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A Place to Remember: The Erasure of Pasar Johar's Collective Memory

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Abstract: History and collective memory can be maintained through heritage building conservation because collective memory can be represented through an architectural object. It is important to preserve the whole story of the building, the architectural form, and the memory related to the building as well as the society so that all of those aspects can be passed down to the next generation. The conservation of both tangible and intangible characters of a heritage building is a key aspect to attain a sustainable city and society. When a heritage building is physically destroyed, the connection among people, the building, the collective memory of the building is also vanished and this condition can be considered as an example of terror in architecture. This paper discusses terror in architecture, especially when the building is slowly destroyed, and the memory that people have about the building is being attacked. The aim of the paper is to investigate whether there is any linkage between the physical changes of the building and collective memory of the society. This study appoints Pasar Johar Semarang as a study case since it is a heritage building that experienced some changes and misfortunes such as fire incident in 2015. In order to do so, this paper will connect some theories on heritage building conservation, collective memory, and terror in architecture. This paper concludes that Pasar Johar encounters terror in its architecture because the building is slowly damaged by physical intervention, ignorance from the authority and fire incident, at the end those situations cause the collective memory of society for the market slowly disappears.

Keywords: collective memory; heritage building; terror in architecture; Pasar Johar; Semarang

1. Introduction

Pasar Johar is located at the center of Semarang City, Central Java, Indonesia. It was built in 1936 and it was a part of Semarang's Old Town developed by the Dutch-Colonial government in the Netherlands Indies as a modern market in Semarang. This market becomes an important space for commerce, especially to accommodate and merge some informal markets located near the Kauman Great Mosque and the old alun-alun of Semarang. Since then, Pasar Johar becomes one of the biggest economic centers in Semarang¹. The people in Semarang rely on their daily needs in this market. Not only local people but also people from outside Semarang visit this market.

Over seven decades, Pasar Johar has already served local people's needs from generation to generation. The engagement of local people with Pasar Johar is very strong since the market provides daily goods and becomes a space of interaction. As time goes by, this simple engagement grows into a deeper bond, not only because Pasar Johar becomes a part of local people's

daily activities, but it also gathers collective memories of how the city grows from colonial to modern eras.

Pasar Johar creates a landmark for Semarang City and the market also becomes a part of economic, social, and culture development for the city.

The market experienced an unfortunate fire incident in 2015 that burnt down almost the whole building. Only the mushroom-like columns – the unique architectural elements of the market – left as the remain of Pasar Johar. The cause of the fire incident is still unclear, as a local newspaper stated that various things can cause the fire. Some people said it was an electrical short-circuit accident, and some said the fire incident was intentional². Later on, to support the economic activities, the government relocated Pasar Johar to a suburban area in Sambirejo, around 4 kilometers from Pasar Johar's original location. In addition to the fire incidents, the market also experienced some building conservation issues during the 1990s and 2000s.

Before the catastrophe happened, people tend to be less aware of Pasar Johar's existence as a heritage building that needed to be preserved. This market is used

by people nearly every day, so there is a tendency that people do not really care about the building conditions, as long as Pasar Johar is able to support their activities.

It is difficult to maintain the market since many people do their daily and any act of conservation will slow down the business. Local government's effort to restore Pasar Johar emerged when the market experienced the fire accident in 2015. A local newspaper mentions that the restoring plan of Pasar Johar will be completed at the end of 2019³⁾.

As a heritage building, it becomes a necessity for the government to conserve Pasar Johar so that its values will stay and the market becomes a legacy for the next generation and a part of the city history. Every society needs to continue their past and this gives a motivation for a conservation of heritage building⁴⁾. To achieve a sustainable society, the conservation of heritage buildings should be based on two aspects: preserving the tangible and intangible aspects⁵⁾, so that the need of the present generation and the upcoming generation could be fulfilled⁶⁾.

Preserving the tangible aspect required as an ocular proof of Semarang's history so it could be passed down to the next generations. To preserve the tangible aspect of the heritage building, the action should meet the narration of the site and the existing context, so it could produce an architectural integrity⁷⁾.

As for the intangible aspect, it needs to be done to maintain and preserve the cultural values and society's identities⁸⁾. Accordingly, historical buildings also conceive a certain emotional value. This emotional value is a value that could bring our sense of curiosity⁸⁾. Not only the emotional value, through historical and urban conservation, collective memory also could be preserved so it could tell the history of the people, places and significant events⁹⁾.

Architecture is considered as one of the physical media that could trigger the emergence of collective memory¹⁰⁾. This phenomenon caused by the daily activities that occur in a place, resulting in providing characters and identities for the place¹¹⁾. The involvement of daily activities and emotional values in a place produces a lot of meanings and memories. These memories are then generally remembered by the user of the place to form collective memories of the place¹²⁾.

Collective memory can trigger a community to create and reproduce an imaginary picture that can be identified by each individual. This identification will provide historical meaning, place, and sense of ownership¹³⁾. This statement also supports Huyssen's notion, that urban space can form a collective imaginary picture¹⁴⁾.

Now, what if a certain heritage building is not being preserved but experienced a destruction to its physical appearance? The destruction of a physical appearance of a building is called terror in architecture. Terror in architecture arises when some architectural objects that contained the collective memory of the society are being

destroyed. The destruction of these architectural objects could also destroy the collective memory within the object itself¹⁵⁾.

From the statement above, we conclude that there are two different kinds of terror in architecture: direct and indirect. Direct terror occurs when the building is physically destroyed at once, such as bombing incident or a fire accident. Indirect terror could occur in the form of neglecting the heritage building, for example, the lack of people's awareness of the building condition¹⁶⁾. This action could worsen the building condition and could lead to natural corrosion. Indirect terror also could be seen in the form of human interventions that were done unconsciously.

In this paper, we wanted to discuss how Pasar Johar experience terror in architecture, especially through its recent fire accident. After seeking the changes that occurred in the market, Pasar Johar experienced terror in architecture in different phases: the phase of terrorizing the market's predicate during the colonial era and the phase of terrorizing people's collective memory for Pasar Johar.

2. Methods

The methods used in this paper are based on literature related to collective memory and architecture. The theories used are related to architecture as a medium for triggering collective memory by Christine Boyer and Cecilia Chu, as well as terror in architecture defined by Andrew Hescher as the destruction of building's collective memory through the demolition of architectural objects.

A historical and literary study of Pasar Johar was also conducted as a case study to find out how terror in architecture occurred in the market and what does it imply to society's collective memory for the building through the analytical method. Pasar Johar was chosen because it recently experienced physical destruction and could be considered as having a terror in its architecture in accordance with the discussion of this paper.

To understand the connection between people and heritage building, we interviewed six participants that consist of three ex-merchants and three current merchants to collect data about Pasar Johar's collective memory from a different point of view. Some questions asked are related to how Pasar Johar could be understood as a heritage building and became a part of the memory of the city. The aim of interview is to understand the memory of Pasar Johar and it is through a qualitative method that we analyze the information from participants. The data collected from the interviews would be used for analyzing physical changes of Pasar Johar and collective memory.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 The Beginning of Pasar Johar

Pasar Johar is one of the traditional markets that was established since the Dutch colonial era. Pasar Johar is located on K. H. Agus Salim Street, Semarang, Central Java. Pasar Johar was built in 1936 by Dutch architect Thomas Karsten. The design of this traditional market was considered very advanced for some decades and it successfully gained the title of being the biggest and healthiest traditional market in Southeast Asia¹⁷⁾.

Pasar Johar is one of Semarang's heritage buildings that stood at the center of the city, alongside the city's heritage complex called the Semarang's Old Town. It is also located near the famous Semarang's landmarks, such as Tugu Muda, Simpang Lima, *Alun-Alun* (the city square), and the Kauman Mosque¹⁸⁾. Behind the Kauman Mosque could be found residential areas in the form of the kampong. This kampong called the 'Kauman', later would be the resident for the traders that attended Pasar Johar.

The establishment of Pasar Johar began when a group of traders selling around the plaza across the Kauman Mosque. Traders swarmed in this area because most people gathered here early in the morning to visit their relatives who were held in prison. These informal markets were considered unorganized by the government, so in order to resolve the mess and to improve the welfare of local traders, the Dutch East Indies Government appointed a Dutch architect Thomas Karsten to build a permanent market around this particular area¹⁹⁾. Most of Karsten's works were public buildings that were designed to improve the quality of urban spaces in Java, including New Candi town planning in Semarang²⁰⁾.

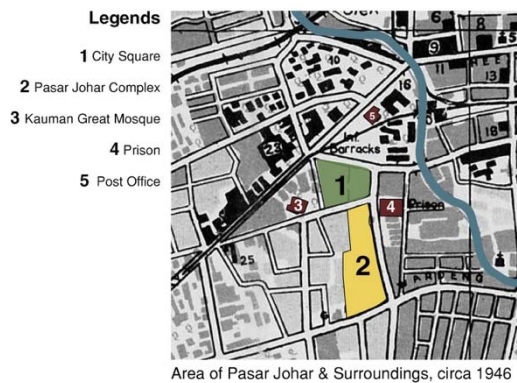


Fig. 1: The area of Pasar Johar complex and its surroundings, 1946.

The presence of Pasar Johar was expected to revive the Javanese's traditional room layout, namely *alun-alun*. This would contradict the spatial irregularities that happened in the temporary market (pre-Johar). The Dutch-Colonial Government also hoped that Pasar Johar's spatial arrangement would be a model for similar activities in other regions²¹⁾.

Karsten designed Pasar Johar into two floors, in a form of a wide hall with two-floor height without walls in between columns. This hall is used as a place for

traders to sell their goods. This large space is supported by large columns that were arranged into grids. The function of these columns – besides being a structural element of the building – also function indirectly as space dividers, so the traders could have a guideline for arranging their own stalls. According to Handinoto, the usage of the flat roof, big-scale glasses, and walls only for the building's envelope are classified into Modern Colonial Style's visual characterization²²⁾.

Pasar Johar gets its trademark from the fungus-like columns. In addition, it also had hexagonal skylights with an elevated roof to leave a certain space for air and daylighting system. It can be seen from the picture, at that time, the space that was made between each column are wide enough to function as the shopper's access, so the merchants and the shoppers had their space (figure 2).

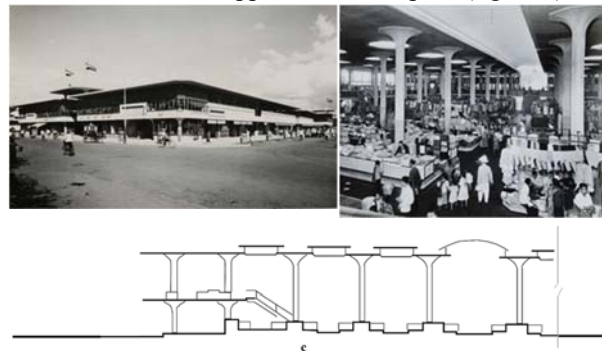


Fig. 2: The exterior (left), the interior (right) and the sectional drawing (below) of Pasar Johar.

Indonesia has tropical climate²³⁾, and to respond this, Karsten designed Pasar Johar's ceiling to be high enough to provide space for warm and mild air to exchange – causing good air circulation for the interior. This also could prevent the warm air to return to the ground and make a bad air circulation. The ceilings created hexagonal skylights which were actually the extension from columns. These skylights functioned as elements for air circulation and entry for sunlight. The use of the hexagonal skylight at that time made this market healthy for its good daylighting and airflow system.

Not only responding to physical context, Karsten also tried to inject some habitual context of local merchants. Around that time, merchants still carried their merchandise using a *bakul* – a basket that carried at the back of a merchant, tied with a piece of fabric to the merchant's body. To respond to this habit, Karsten raised the market's counter size to a general waist-high. This counter facilitates merchants to immediately put their *bakul* on top of the counter without having to squat down to the ground.

Overall, Pasar Johar had been a unique market from its first development until now. Not only it has its own trademarks and identities, but it was also possibly the healthiest traditional market around that time. To these days, Pasar Johar became one of the biggest economic center and played an important role in Semarang's economic development. The label of being the biggest

and busiest economic centers in Semarang caused people to recognized Pasar Johar as one of the widely known landmarks in Semarang.

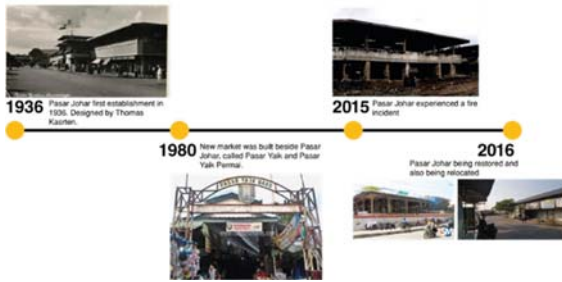


Fig. 3: The timeline of Pasar Johar’s development.

3.2 The “terror” occurred in Pasar Johar

When its first establishment, Pasar Johar was the biggest and the most modern market that had been built in South East Asia. The grandness and the monumentality of the building could be captured from the scale and the size of the building²⁴⁾, especially if people saw the market from the street’s point of view. During the 1930s, buildings around Pasar Johar were not as dense as it is today, so the space around the market emphasized the gloriousness of Pasar Johar. Furthermore, the city plaza located across Pasar Johar also could be a place for sightseeing the scale of the market.

Not only from the exterior, but the big scale of Pasar Johar could also be sensed from the inside of the market. The void that was located at the center of the building, accentuated the high ceiling of the market. In 1940s, the market stalls were only used as a counter and sellers put their goods there, so the whole condition could give a sense of majestic scale inside Pasar Johar.

The first phase of terror in architecture in Pasar Johar occurred because of the users’ intervention to the market. The rapid growth of the society made Pasar Johar grew into a bustling economic center. This made Pasar Johar must adapt to the economic changes that have occurred in the modern era since many traders began to occupy Pasar Johar. The addition of the merchants surely increases the space used for market stalls. Merchants started to take up the shopper’s access by extending their stalls into the alley. The mass of the merchants’ space is enlarged so the shopper’s circulation space is shrinking, making a crowded and stuffy market situation (see figure 4).

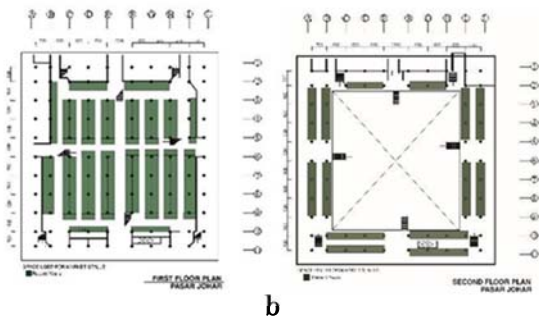
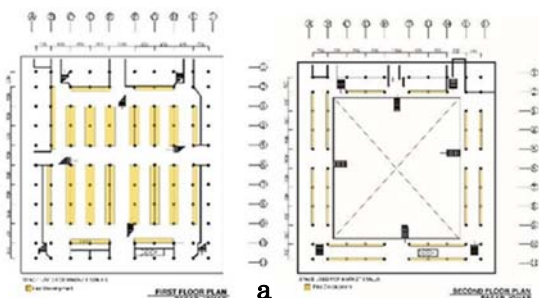


Fig. 4: The comparison of Pasar Johar’s counter stall in (a) 1936 and (b) recent years.

The addition of market stalls also takes effect on using an additional ceiling in each kiosk. This additional ceiling had a big impact on the market’s scale. If we took a stand in the market’s alley, the additional ceiling could cause a loss of visibility, so there would be a change within the sense of scale. The change within the sense of scale could eliminate the image of Pasar Johar’s grandness and monumentality.

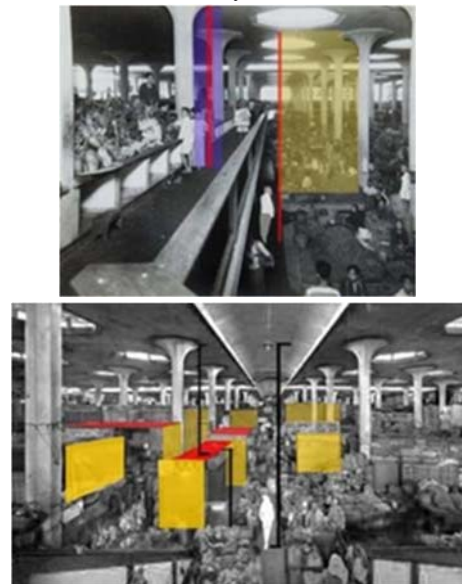


Fig. 5: Comparison of monumentality and grand scale in 1936 (above) and recent year (below).

The surrounding of the general Pasar Johar complex also contributing to the development of Pasar Johar throughout the years. The city square was no longer exists now, and the space used for the market’s extension called Pasar Yaik.

Because of the densities of the market’s extension, Pasar Johar could not be recognized as a whole monumental building like it was first built in 1936. The extension of the market also covered up some entrances of the building so people would lose the sense of direction in the market. These extensions also covered up the building from public view on the street, so the recent condition of Pasar Johar did not resemble the status of one of the landmarks in Semarang.

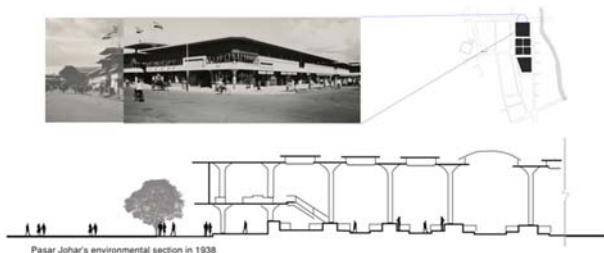


Fig. 6: Contextual sectional drawing of Pasar Johar in 1936.

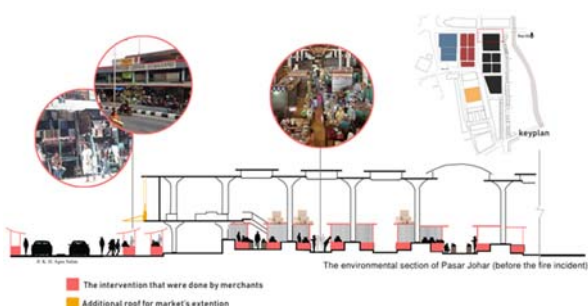


Fig. 7: Contextual sectional drawing of Pasar Johar in recent years before the fire incident. The physical intervention caused a loss of monumentality of the market.

The next phase of terror in architecture in Pasar Johar is the fire catastrophe. The fire incident in 2015 left Pasar Johar only on its main structure. The cause of the fire was still unclear, as some of the resources said that it could be caused by an electrical short-circuit, as others said that this fire incident could be intentional. The catastrophe of Pasar Johar resulting in the government's effort to restore the market to its original design. The remains of the building are now being preserved and used as a guide to restoring Pasar Johar²⁵).



Fig. 8: Pasar Johar after the fire incident (above) and the remains of Pasar Johar is being restored to its original form (below).

In order to fill the gap of the disappearance of the market, the government took the initiative to relocate the

market to the Eastern Semarang area. The “New Pasar Johar”, as the people would refer, is located in the Sambirejo area²⁶). Sambirejo is quite far from the center of the city, approximately 4 kilometers from the Old Pasar Johar's location, so probably the regular shopper that always went into the old Pasar Johar could not attend this market. The new market loses its spirit as a busy economic community because it is lonesome without the normal numbers of visitors. The loss of the spirit also could be caused by the surrounding of the market that did not meet the narration of the old Pasar Johar.



Fig 9: Relocated market, The New Pasar Johar.

3.3 Erasing the Collective Memory of Pasar Johar

From the interview we conducted between June – July 2019 with a total of three ex-merchants and three current merchants, we asked about the memory they have about Pasar Johar and the most memorable things, including changes in buildings, that they could recall from Pasar Johar.

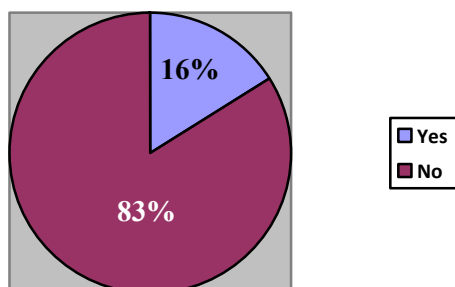
With the ex-merchants' works starting from the 1980s, they remembered Pasar Johar as a busy market that sells almost everything. “You could find anything you've been looking for in Pasar Johar. That place is known for its completeness of commodities and the importance of the market as a landmark for the surrounding area. What I also remembered is the crowd of the market, unorganized market, and also its muddy floor”, said one of the ex-merchant that used to attend Pasar Johar.

The same answer goes to the merchants that currently attending the new Pasar Johar. They also added the different atmosphere of the market, “the old market was full of crowds and we could find our regular shopper easily because people would know, if they look for something, they can go to (the old) Pasar Johar. But now with the relocation market, we lost our customers. I would like to go back to the old market”, said one of the merchants that we interviewed.

We also asked whether people still knew that Pasar Johar was actually listed as one of Semarang's heritage buildings. From six speakers, only one person that knew Pasar Johar's historical condition. One of the merchants

added, “I did not know that Pasar Johar was a part of the heritage building. We did not even know that Pasar Johar was built by a Dutch architect because the condition of the market did not reflect that”.

Chart 1: Merchant’s acknowledgment of Pasar Johar being Semarang’s heritage building



From the answers of the interviewees, we could conclude that their answers implied that Pasar Johar was indeed the biggest economic center in Semarang and had a great role in the traditional market’s economic development.

We could also conclude that all of the interviewees did not know that Pasar Johar was listed as one of Semarang’s heritage buildings. This result shows that there is a lack of socialization from the local government and authorized institution concerning Pasar Johar’s historical conditions. This resulted in a lack of attention towards Pasar Johar’s important position as a heritage building. Following Chu’s theory, the lack of society’s awareness against a building and its physical condition could terrorize the building’s memory.

From the explanation above, we conclude that there are some memory-shifting about Pasar Johar. This memory-shifting happens due to the changing of Pasar Johar’s physical conditions and lack of people’s awareness of the importance of the market. The memory shifted from ‘being the biggest and healthiest market in Southeast Asia’, to a ‘biggest and busiest economic center in Semarang’ as a landmark to the city. However, there is a loss of the market’s spirit in the new relocated market.

We tried to analyze what causes this memory-shifting from the causes of the physical changes that occurred in Pasar Johar throughout the decades.

The physical changes and some interventions that were done by the merchants slowly changed the appearance of the market. From the organized market that built by Karsten to a very crowded and unorganized market. The small intervention done by the merchants slowly covered up the visibilities of Pasar Johar’s grandness and monumentality. The intervention also changed the market’s atmosphere, from a healthy and organized market to a crowded, untidy and stuffy market. Perhaps this is why the memory of being the biggest and

healthiest market around South-East Asia could not be found in evidence and so could not be remembered as such in the ex-merchants’ generations.

The next physical changes that occurred in Pasar Johar is the fire incident that almost burnt down the whole building and the market needed to be relocated. The loss of Pasar Johar’s existence implies that there is an erasure of collective memory of the market itself: Pasar Johar has been the biggest economic center in Semarang and also played an important role in the traditional market’s economic development. So when the market is being relocated far away from the center of Semarang, the regular customers rarely went shopping in the new market. This could lead to changes in the market’s atmosphere from the crowded market to a less crowded market. Had been one of the biggest and busiest markets in Semarang, Pasar Johar turned into a less ‘uproar’ market than it was. The sense of glory and pride in the old market had been gone.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, in this Pasar Johar study case, the physical changes of Pasar Johar could correspond to the shifting of the building’s collective memory from the biggest and healthiest market in South-East Asia, to the biggest and busiest market in Semarang that turned into a landmark of the city. The physical changes that occurred whether it is directly or indirectly could erase the building’s collective memory slowly. The lack of society’s awareness regarding Pasar Johar as a heritage building that needed to be preserved leads the market to experience a loss of its collective memory.

The intervention and the physical changes that occurred in Pasar Johar slowly encounter the market’s collective memories. There are two types of ‘terror’ that occurred in Pasar Johar. The first one is the physical intervention that was done by the local merchants, as a form of indirect ‘terror’. These physical interventions slowly erased Pasar Johar’s collective memory as being the biggest, the most modern and the healthiest market in South-East Asia. The second one is the direct ‘terror’ that occurred in the form of a fire incident. The fire incident not only ruined its physical appearance but also erased the place’s collective memory as the busiest and largest economic center in Semarang. Each of these interventions and physical changes resulted in a shifting-memory of Pasar Johar from generation to generation.

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