



## Framing Architectural Identity of Aceh After Two Contemporary Events

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### Abstract

*Socio-political conditions in a region have a substantial impact on architectural identity. Two contemporary events in Aceh: the 2004 tsunami and the Free Aceh Movement and the Republic of Indonesia conflict, impacted socio-political circumstances and architectural identities. This study revisits the architecture after those two contemporary events in Aceh by examining the socio-political processes and dynamics underlying its architectural representations. The research incorporates literature, theoretical data, and Aceh's architectural and urban history. This research also ties socio-political data to architectural phenomena after the two contemporary events. This research frames two main periods of architectural history after two contemporary events, namely Post-Tsunami 2004 and Post-Conflict. In the post-tsunami 2004 period, there are three architectural phenomena: the shifting perspective of safe and vulnerable places, the new 'Tsunami' typology, and the revival of the old typology. While in the post-conflict period, there are also three architectural phenomena: the search for Islamic architecture, the return of regionalism, and architecture anomalies.*

**Keywords:** Aceh architecture; architectural identity; contemporary events; post-conflict architecture, post-tsunami architecture

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, two major disasters occurred in Aceh: (1) the natural disaster of the 2004 Aceh earthquake and tsunami, and (2) the social disaster of the rebellion force: the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), and the Republic of Indonesia (RI) military conflict (hereinafter referred to as "GAM-R.I. Conflict"). This initial study provides a refreshing idea of Aceh's current architectural identity and urban forms,

as well as the process and dynamics of forming the identity.

The two subchapters in this article represent two architectural processes and manifestations in Aceh: (1) post-earthquake and tsunami 2004; (2) post-GAM and RI conflict. Both periodizations arose in response to the political and natural changes following the recent events in Aceh. This architectural history study is intended to explain the contemporary relevance of Aceh's architectural form and to encourage architects and architecture students to think critically and productively about architectural

phenomena. This research aims to compile evidence of the architectural identity phenomenon. The earthquake and tsunami (natural rupture) and the GAM-R.I. Conflict (social rupture) influenced other layers of architectural identity in the early stages, including typology embodiment, collective memory, and philosophical aspects.

The scope of this study is centered on Aceh Province, with a specific emphasis on Banda Aceh City and Aceh Besar District. Banda Aceh is the capital of Aceh Province, the westernmost province of Indonesia. It was previously known as Aceh or Aceh Darussalam until the Dutch occupation of the Aceh court in the late nineteenth century. The Aceh Besar district was formerly a region with Banda Aceh as its capital. After Banda Aceh was separated into an independent municipality in the late 1970s, the district's capital was moved to Jantho, a city in the Seulawah hills. Aceh Besar and Banda Aceh districts were the core realm of the Sultanate of Aceh since the sixteenth century. Aceh Besar is also known as Aceh Rayeuk (Greater Aceh). Aceh Rayeuk refers to the area inside and surrounding Aceh Lhee Sagoe, the triangle that forms the Sultanate of Aceh's core realm.

This article attempts to develop a periodization of Acehnese architecture that has never been presented before, especially in the teaching of architectural history in Aceh. These periods emerge in relation to the processes and dynamics of politics and nature after contemporary events in Aceh. Two decades after the 2004 tsunami and Aceh peace, the younger generation of architects, especially architecture students in Aceh, need to know the layers of architecture and urban form that can be witnessed today. This knowledge is the foundation for designing contextually appropriate architecture and cities. The results of this architectural history study are expected to explain the relevance of Aceh's architectural forms in the present and encourage the participation of students and architects to think critically and productively in responding to architectural phenomena around them.

## **2. METHODS**

This study employs data from a critical literature review, both theoretical and

empirical, about the history of architecture and urban form in Aceh. The study of architectural theory is used to improve understanding of current events that affect architectural embodiment. Furthermore, this study also investigates socio-political factors to analyze the occurrence of architecture in Aceh following recent events. The socio-political consequences of two recent events, the 2004 tsunami and the GAM-R.I. conflict in Aceh, are linked to changes in activities, ways of life, and the intersection of social and political elements. These changes and intersections created new urban forms that had not previously existed or remained in people's memories.

This research has three stages. The first stage is mapping the existing architectural phenomena in Aceh to find issues and problems. The second stage is to conduct theoretical and historical studies to be associated with current architectural phenomena. The third stage is the categorization of the period into two contemporary events. In this stage, each category is derived into three sub-categories.

The article begins by presenting a comprehensive overview of those two notable events in Aceh in the twenty-first century, after the Indonesian reformation era. Following the two recent events, two periods emerged: post-tsunami December 26, 2004, and post-GAM-R.I. conflict since the peace agreement in 2005. The article highlights the architectural phenomena of these two periods. In the post-tsunami 2004 period, there are three architectural phenomena: the shifting perspective of safe and vulnerable places, the new 'Tsunami' typology, and the revival of the old typology. Meanwhile, after the GAM-R.I. conflict, there are three architectural phenomena: the search for Islamic architecture, the return of regionalism, and architectural anomalies. The architectural phenomena are then explored by linking Aceh's socio-political aspects and mapping the ideas of various architectural historians.

## **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 Brief History of Aceh**

Although in some cases not reported, Aceh's history has a strong intercultural and multi-religious connection to the pre-Islamic

kingdom (Fadhil, Putri & Nichols, 2022). It is located at the northern tip of Sumatra and is generally considered to have originated around the ninth century AD. According to Denys Lombard, an eminent Southeast Asian historian, some Arab texts in the ninth century mentioned a settlement in the northern tip of Sumatra Island known as Rami, Ramni, or Lamuri (Fadhil, 2020). Marco Polo, a Venetian explorer, documented six trading ports in Sumatra in a travel journal: Ferlec, Basman, Sumatra, Dagroian, Lambri (Lamuri), and Fansur (Lombard, 2007). Lamuri, Samudera, Pidir (Pidie), and Ferlec (Perlak) were settlements under the Aceh Sultanate in the sixteenth century. Samudera and Pidir have appeared in the records of the first Europeans who visited Siqueira in 1509 (Lombard, 2007). Since the Portuguese occupation of Malacca in 1511, Samudera or Pasai gained advantages from this situation because traders from Moro, Kalinga, Istanbul, Turkey, Arab, Persia, Gujarat, Malay, Java, and Siam, who initially anchored to Malacca, preferred Pasai, which was under Islamic rule.

Tome Pires (1465-1540), a Portuguese traveler, mentioned 'Aceh' for the first time among several place names in Sumatra as a new kingdom (Villiers, 2001). The pre-modern source, Hikayat Aceh, reports that the kingdom of Aceh came about by the merger of 'Makota Alam' and 'Darul Kamal', whose territory was separated by two rivers (Iskandar, 2011). Aceh, which resulted from the merger of these two kingdoms, was not built in the Lamuri area. This evidence is derived from the Pires record, which states that Lambry (Lamuri) and Aceh are neighboring states led by a powerful Sultan (Lombard, 2007). The formidable Sultan presumably referred to by Pires was Ali Mughayat Syah (n.d.-1530), the Sultan of the Makota Alam Dynasty (Lombard, 2007).

The Aceh Sultanate proliferated and fostered a formidable naval fleet in the Malacca Strait during the reign of Alauddin Riayat Syah (1538-1571), the son of Sultan Ali Mughayat Syah (Lombard, 2007). A leadership crisis resulted due to conflict between the Sultanate family and the orang kaya (nobility of Arab decent) after the death of Ali Riayat Syah (1571-1579), Alauddin Riayat Syah's successor (Lombard, 2007). After a ten-year crisis, it was

determined that a democratic election system should decide the throne of the Sultan. Alauddin Riayat Syah Sayyid Al Mukammil (1589-1604), an old nobleman and a Darul Kamal Dynasty descendant, was elected and initiated the new improvements in Aceh (Lombard, 2007). His grandson, Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636), later became a formidable Sultan and continued his grandfather's legacy in city building by transforming the capital of Aceh into a cosmopolitan city. This period was known as the "Golden Age" of Aceh, as the kingdom was a center of science and culture. It also prompted the expansion of Aceh's authority into the Malay peninsula (Lombard, 2007). Iskandar Muda's successor, Iskandar Thani (1636-1641), continued the advances that had begun by Iskandar Muda by beautifying the capital and continuing good relations with countries that were loyal to the Kingdom of Aceh (Lombard, 2007).

After Iskandar Thani's rule, the sultanate was led by the queen, Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiyatuddiniyah (1641-1675), the wife of Iskandar Thani (Lombard, 2007). Sustaining a Dutch offensive and several throne disputes contributed to the sultanate's downfall. Conquered areas, once loyal to the Aceh Sultanate, gradually fell under Dutch rule. The Sultan of Aceh surrendered power to the Dutch in 1904, and the Dutch ruled over Aceh until the Japanese occupation in 1942. During Dutch rule, Aceh's urban form and architecture underwent significant changes, including the destruction of the Dalam, the sultanate's palace, and its replacement with a military camp. The Baiturrahman Great Mosque, which burned down during the war in 1873, was rebuilt in a new architectural style (Wirjomartono, 2023). The Dutch built several new roads and settlements in Aceh for military purposes. Those colonial urban plans continue to be developed to this day.

Aceh is now an Indonesian province that includes the entire Aceh Sultanate area and shares a border with North Sumatra Province. Unfortunately, this province has gained a global reputation due to the disasters of December 26, 2004, when an earthquake caused the Indian Ocean tsunami. There were approximately two hundred thousand victims, and the majority of

the capital, Banda Aceh, was severely damaged. Before the tsunami, Aceh faced a prolonged civil war between GAM and RI Military. The conflict between the GAM and RI in Aceh had been ongoing since 1976 and peaked during the post-reform era (after 1998). On November 8, 1999, approximately 500,000 people, including political figures, clerics, and students, gathered in the courtyard of the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque to campaign for a referendum as shown in Figure 1 (Miller and Bunnell 2010). In the largest rally in Aceh's history, the masses voiced two options: "join or separate from the Republic of Indonesia" (Miller & Bunnell, 2010).



**Figure 1.** A Rally Called for a Referendum on November 8, 1999, in The Courtyard of The Baiturrahman Grand Mosque.

Source: Tirto.id, 2019

Dissatisfaction with the referendum's outcome resulted in the conflict peaking in early 2000. Attacks were common in the hinterland, particularly in the industrialized area of Lhokseumawe, which housed the headquarters of Arun Gas and Exxon Mobil. The hinterland was also GAM bases in Banda Aceh and other regencies, especially rice fields, plantations, villages far from the main road, and the suburbs (Waizenegger & Hyndman, 2016). Meanwhile, from 1998 to 2001, TNI military forces in Aceh were only permitted to conduct defensive operations (Reid, 2005). The war ended in 2005 when GAM and the Indonesian government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in Helsinki, Finland (Mahdi, 2007). Both sides recognized that the war would only exacerbate the tsunami's devastation in Aceh.

Modern-day Aceh experienced prosperity from the 1970s to the 1990s. The discovery of natural gas fields immediately accelerated Aceh's economy. Following the development, large industrial companies in North Aceh and Lhokseumawe City emerged, including Exxon Mobil, P.T. Arun, and several petrochemical

industries. The beginning of the twenty-first century marked the end of the lucrative period for this natural resource, resulting in the closure of those large industries. The government intended to revitalize Aceh after the disaster and rebuild the people's economy through an intensive campaign of Halal tourism, which is the development of tourism based on the Islamic concept (Anismar et al., 2018). Along with historical and tsunami memorial tourism, these government initiatives were presented as new ways to restore Aceh's position as a formidable economy.

### **3.2 Socio-political Aspects that Shift Architectural Identity**

Social advancements and upheavals often trigger architectural changes and vice versa. Architecture and urban forms have been used for social and political agendas all around the globe throughout history. Vale's reference to manipulating architecture and cities might include ideas, development, and exploitation (Vale, 2022). Sensitivity and comprehension are necessary to grasp the relationship between architecture and social interactions. Power, hierarchy, and dominance are social components that interact to establish specific relationships. Others include politics, economics, social class, ownership, as well as conflict and harmony.

Power, hierarchy, and dominance impact how a group's preferences, direction, and ambitions manifest in space. Although this does not always occur, it is common for larger and more established groups to exert dominance over smaller or younger ones. The dialectic between rulers and public dominance can be observed in public places. More than merely an open field, public space has evolved into a venue for protest (Kusno, 2009). Similarly, the rulers work tirelessly to maintain control of the field. When building public spaces, rulers and dominating citizens recall and forget to choose which memory to advance or to erase (Kusno, 2009).

Politics and economics are social forces that influence architectural identity. Government structures, for example, have a multifaceted meaning that is not merely a matter of taste but also embodies the political design of government leaders when the building was

erected (Vale, 2022). The architect's design manifestation is also intimately tied to political design (Vale, 2022). The design began as a collaborative idea between government officials and architects (and, in some cases, the public). It was then transformed into three-dimensional renderings by architects, which may change again during construction. These modifications depend on the authorities' tastes, which may have changed during construction, power shifts, or economic factors determining whether the architectural form is implemented as designed. This architectural realization process and dynamics incorporate political dialectics.

In the past, social strata, including aristocrats, were crucial in developing Aceh architecture. They could transform their ideals into architectural representations due to their possession of land and economic power. In sixteenth-century Aceh, for example, the influence of the merchant aristocrat (known as *Orangkaya*) surpassed that of the monarch, allowing them to control commerce and construct magnificent stone mansions in the city, which were always packed with their relatives and enslaved people (Lombard, 2007). In modern times, social class is linked to the economy and ownership. Economic and property rights holders, such as commercial housing developers, will have more leeway in determining architectural expressions, regardless of the size of the city. This freedom is not without constraints, as individuals must deal with other social contacts, such as local culture and government politics.

Conflict and harmony are central to the outcomes of social dialectics. Through social dialectics, a harmonious agreement will be reached. This condition can impact architectural and urban manifestations representing the dialogue's parties, or the dominant party can act as a temporary mediator. Meanwhile, a failed dialogue will lead to socio-political conflict, potentially resulting in the loss of specific architectural and urban manifestations. Long-term social conflict challenges can shape resilient architecture, emerging as a community adaptation to specific social conditions. For example, when the government provided permanent housing assistance in the village to the *Orang Rimba*

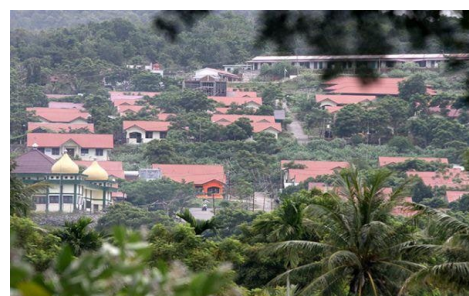
who live nomadically in Bukit Dua Belas National Park in Jambi, they used it as a shelter while selling forest products at the village market (Kurniawan et al., 2014). Because the forest area where they live is shrinking due to the clearing of oil palm land, they must choose a new way to survive. Previously, they searched for forest products to meet their daily needs; now, they sell them at the village market to earn money and purchase necessities for use in their forest huts.

### 3.3 Post-Tsunami Architectural Identity

#### 3.3.1. Shifting Perspective of Safe and Vulnerable Place

During the GAM and RI conflicts, gunfire became more frequent, resulting in tense conditions in the GAM base areas. The base areas were mostly situated in the hinterland or inner forest. Gunfire and mysterious shootings occurred frequently between 2000 and 2003, instilling fear in the GAM's base areas, which were predominantly hilly and inland. This fear resulted in temporary and permanent migration to areas less affected by the conflict, specifically urban areas near the coast.

The 2004 earthquake and tsunami altered perspectives on safe and vulnerable areas. People who previously avoided the hinterland and hills due to intense military activity were relocated to the coast. However, after the natural disaster of the tsunami, people were forced to migrate from coastal urban areas to the hinterland, previously considered a conflict-based area. Consequently, areas along the coasts that were once deemed secure (during the conflict) are now vulnerable to natural disasters.



**Figure 2** The Chinese Aid Built New Housing in The Hills of Neuheun Village, Aceh Besar.

Source: Media Indonesia, 2014

The national and international aid that flowed into Aceh was utilized for infrastructure

development, such as relocating tsunami-affected villages in Aceh Besar and Banda Aceh to inland areas and hills safe from the tsunami's impact. In Neuheun Village in Aceh Besar, for example, 606 units of 42 sqm houses were built in an area of 22.4 hectares in the hills at 300 meters above sea level to relocate people in urban coastal areas as shown in Figure 2 (*BBC News Indonesia*, 2019).

This housing development, known as the Jackie Chan Housing Complex, was built with a Chinese government grant. The complex was named after Jackie Chan, a Chinese superstar, who visited Aceh as a Chinese government ambassador following the 2004 disaster and contributed funds to the construction of this housing. Several supporting facilities, such as water pump installations, water storage tanks, schools, markets, mosques, *meunasah* (village hall), and sports facilities, were built to complement the needs of people living some distance from urban areas.



**Figure 3.** New Business Centre and Residential Area in Tsunami 'Safe' Area Batoh Village, Lueng Bata Sub-district, Banda Aceh before Tsunami (June, 2004) and 18 years after Tsunami (June, 2022)

Source: Google Earth, 2022

Banda Aceh also expanded into the hinterland by establishing two new urban areas: Batoh "New Town" (Figure 3) and Pango Raya Ulee Kareng. The growth of new settlements and centers in these areas was preceded by the opening of new highways that cut through inland villages (previously avoided during the conflict era).

Meanwhile, in Ulee Lheue, tsunami Ground Zero, previously inhabited by hundreds of

families, is now a disaster-prone area (Figure 4). The Banda Aceh City Government has prohibited the establishment of residential areas in the Ulee Lheue region and has designated it as a green space and tourist destination, as stated in the 2009-2029 Regional Spatial Plan (Ningrum et al., 2023). The area, formerly bustling throughout the evening, is now only crowded until Maghrib time and remains tranquil until the morning. The fear of living and doing activities in these ground-zero coastal areas persists, particularly at night when the residential areas surrounding Ulee Lheue are quiet.



**Figure 4.** Satellite Images of Tsunami 'Prone' Areas. Ulee Lheue Area before The December 2004 Tsunami and 18 years after The Tsunami in June 2022. What was once Densely Populated is now a Tourist Area and Green Open Space.

Source: Google Earth, 2022

The dialogue between social layers that feared coastal areas and hilly areas that relaxed after the tsunami catastrophe resulted in new residential and architectural spaces away from coastal cities. The phenomenon is also related to the dialectic of nature, which causes safety and vulnerability to reverse each other in two different periods. Coastal towns that were considered safe during the conflict period subsequently transformed into tsunami-prone zones that are still discouraged today after the disaster.

Small villages around Ground Zero are being reoccupied, primarily with low-density landed

houses. In this area prone to disasters, mitigation is now being prioritized as an essential measure to protect residents in the event of a recurring disaster. The government delineated safe and tsunami-prone zones to establish primary and temporary evacuation routes and sites. Arterial routes from vulnerable to safe areas, such as Jalan Iskandar Muda, which connects Ulee Lheue to the city center, were widened to aid mitigation, and evacuation signs were placed at several locations along these routes.

### 3.3.2 The New 'Tsunami' Typology

Mitigation efforts in tsunami-prone villages with access far from the main mitigation route include constructing tsunami-safe rescue buildings. The new typology in four villages features four-story buildings that can hold 500 people and withstand a magnitude 10 earthquake. Three escape buildings were built with JICA (Japan International Corporation Agency) funds in Lambung, Deah Glumpang (Figure 5), and Alue Deah Teungoh villages. In Ulee Lheue, there is another escape building by the BRR (Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency) NAD-Nias that was formerly a TDMRC (Tsunami and Disaster Mitigation Research Center) office (Zahrina et al., 2019). This escape-building typology has been present in all four villages for more than ten years, despite little support from the local community. When not in use, these buildings host community events; some serve as village museums and tsunami education centers, while others remain locked, unmaintained, and unused (*BBC News Indonesia*, 2019).



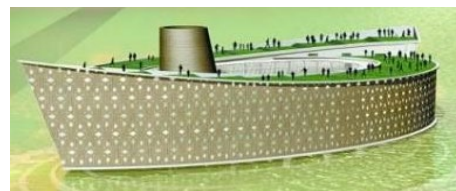
**Figure 5.** An Escape building at Deah Glumpang Village

Source: Serambinews.com, 2018

Several monuments have been constructed across the city to memorialize the catastrophic occurrences of the 2004 earthquake and tsunami. Monuments in the form of museums serve as a reminder and a learning tool about

tsunamis. Centuries of neglecting earthquakes and tsunamis led to insufficient mitigation measures and poor urban planning following Aceh's 2004 earthquake and tsunami.

The Tsunami Museum is the most significant architectural landmark that encapsulates the events during and after the tsunami, as well as reflections on Aceh in the aftermath (Figure 6). The museum, designed by Ridwan Kamil, highlights many philosophical values related to the tsunami and regionalism through metaphors, such as the shape of the ship, the rescue hill, the columns of Rumoh Aceh (Aceh Traditional House), and the shape of the Saman Dance movement pattern (Jarry, 2015). The community's memory of the tsunami event is reflected in the spatial quality of the tunnel of sorrow, which contains spaces of fear, memory, and confusion in the experience of first entering the building's interior. Then, visitors continue their journey to the prayer well, a space of sadness and contemplation of the greatness of the Divine, which contains the names of the victims with the writing of "Allah" at the top of the well (the top of the museum chimney). Finally, visitors are taken to the space of hope, which conveys a message of Aceh's spirit and hope through the earthquake and tsunami technology exhibition.



**Figure 6.** The Aceh Tsunami Museum with The Concept of Escape Hill, when a Similar Disaster Occurred

Source: P.T. Urbane Indonesia, 2022

Other monuments in the city enrich the vision of the community's memories and hopes for those who did not witness the disaster. The PLTD Apung, a 2,600-ton vessel powered by diesel generators, became stranded 5 km from Ulee Lheue Harbor to the mainland of Punge Blang Cut Village. The ship was manufactured in Batam in 1996, and since its manufacture, it has been berthed to various areas in Indonesia that are experiencing electrical shortages. The ship was anchored at Ulee Lheue Harbor, Banda Aceh, in 2003 before being washed ashore by the tsunami waves. It has been

preserved in its current location and transformed into an open-air museum dedicated to educating people about tsunamis.

Additionally, 53 inscriptions in the national languages of 53 countries were erected around Blang Padang Square to express Aceh's gratitude to those nations. This monument is called Aceh Thanks to the World Memorial Park (Figure 7). Appreciation in the form of a memorial garden indirectly illustrates a long-term appreciation that is continuous and eternal (Arif 2008). The placement of these monuments in Blang Padang Square further strengthens the field's position as an informative museum in the center of the city. Since colonial times, Blang Padang Square has been a public museum, as it was the location of Aceh Museum (Rumoh Aceh Pavilion) from 1915 to 1969 before moving to its current location in Peuniti (Fadhil, 2023). On 30 July 1984, a monument replica of Seulawah RI-001 aircraft was built, commemorating the first commercial aircraft donated by the people of Aceh to Indonesia (Indonesiakaya, 2024). The placement of those memorials in the public space of the city center implies that this gratitude comes from the wider community.



**Figure 7.** The Main Inscription in The Aceh Thanks to The World Memorial Park Shaped Sea Waves and The Design of 53 Inscriptions in The Form of Drowning Boats and The Inside is in The Form of Jeu'e, a Traditional Acehnese Bamboo Rice Refinery .

Source: Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Aceh, 2015 & Arif, 2009

The Masal Cemetery, the final resting place of thousands of tsunami victims, was built as a memorial and is visited by various ethnic groups on the commemoration of the December 26 tsunami every year (Setyadi, 2021). Various monuments, such as ship replicas, flood wave sculptures, abandoned ruins, and tsunami water level markers, serve as reminders of the city's collective memory. These monuments convey the message of the destructive tsunami disaster

and hold significant meaning for most of the city's inhabitants.

The symbols representing the tsunami, imprinted on the memories of the city's inhabitants, were subsequently integrated into new architectural ideas. For instance, the architectural design of the new Banda Aceh Mayor's Office drew inspiration from the imagery of a ship placed on top of a house and a ship being pulled ashore (Figure 8). The new mayor's office building with a futuristic model seems to represent the taste of the 2007–2014 Mayor of Banda Aceh, the late Mawardi Nurdin. He is the father of Banda Aceh's post-tsunami development and aimed to create a positive image of the public service system by modernizing damaged and dilapidated public administration buildings (Yudha, 2017). The futuristic model of the mayor's office building and the Tsunami Museum Building catalyzed the development of an innovative architecture that embraced a similar concept while advocating for values deemed suitable for post-disaster Aceh.



**Figure 8.** The Phenomenon of The Ship on The Building (above) was Raised into The Form of the Banda Aceh Mayor's Office Building (below)

Source: beritatrans.com, 2019; kanalaceh.com, 2019

### 3.3.3 Revival of the Old Typology

In addition to the emergence of new architecture, the post-tsunami conditions allowed some buildings to be restored to their original appearance. Baiturrahim Mosque Ulee Lheue and Teungku Dianjong Mosque have been restored to their original forms (Putri & Fadhil, 2023). The Baiturrahim Mosque was the only structure in the Ulee Lheue area after the tsunami. Before the tsunami, the Dutch East Indies government restored the mosque in 1922



with a permanent structure featuring a stacked roof and a distinctive onion dome (Figure 9).

A major earthquake in 1983 collapsed the mosque's dome, and the restoration ten years later did not follow the distinctive character of the old form as shown in Figure 10 (Kamaruddi, 2023). Following the tsunami catastrophe, the mosque building underwent restoration to reinstate the distinctive features of the stacked roof and dome located at the tip-top of the mosque as shown in Figure 11.



**Figure 9.** Baiturrahim Mosque Ulee Lheue after Being Restored by the Dutch East Indies Government. The photo was Taken in 1929. Source: Tropenmuseum, 1929



**Figure 10.** Baiturrahim Mosque Ulee Lheue was Renovated after the 1983 earthquake, which Eliminated The Main Character of The Roof and Dome. Source: Indonesiana, 2013



**Figure 11.** Baiturrahim Mosque Ulee Lheue, after The Post-Tsunami Renovation in 2004, was Returned to Its Old Form. Photo taken in 2010. Source: Wikipedia, 2010

### 3.4 Post-Conflict Architectural Identity

#### 3.4.1 The Searching of Islamic Architecture

As discussed in the GAM and RI Conflict periods, military and civil emergencies have reached various levels since the post-1998 reform. The 2004 earthquake and tsunami disaster occurred amid the war between GAM

and RI. The situation after the severe disaster then became a turning point for peace. Eight months after the 2004 earthquake and tsunami disaster, the Indonesian government and GAM reached a peace agreement through the Helsinki MOU on August 15, 2005 (Syahbandir et al., 2021).

In the memorandum of understanding between the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement, Aceh has several special rights, such as the right to use regional symbols, the preparation of regulations (*Qanun*) following Islamic Sharia and Acehese Customs, as well as the establishment of Wali Nanggroe (*Wali Negri*) and other customary institutions under it. GAM also gained the right to participate in local elections by forming local parties. These post-peace and post-tsunami political conditions were then influenced by various freedom celebrations, which raised symbols in architectural and urban forms.



**Figure 12.** Sultan Iskandar Muda Airport Main Terminal with 3 Domes Source: AP II, 2019

To implement Islamic Sharia and promote Aceh's identity as the Verandah of Mecca (Serambi Mekkah) region, buildings and public spaces display symbols representing Islamic values. The use of domes and Middle Eastern ornaments in public buildings such as Sultan Iskandar Muda Airport and the Banda Aceh DPRK Building is one way to highlight Islamic influence (Figure 12). Other symbols adopted and implemented were 'Medina-style' electric umbrellas and a marble-lined courtyard of Banda Aceh's Baiturrahman Grand Mosque.

The Acehese people widely embrace Islamic symbols such as domes, Islamic motifs, and the Medina umbrella (Figure 13), which have been adopted from other cultural identities to form new cultural identities.

The revival of the Islamic legacy in Aceh following the conflict and tsunami appears to

have influenced and molded public perception of the ideal characteristics of Islamic architecture. This is demonstrated by the widespread use of domes, Islamic arches, and Islamic ornaments in shops, hotels, and office buildings. Undoubtedly, elevating these values entails a procedure referred to as "oblivion" by Kusno (2009). Islamic architecture of Aceh's "golden age" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including structures with fortified mosques, *meunasah*, and mosques with tiered roofs, appears to have evaded during this reconstruction. People no longer associate the tiered roof model and fortified buildings as symbols of Islamic splendor.



**Figure 13.** Some Electric Umbrellas 'ala Medina' were Erected in The Front Yard of Baiturrahman Mosque.

Source: lintasatjeh.com, 2017

### 3.4.2 The Return of Regionalism



**Figure 14.** Junior High School Students and Their Teachers Visited The New Library of Banda Aceh City, which is Neo-Vernacular Rumoh Aceh

Source: newsbandaaceh.com, 2022

The use of Islamic symbols was accompanied by the resurgence of regionalism (neo-regionalism) architecture, also known as neo-vernacular. In the post-conflict period, while fewer buildings and public spaces adopted Islamic symbols, some incorporated Acehese regional values into their form and facade. The facade of the new library in Banda Aceh City features traditional ornaments and the Acehese vernacular house model (Rumoh Aceh) as shown in Figure 14.

Although the library's form differs from Rumoh Aceh in terms of building period and materials used, the main principles of Rumoh can still be

seen in its forms, such as the three levels of the front, middle, and back verandahs, the stilt legs, and the wide gable roof (Nichols, Fong & Fadhil, 2017).

### 3.4.3 Architectural Anomaly

The Wali Nanggroe Institution, as the protector of Aceh's customs and rights, now has its palace and office in Banda Aceh. The Institute for the Protection of Aceh's Customs and Privileges buildings differ from previous public buildings that honor Aceh's Islamic and regional symbols. The Wali's palace is designed in the neo-classical style of America's White House, and the surrounding offices are all white buildings set back from the highway as shown in Figure 15. This phenomenon could be an attempt to highlight power symbols that are still associated with neo-classical architecture, such as the White House of America and the Jakarta Presidential Palaces.



**Figure 15.** Wali Nanggroe Palace

Source: tribunews.com, 2015

## 4. CONCLUSION

The conflict period following the Indonesian reform era created social and political chaos, resulting in changes in architecture and urban space in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar. People avoided the inland and hilly regions due to those areas' transformation into conflict bases between GAM and RI Military. Residents then prefer to live in urban areas near the coast, which are generally safe from war. This area later became the center of the economy and settlement, remaining crowded until 2004.

The 2004 earthquake and tsunami disaster changed the perception of safe and vulnerable zones, subsequently changing the development of architecture and urban areas. Coastal urban areas, like Ulee Lheue, were totally damaged during the catastrophe. The tsunami ground zero, mainly located in the coastal urban area, became a vulnerable zone and is still avoided by people. New settlements are relocated and

developed in rural areas and hills that are safer and unaffected by the tsunami. This condition led to new crowd centers in the tsunami-safe areas, inland areas, and hills once prone to war during the conflict. Architectural and urban development changes occur as a result of safe post-conflict situations in the hinterlands.

After the tsunami and the peace agreement between GAM and RI in 2005, Aceh received much economic assistance and the right to exceptional freedom. Following two significant events, a wide range of architectural concepts were employed by both the government and the community to establish an architectural identity that reflected the new soul of Aceh. The widely accepted symbols are then celebrated through the repeated use of the same forms in various buildings and urban spaces.

The celebration of symbols thought to represent Islam, such as the use of domes in several public buildings, the electric umbrellas of Medina's Nabawi Mosque in the Baiturrahman mosque's front yard, and Middle Eastern Islamic motifs to decorate the building facade. Furthermore, there is a celebration of regional symbols in neo-regionalism, which includes the appointment of the Acehnese Traditional House, typical Aceh ornaments, and other regional symbols. The sad and dark memory of the tsunami was also celebrated in architecture, serving as a warning and collective memory for most urban communities. The tsunami symbol celebration is represented by a ship colliding with land, resembling sea waves, and reflecting the water levels in different parts of the city. Another form of symbol celebration is the use of neo-classical architecture in palaces and government buildings, which attempts to demonstrate the authorities' power and splendor.

The diversity of architectural works and urban public spaces reflects the impact of collective, social, political, natural, and philosophical memory following two recent events in Aceh, particularly in the Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar regions. Manifestations in Aceh after the post-contemporary event, conflict, and tsunami suggested that something else caused them, prompting students to examine the layers of the process and the dynamics of embodiment in

history and then critically consider why and how the realization could occur.

#### AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

The first author (MNF) contributed to the formulation of the initial idea of the research and article, literature review, data collection and verification, periodization, analysis, and synthesis of research results; the second author (ASP) contributed to data validation and analysis.

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