



Architecture as a Symbol of Social-Economic Relationship at Al Munawar Village in Palembang

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Abstract

Palembang is a city with a long history and one of the oldest cities in Indonesia. One of the driving aspects for the formation of the city is its reputation as the area for main trade in Southern Sumatra. The trade also encouraged the development of immigrant communities which later became their inhabited colonies such as the Al-Munawar Village inhabited by immigrants from Yemeni Arabs. The primary goal of this research is to demonstrate the impact of trade interactions on architectural expression. This demonstrates that architectural form is impacted by a variety of factors, namely commercial interactions. Therefore, this research was conducted to determine the correlation between the history of a community and its architectural elements ranging from regional spatial planning to decorative elements. This involved using the historical research approach with architectural semiotic analysis techniques. The results showed that the spatial layout of Al-Munawar Village has a typology similar to those in settlers' villages, for both fellow Yemeni Arabs in Sungai Lumpur Village and Chinese migrants in Kapitan Village. It was also discovered that the buildings in Al-Munawar Village reflect the relationship between the residents and the surrounding environment as observed with the Sultanate of Palembang Darussalam. The buildings also reflect the relationship with Yemeni Arab migrants outside Indonesia such as those in Malaysia and Singapore. This means architecture is used as a sign of the socio-economic relations for the residents of Al-Munawar village.

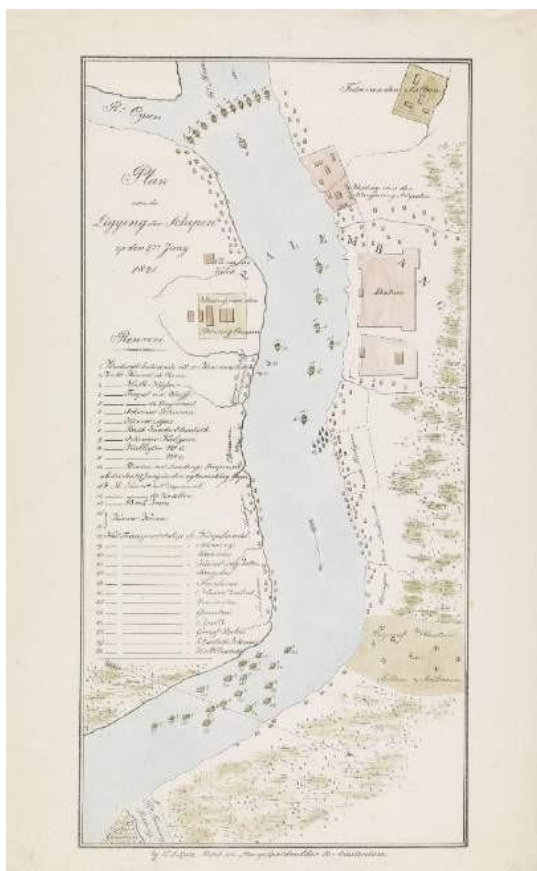
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1. INTRODUCTION

Palembang is a city with a long history and served as the center of the Srivijaya kingdom until the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate period. The records of the Dutch East Indies Government in 1825 showed that the city had a population of 29,457 people consisting of 119 families of Arab descent, 184 families from China, and 3,589 indigenous families living in

approximately 40-50 villages (Nawiyanto; Eko Crys Endrayadi, 2016:70). This is understandable because the Sultanate of Palembang Darussalam became an important axis in the trade network of Malacca waters and the north coast of Java (Nawiyanto; Eko Crys Endrayadi, 2016:37). The 1821 map shows the dispersion of tribal-based communities (see map 1).



Map 1 Map of Palembang in 1821

Source:

<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/RP-P-OB-87.399>

This research focuses on immigrants of Arab descent, especially from Hadramaut, which is now the territory of Yemen. It is important to note that there were trade relations with Muslim traders from Arab, Persian, and Middle Eastern countries in the 7th and 8th centuries through the Malacca Strait route (Apriana, 2020). This made it possible for the Arab community in Palembang to be the second largest after Aceh during the reign of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin (Kathirithamby-Wells 2021:276). It was recorded that there were 2,125 Arabs in the Residency of Palembang in 1885 with 500 found in Palembang city alone while there were 2,848 in Aceh (Apriana, 2020). In comparison, the population of Europe (the Netherlands) in 1870 was only 200 people. The Arab immigrants have a special relationship with the Sultanate, among others, as indicated by the fact that the traders were allowed to sit in a chair next to the Sultan and were rarely tried and punished. They also have the privilege of being

able to build their warehouse on the ground (Peeters 1997: 15).

The privilege given to the Arab immigrants in Palembang is not limited to their relationship with the household of the Sultan but also the location and construction of their residences. The Arab villages in Palembang are located both in the Ulu and Ilir parts of Palembang City, on the Musi Riverside. It was discovered on the Ulu side that Area 13 Ulu is inhabited by the Al Munawar clan which is the focus of this research. Meanwhile, the Assegaf clan is in Area 16 Ulu, Amesawa in 14 Ulu, Barakah in 7 Ulu, and Aljufri in 15 Ulu. On the Ilir side, the Alhabsyi clan is in 8 Ilir and Alkaf in 8 Ilir. The Arab immigrants had the ability and privilege to build large wooden houses with iron and tembesu wood and equipped with roofs and tiles. They were also allowed to build Limas houses which was the privilege of the royal nobles. The Arab immigrants were also given the privilege to build Rumah Batu (Peeters 1997: 17 - 18).

This research focuses on examining and analyzing the messages conveyed through Arab immigrant settlements – particularly in the Arab village of Al Munawar as well as determining the relationship between the identity of the occupants and their architectural elements.

According to Chris Abel, there are two perspectives on architectural identity. The first is the Norberg-Schulz perspective which views architectural identity as being influenced by place identity in its development while the second is Jenck perspective on identity which states that architecture is an irreducible plurality and accommodates criticism of Schulz's thinking that there is nothing essential in architecture because it is influenced by several factors (Abel, 1982).

2. METHODS

This research uses a linguistic approach with a focus on the works of Ferdinand de Saussure. The second part of the book 'Course in General Linguistics' – first published in 1916 – discusses synchronicity while the third part focuses on diachronic (Saussure, 1916). According to Jiř'ı Raclavsk'y, the language in a synchronic perspective is the function of an expression to meaning while the diachronic perspective is a function of the possible scope and time of the

language in a synchronic perspective (Raclavsk'y, 2014).

The adoption of a synchronic-diachronic approach from linguistics led to the introduction of semiotic analysis techniques in architecture. Pellegrino referenced Umberto Eco in explaining the 2 stages involved with the first being the functional denotation which expresses the use of the building while the

second interprets the function of the building against the cultural system and events that continue to occur. This means there is a transformation between the function of the building and the development of the times in relation to the cultural system (Pellegrino, 2006).

Figure 1 shows schematic of research steps.

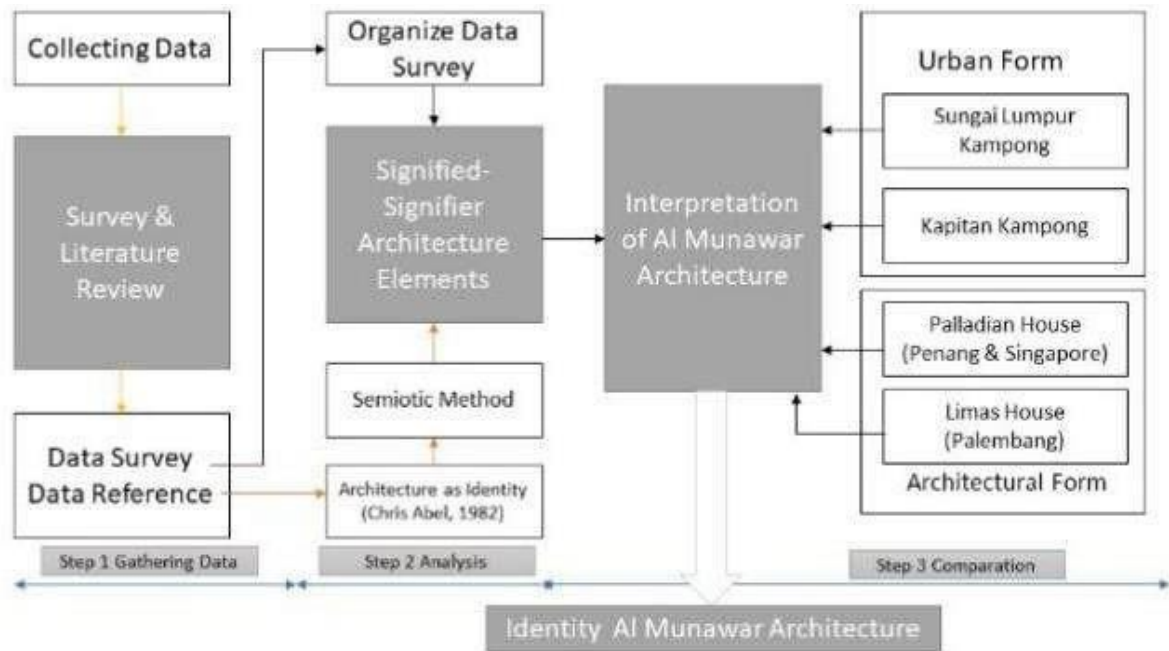


Figure 1 Schematic Research Steps

The analysis process was divided into three main stages which are stated as follows: The first stage is the collection of data from both the field through surveys and previous research. The second stage is data organization which involved sorting the data obtained signs such as signifiers and signified using a semiotic approach in architecture. The third stage is the comparison which is divided into two parts. The first is the comparison of the area with a focus on the shape in relation to the Sungai Lumpur and Kapitan villages which are all located in Palembang city. The second is the comparison of architectural elements with a focus on the architectural forms of Palembang pyramid houses and Yemeni immigrant houses in Penang and Malacca. These three stages produced an architectural identity in Al-Munawar Village.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

A. Location

Al-Munawar village is located in Lrg. Al Haddad, 13 Ulu Village, Seberang Ulu II District, Palembang City, South Sumatra. It is sited on the banks of the Musi River in the area opposite Ulu, East of Palembang city center.

In the arrangement of buildings in the Al Munawar village area, the center of the village is in the form of open space as indicated by the yellow ellipse in Figure 2. Moreover, the circulation path divides the open space from Jl. KH. Azhari heads to the bank of the Musi River as presented with the blue arrow. This shows that the model of the area has an open space centered in the middle of the village.



Figure 2 Aerial Photo of Al-Munawar Village Area
(Source: Author's team drone, 2023)



Figure 3 Aerial Photo of Sungai Lumpur Village
(Source: Author's team drone, 2023)

A similar pattern was observed in Sungai Lumpur Village at Area 11 Ulu which is also inhabited by Arab-Yemeni immigrants as indicated in Figure 3. The difference is that the village is not directly divided by the access to the river from the land but it is a little twisted. Another difference is the presence of a mosque on the east side of the village which is not the case in Al-Munawar village.

However, it was later stated that one of the peculiarities of the Arab-Yemeni village in Palembang is the presence of open space in the spatial arrangement, but this is not appropriate because it was also observed in Kapitan Tionghoa in 7 village Ulu Palembang. (see Figure 4)



Figure 4 Aerial Photos of Kapitan Village
(Source: Author's team drone, 2023)

B. Building Shape

It was previously explained by Peeters that immigrants from Arabia have privileges in the form of housing compared to other immigrants or even non-aristocratic indigenous people.



Figure 5 Buildings in the South (land side) of Al-Munawar Village
(Source: Writer team survey, 2023)

Figure 5 shows that the building on the left is (1) Rumah Kembar Darat in the south, (2) Rumah Batu in the middle, and (3) Rumah Limas which is often called Rumah Darat on the right.

Peeters also discussed the reasons the Arab immigrants were permitted to use the pyramid house model which was previously only reserved for the nobles of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate. The Limas house which

is also known as a land house because of its far position from the banks of the Musi River is proof of a very close relationship between the Arab immigrants in this case the Al-Munawar clan and the Sultanate. The first owner of the house was Habib Hasan bin Ahmad Al-Munawar, the fourth child of Habib Abdurrahman bin Muhammad bin Abdurrahman Al-Munawar.

The Rumah Batu is also unique because the house was not constructed with wood like

general houses at the time and also did not take the form of a stage. It was built with stone and the floors are marble.

It was also discovered that the east side of the southern part of the house (land side) is occupied by the southern side of the Rumah Kembar Darat. The unique aspect of the house for both south and north is that the house is on stilts with a model similar to a shophouse but the bottom is a veranda instead of a shop.



Figure 6 Buildings on the North Side (near the Riverside) in Al Munawar Village
(Source: Writer team survey, 2023)

The row of houses on the North side which is closer to the river indicates (4) Rumah Tinggi, (5) Greenhouses/Central, and (6) North Rumah Kembar Darat from left to right in Figure 6. According to Retno, Rumah Tinggi was built in 1875 and founded by Habib Abdurrahman. An ornament was found above the window sill with the Hijri year number "١٦٠٢١" (circa 1792 AD) (Purwanti, 2017).

This leads to the assumption that the Al-Munawar clan started settling at this location in 1792 AD and the Rumah Tinggi was founded or inaugurated in 1875 AD. Therefore, Rumah Tinggi was assumed to be the first house in the village with the Rumah Limas Gudang form which is the Palembang Rumah Limas without kekijing. This means the difference in floor height is closely related to the social strata of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate. The traders that have close relations with the sultan's relatives usually use the Rumah Limas Gudang shape.

However, the quite striking difference is between the pyramid houses in Palembang and the floor height of the stage in the house. The Rumah Tinggi is indeed 'taller' compared to other limas warehouses and is also designed

with two stairs on the right and left sides of the building.

The Middle House is the most attention-grabbing structure in Al Munawar village due to its placement in the middle of the area and facing the entrance of the KH. Azhari Street. It is also in the form of a stage with the bottom made of stone instead of wood. The house was known as a greenhouse because there were glass windows at the top but they have been replaced with wood.

The last house in the north row is the Rumah Kembar Darat which is on the north side and opposite the Rumah Kembar Darat on the south side. The two houses are like mirrors of each other.

Further observation showed two forms of houses around the open space in the middle of Al-Munawar village. These include those influenced by local architecture and those related to European architecture.



Figure 7 Rumah Tinggi
(Source: Writer team survey, 2023)

The influence of local architecture was found in the Rumah Darat/limas and Rumah Tinggi (see figure 7).

Limas Gudang is a combination of limas and warehouses (Siswanto, 2009) which involves using a limas roof. Rumah Tinggi was observed to be equipped with *tanduk kambing* ornaments but its floor height-kekijing was not different as reflected in the limas house in Figure 8.



Figure 8 Rumah Darat / Limas
source: writer team survey, 2023)

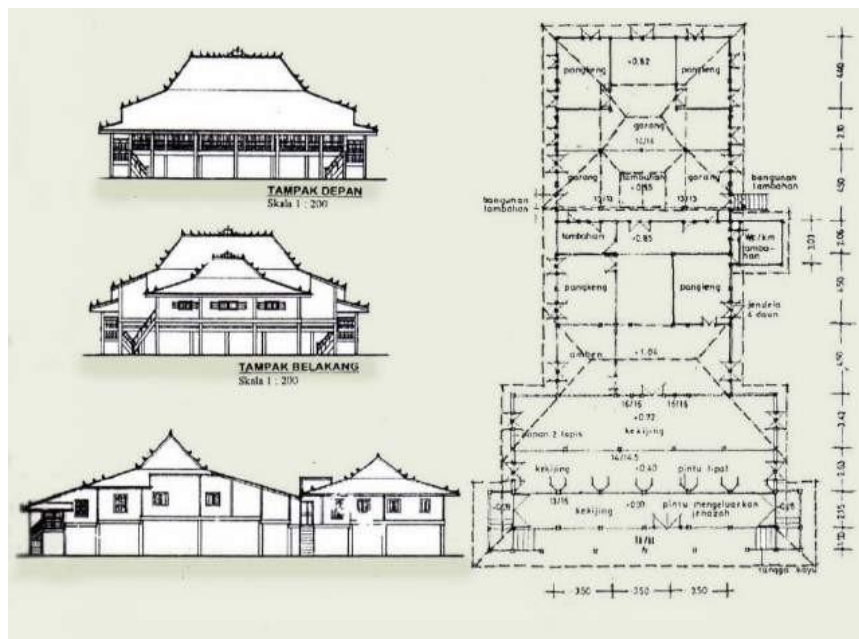


Figure 9 Rumah Limas H. Abdul Rozak
Source (Siswanto, 1997)

The Rumah Limas structural form was not limited to Palembang but spread throughout southern Sumatra including Lampung, Bengkulu, and Jambi to the Bangka Belitung region (Siswanto, 2009). A comparison was made in to show the peculiarity of the Rumah Limas concerning the presence of a kekijing or terraced floor while the roof of the Limas is cut off (see Figure 9).

The second aspect focuses on a group of houses influenced by European architecture which include the Rumah Kembar Darat (both north and south sides), the Rumah Tinggi, and the Rumah Batu.



Figure 10 Rumah Kembar Darat north side
(source: writer team survey, 2023)



Figure 11 Photo of Rumah Kembar Darat from the South side
(source: writer team survey, 2022)

Figure 10 and Figure 11 show two houses known as Kembar Darat with their shapes

observed to be similar but they are not the same. The difference in the stilt model house is the windowsills on the top floor of the building, especially the white color contrasting the blue wooden walls. The shape in Figure 12 looks like the ornate ornament on the mirror made by George II William Kent with a Palladian-style approach (see Figure 13).



Figure 12 Jamb Details on the Rumah Kembar Darat
(source: writer team survey, 2023)



Figure 13 Mirror with Palladian Ornament by William Kent
(source: <https://www.jonathan-sainsbury.com/product/george-ii-william-kent-mirror/>)

William Kent was an architect and designer that lived from 1685 to 1748. He is known for introducing the Palladian style in England. Kent's clients were aristocrats and worked

closely with Lord Burlington in developing an Anglo-Palladian style for his personal house and a few friends (William Kent: Designing Georgian Britain, 2014). This raises the question of why the influence of European architecture came from England and not the Dutch that was controlling Palembang at the time. The answer has been found in the Rumah Tinggi constructed using the Palladian building style which is like the pattern used in some places in Malaysia and Singapore.

Who is Palladio? Andrea Palladio (1509 – 1580) was an architect from Venice and was responsible for several churches in Venice, public buildings, villas in Veneto, and other buildings. Palladio's studies revived the ancient Roman principles of proportion and symmetry which were applied precisely in the classical order. The Palladio look was developed in England by Inigo Jones that his principles in depth (Whyte, n.d.).

Figure 14 shows the basic typology of Palladio's study which was later known as the Palladio architectural approach. It was further developed by Benros and his team by examining the grammatical forms of the approach (Benrós et al., 2012). This led to the production of a Palladian Grammar Tree diagram as indicated in Figure 15.

Benros' Palladian Grammar Tree is important because Palladian architecture is understood in almost every part of the world. Guerrieri noted that the spread reached Poland, Germany, and France in the 19th century and was inspired by England. It was further observed in British colonies in America and Russia. Meanwhile,

the locus of Guerrieri's research is from Calcutta to New Delhi (Guerrieri, 2021).

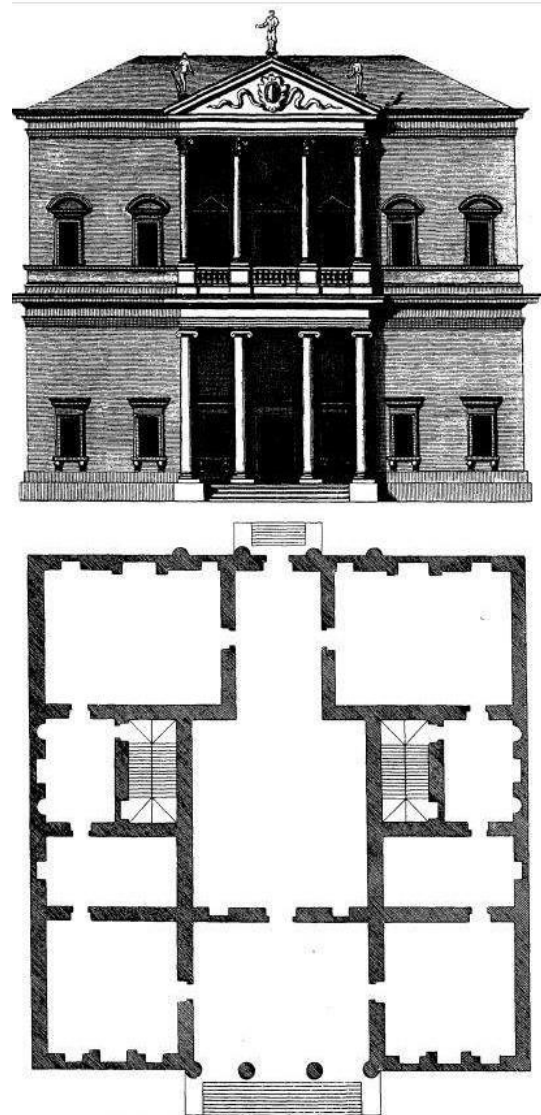


Figure 14 One of Palladio's studies of symmetry and proportion
Source (Paladio, 1797)

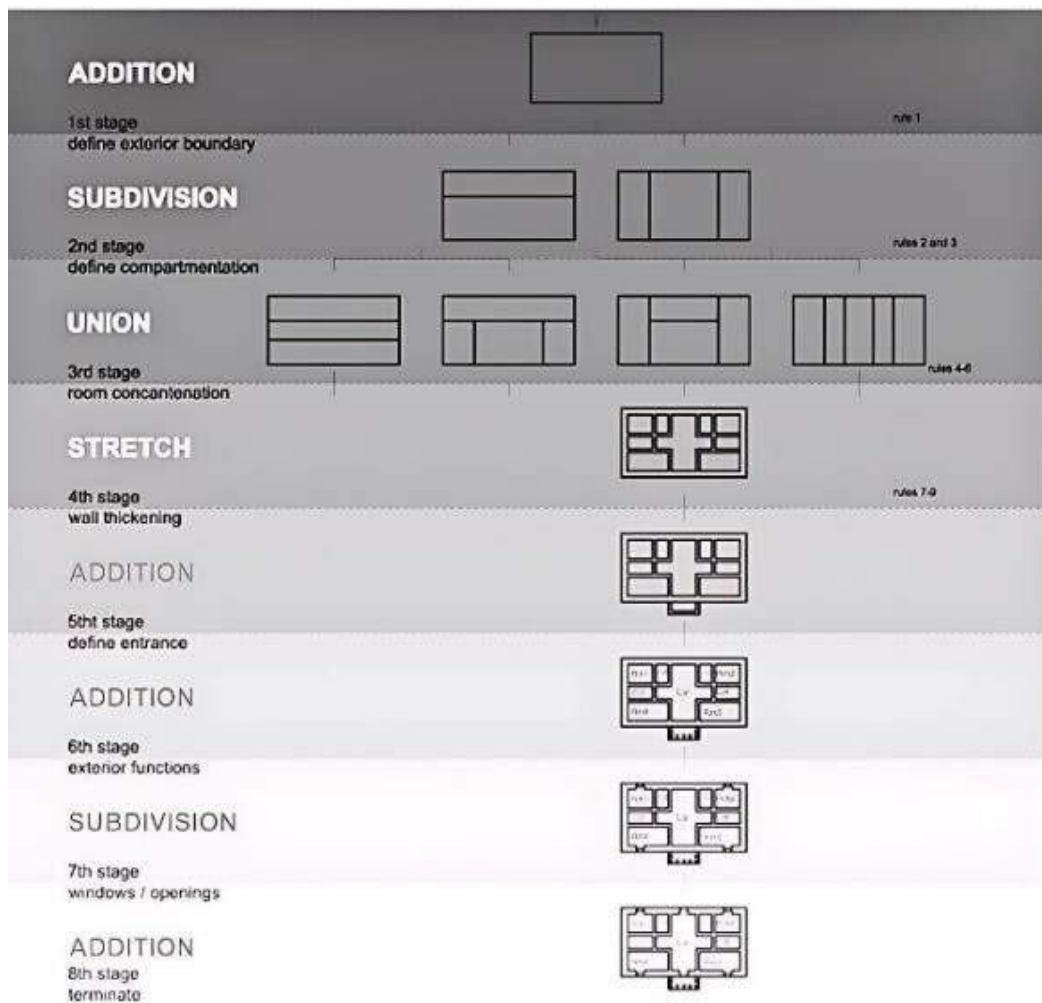


Figure 15 Proposed Palladian Grammar Tree diagram.

Source : (Benrós et al., 2012)

In the case of Al-Munawar, the observation of Benros's team can be indicated in the proposed grammar tree.



Figure 16 Al Munawar Village High House
(Source: Writer team survey, 2023)

Figure 17 show similarities in the shape of the house building as indicated by the part that protrudes forward in the middle symmetrically. According to Tajudeen, this is a transformation of the neo-Palladian house developed in the 19th century by the local community. The shape resemblance further emphasizes the relationship between Palembang - Singapore and the West Coast of Semanjung Malaysia (especially Penang) as stated by Berg. (Berg 1989: 72).

This similarity is only general to the building, and this means it needs to be tested more deeply in terms of the proportions between the three houses and against the Palladian proportions. This creates an opportunity for further research to provide more accurate evidence of the

relationship between the three houses and possibly those in other cities.



Figure 17 The Sultan's Palace in Kampung Gelam, Singapore (above); Tool Mansion in Penang Malaysia (below)

Source:

<https://journals.openedition.org/abe/docannexe/image/11008/img-10.jpg>

3.2. Discussion

This section focuses on the identity associated with the architectural form of the Al-Munawar village. It was discovered that the initial explanation of Abel concerning the Norberg-Schulz relationship between architecture and place is not reflected in the study area. Meanwhile, Adebayo et al. (2013) defined identity as a process that is traceable through the roots of civilization and culture in the span of history. The concept is believed to be intangible but needs to be identified considering the historical and cultural processes in a community (Adebayo et al., 2013). The trend observed in the Yemeni Arab community, especially the Al-Munawar clan in Palembang, is perceived as an effort to show their relationship with the local authorities and other countries such as Malaysia and Singapore. This

has also been explained by Berg that the Hadramaut people in the archipelago are significantly different from the Hadramaut people in their place of origin as indicated by their ability to adapt to conditions, especially trading activities (Berg 1989:123).

The case of Al-Munawar Village can also be analyzed based on a critical regionalism perspective. This is in line with Mumford's statement cited by Eggener that culture and identity can change according to conditions and not just by romancing and elevating the forms of construction used by ancestors. It was further stated that regional forms – which are related to identity and culture – are efforts made by the people to fulfill their current living conditions and feel at home in a place. This is usually reflected in their architectural expressions (Eggener, 2002).

The observation from Al-Munawar village shows that the architectural form reflects the people's life at the time they had close relations with local authorities such as the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate as well as the wider community such as the fellow immigrants from Europe due to trade relations. The architectural experience also indicated that the Arab-Yemeni immigrants were regionally related, particularly with Malaysia and Singapore.

4. CONCLUSION

The case of Al-Munawar Village showed that architectural identity sometimes does not reflect the origins of its inhabitants but tells the relational process between them and their immediate and surrounding environments. This was observed on the relations the immigrants from Yemeni Arab had with the Palembang area and the regional environment such as Malaysia and Singapore. The architectural form in Al-Munawar Village was discovered to be used by the residents as a sign of certain social strata possessed because of their relationship with local rulers – in this case, the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate – as well as European traders. It also serves as a symbol of their socio-economic dialectic and socio-political symbol at the time.

It was also discovered that the architectural elements require understanding and researching the sociocultural realm and history of immigrant civilizations in the archipelago. There is also a need for more focus outside the

realm of architecture to understand the architectural signs left by past buildings.

This research also opens opportunities to further explore other locations in Palembang city considered to be closely related to Arab-Yemeni immigrants. There is also a need for comparative studies in several places that have served as destinations for Arab-Yemeni migrants in the past such as Aceh, Pontianak, Banjarmasin, and places outside Indonesia, such as Singapore, Malacca, and Penang. This is necessary to understand the architectural expressions displayed by the immigrants from Hadramaut further.

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