



Between Admiration and Alienation: Jules Leclercq's View on Javanese Architecture in *Un Séjour dans l'Île de Java*

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RÉSUMÉ - ABSTRACT

Cette étude examine la manière dont Jules Leclercq, un voyageur européen du XIXe siècle, décrit l'architecture de Java dans son récit de voyage *Un Séjour dans l'Île de Java* (1898). En adoptant une approche postcoloniale, cette recherche analyse les représentations architecturales dans le texte. Les résultats montrent que Leclercq, influencé par la perspective coloniale de l'époque, présente l'architecture javanaise comme un symbole de la différence culturelle entre l'Occident et l'Orient, tout en reconnaissant certaines beautés et innovations. Cette étude met en lumière comment ces descriptions renforcent les stéréotypes coloniaux et soulignent la hiérarchie culturelle entre les mondes occidental et oriental. Les résultats de cette analyse offrent une meilleure compréhension de l'impact des récits de voyage européens sur la construction des représentations coloniales, en particulier celles liées à l'architecture, et soulignent l'importance d'une lecture critique des textes de voyage pour déconstruire ces stéréotypes.

*This study examines how Jules Leclercq, a 19th-century European traveler, describes the architecture of Java in his travelogue *Un Séjour dans l'Île de Java* (1898). Adopting a postcolonial approach, this research analyzes the architectural representations in the text. The results show that Leclercq, influenced by the colonial perspective of the time, presents Javanese architecture as a symbol of the cultural difference between the West and the East, while recognizing certain beauties and innovations. This study highlights how these descriptions reinforce colonial stereotypes and emphasize the cultural hierarchy between the Western and Eastern worlds. The results of this analysis offer a better understanding of the impact of European travelogues on the construction of colonial representations, particularly those related to architecture, and highlight the importance of a critical reading of travel literature to deconstruct these stereotypes.*

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 28 October 2024

Revised 10 November 2024

Accepted 25 December 2024

Available online 30 December 2024

Mots-clés : architecture, récit de voyage, postcoloniale

Keywords:

architecture, travelogue, postcolonial

To cite this paper (in APA style):

Mustofa, A. & Hibatullah, S. M. (2024). Between Admiration and Alienation: Jules Leclercq's View on Javanese Architecture in *Un Séjour dans l'Île de Java*. *Francisola*, Volume 9(2), 91 - 98.

<https://doi.org/10.17509/francisola.v9i2.76647>

1. INTRODUCTION

Architecture is a form of cultural representation that reflects not only lifestyle, but also the value system, beliefs, and identity of a society, especially when viewed from the perspective of foreigners in 19th-century travel literature. In that century, architecture in the Eastern world became the object of attention and even admiration for foreign explorers, who saw it as a symbol of a different culture and, for most, considered exotic. In 19th-century travel writings, such as Jules Leclercq's travelogue *Un Séjour dans l'Île de Java*, architecture in Java is often described with narratives that are descriptive and full of Western cultural assessments. Descriptions of buildings in Java—such as palaces, temples, and houses in Chinatowns—are not only used to describe the values and social structures of the community. Still, they are also influenced by strong orientalist stereotypes.

Several previous studies have explored cultural representations in literary works, especially those depicting local cultures in the Indonesian context. Research by Andi Mustofa et al. (2023) highlighted the types of explorers in 19th-century French travel literature, describing their views of the outside world based on various categories of explorers. Utama et al. (2023) examined the representation of Javanese culture in the novel *Love in Lumajang*, which expresses moral values through character interactions, while Rahmawati and Wulandari (2024) focused on the Siri' culture of the Bugis-Makassar community in the novel *Siri'*. Research by Hidayah et al. (2016) discussed the acculturation of Javanese and Western cultures in the novel *Rahvayana*, noting significant differences between Javanese and Western cultures represented in modern and individualistic values. Other studies, such as those conducted by Amelia et al. (2017) in the novel *Hujan Bulan Juni* and Mantovani and Yusuf (2018) highlights the representation of Javanese culture in characters and cultural elements such as norms and beliefs. In addition, Desy Proklawati (2020) explores Sumatran culture in *Bidadari-Bidadari Surga*, and Syihaabul Hudaa et al. (2021) describe the fusion of Sundanese, Javanese, and Chinese cultures in *Boenga Roos Dari Tjikembang*, while Mochamad Muarifin and Endang Waryanti (2021) identify values of tolerance and religion in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*. Yulianti's (2021) research on the novel *Hinomaru* describes the conditions of West Javanese society during the Japanese occupation, using a historical approach to reveal cultural and economic interactions. The above studies highlight cultural representations through various perspectives: explorer identity, local moral values, and socio-cultural concepts. However, no study has examined the representation of Javanese architecture from the perspective of a foreign explorer in the 19th century. By focusing on the architectural aspect, this research is expected to contribute to understanding how Western explorers view and interpret architecture as a physical element of culture and how colonial and orientalist views influence these interpretations in travel writing.

This study fills the knowledge gap in previous studies by focusing on the representation of architecture in Java in Jules Leclercq's French travel writing. In other words, this study raises the following questions. First, how is architecture in Java described in Jules Leclercq's French travel writing? Second, how does Jules Leclercq, as part of a European explorer, view architecture in Java in his travel writing? As part of a Western explorer, Leclercq's perspective on architecture in Java can provide new insights into the culture of architecture in Java as understood and represented by foreigners. Jules Leclercq, who views from a European perspective, sees and represents architecture in Java through a different lens that can distort the representation of the building's architecture. Distortion as a result of differences in cultural views has an impact on the broader meaning and interpretation of architecture in Java.

This article is based on the argument that Jules Leclercq's view of architecture in Java was influenced by his background as part of a Western nation, which brought with it a series of distinctive cultural and ideological assumptions. The discourse of orientalism and colonialism in the 19th century influenced Leclercq's perspective, which impacted the representation of architecture that emerged in his travel writing. This means that architecture in Java is positioned as the other in the Western narrative. From Leclercq's perspective, Orientalist ideas position architecture in Java not only as a physical object but also as a symbol of difference that needs to be observed and evaluated from a

Western perspective. Such a perspective strengthens the colonial construction that influences readers of Jules Leclercq's travel writing.

2. METHOD

This study highlights Javanese architecture recorded in a travelogue entitled *Un Séjour dans l'Île de Java* (1898) by Jules Leclercq. This qualitative descriptive study uses a postcolonialist approach. This study uses data collection techniques in the form of reading and note-taking techniques. Data were collected by reading intensively and thoroughly the travelogue *Un Séjour dans l'Île de Java* to find the representation of Javanese culture through building architecture from Jules Leclercq's perspective. The note-taking technique was used to record data on the architectural representation of cultural buildings from Jules Leclercq's perspective. With this reading and note-taking technique, the researchers conducted a careful, directed, and thorough reading of the travelogue *Un Séjour dans l'Île de Java* to obtain the necessary data. The collected data were analyzed using content analysis techniques.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Exploring Architecture in *Un Séjour dans l'Île de Java*

In this section, we will analyze how architecture on the island of Java is described in Jules Leclercq's French travelogue, *Un Séjour dans l'Île de Java* (1898). As a European writer who traveled to Java in the late 19th century, Leclercq witnessed and documented various aspects of culture, including architecture, from a colonial perspective. The descriptions of the buildings, spaces, and architectural structures that Leclercq encountered reflect a typical colonialist's view and interpretation of a culture that was considered foreign.

Quel indicible contraste entre le mystère de cette forêt et la bruyante animation des quartiers asiatiques! Je n'ai rien vu de plus étourdissant, de plus pittoresque que le Kampong tjina, le quartier chinois du vieux Batavia, où grouillent à peu près vingt mille jaunes, n'ayant, pour la plupart, d'autre costume qu'un petit caleçon et une queue de cheveux qui leur tombe sur le dos (Leclercq, 1898, p. 36)

What an unspeakable contrast between the mystery of this forest and the noisy bustle of the Asian quarters! I have seen nothing more stunning, more picturesque than the Kampong tjina, the Chinese quarter of old Batavia, where about twenty thousand yellows swarm, most of them wearing no other costume than a pair of underpants and a ponytail that falls down their backs.

Leclercq's observations of the Chinese ethnic village in Batavia demonstrate a deep interest in the beauty and uniqueness beyond his European experience. The praise in the sentence "*Je n'ai rien vu de plus étourdissant, de plus pittoresque que le Kampong tjina, le quartier chinois du vieux Batavia*" confirms that Leclercq's focus is on the otherness found in the Chinese quarter. The description of the color of the houses and the appearance of the Chinese people confirms the striking differences in architecture and the European way of life.

Leclercq's focus on visual aspects not commonly found in Europe shows that his interest in the Chinese region was a form of interest in the "other," things that were foreign and exotic in the eyes of a colonial explorer. The foreign region was not just a geographical location but an object appreciated for its difference and exoticism.

Buitenzorg, comme à Batavia, les Chinois coudoient les Européens. Ils habitent un quartier séparé, qui s'étend très loin le long de la route de Megamendoeng [...] Cette architecture est parfaitement adaptée au climat, et les murs latéraux sont percés de fenêtres ouvertes qui procurent une abondante ventilation. (Leclercq, 1898, p. 52)

Buitenzorg, as in Batavia, the Chinese rub shoulders with the Europeans. They live in a separate quarter, which extends far along the road to Megamendoeng [...] This architecture is perfectly adapted to the climate, and the side walls are pierced with open windows which provide abundant ventilation.

Leclercq highlights the social separation between Europeans and the Chinese community in his observations. The data above shows how Leclercq enjoys the area as an entertaining yet foreign sight. Leclercq's interest in architecture is also evident in his descriptions of Javanese settlements: "*derrière les boutiques, au milieu des palmiers, se cachent les huttes de bambou des indigènes: jolies, coquettes, couvertes*

souvent d'une toiture en pannes, elles ont un air de bien-être qui réjouit l'œil." (Behind the shops, among the palm trees, are hidden the bamboo huts of the natives: pretty, stylish, often covered with a shingle roof, they have an air of well-being that delights the eye) (Leclercq, 1898, p. 65). He notes how the bamboo huts of the natives, hidden among palm trees, display visual appeal with expressions such as beautiful and pleasing to the eye. The huts are described as having an atmosphere of well-being that blends with the surrounding nature. Leclercq appreciates the natural beauty of these settlements. He sees them as part of an exotic landscape in harmony with the tropical environment, where the uniqueness of the bamboo structures and the greenery of the trees create an eye-catching and impressive sight.

Dans mes promenades matinales, j'ai rencontré plusieurs villages indigènes, dont le plus important, Tosari, se compose d'une cinquantaine de cases. Tous ces villages sont pareils les uns aux autres et différent beaucoup de ceux de la plaine; comme les villages kabyles, ils sont toujours perchés au sommet d'un mamelon; ils se protègent contre les tigres par un mur d'enceinte formé de bambous entrelacés; l'entrée est précédée d'une porte en manière d'arc de triomphe, assez semblable à celles qui précèdent les temples japonais. Les cases en bois, couvertes d'une toiture en chaume, sont longues et étroites et toutes pareilles; entre ces cases errent une multitude de chiens et de poules; chaque village a son tambour en bois, tout à la fois horloge et télégraphe. (Leclercq, 1898, pp. 204–205)

In my morning walks I came across several native villages, the largest of which, Tosari, consists of about fifty huts. All these villages are similar to each other and differ greatly from those on the plain; like the Kabyle villages, they are always perched on the top of a hillock; they protect themselves against tigers by a surrounding wall made of intertwined bamboo; the entrance is preceded by a door in the form of a triumphal arch, quite similar to those preceding Japanese temples. The wooden huts, covered with a thatched roof, are long and narrow and all alike; between these huts wander a multitude of dogs and chickens; each village has its wooden drum, which is both a clock and a telegraph.

In this description, Leclercq admires the Indigenous villages in the region, especially Tosari. He compares the village's layout and location with those of a Kabyle village while also linking it to visual references familiar to the West, such as "arc de triomphe," to emphasize the exoticism and uniqueness of the architecture of this indigenous village. His interest in the other is evident in the description, which focuses on attractive architectural and cultural elements because of their fundamental differences from Western standards.

The author also narrates European-style buildings in the Dutch East Indies, in addition to the houses of Javanese and Chinese ethnic groups.

Buitenzorg, dont le nom signifie « Sans-Souci », est la résidence ordinaire du gouverneur général, dont le palais s'élève au milieu du parc. C'est à ce palais qu'aboutissent, comme à un centre, tous les rouages de l'administration du vaste empire des Indes néerlandaises. Imaginez un grand bâtiment style Empire, surmonté d'une coupole où flotte le drapeau tricolore, orné de beaucoup de colonnes ioniques, de corniches, de frontons, d'escaliers de marbre, de galeries, et de tout ce qui constitue ce qu'on est convenu d'appeler un monument de bon goût. Cet édifice moderne, sans étage, dont le manque de hauteur est racheté par le développement des ailes, en a remplacé un autre à étage, qui fut détruit par un tremblement de terre. (Leclercq, 1898, pp. 50–51)

Buitenzorg, whose name means "Sans-Souci", is the ordinary residence of the Governor-General, whose palace stands in the middle of the park. At this palace, all the machinery of the administration of the vast empire of the Dutch East Indies ends, as at a centre. Imagine a large building in the Empire style, surmounted by a dome on which the tricolour flag flies, decorated with many Ionic columns, cornices, pediments, marble staircases, galleries, and everything that constitutes what is agreed to be called a monument of good taste. This modern building, without a storey, whose lack of height is compensated for by the development of the wings, replaced another one with a storey, which was destroyed by an earthquake.

The description of the governor-general's palace in Buitenzorg, which served as the seat of government, shows how the author paid particular attention to the grandeur of the Empire-style architecture. The palace is described in detail and highlights the symbols of colonial power, such as the dome with the tricolor flag, the ionic columns, the marble staircase, and the gallery that gives the impression of being a "monument de bon goût." This choice of words reflects the explorer's view that European architectural styles were a manifestation of superior and sophisticated aesthetics and a

symbol of order and modernity. This analysis shows that Leclercq viewed European-style buildings as symbols of progress in contrast to local settlements. By emphasizing the elegance of the palace as the “center” of government, the author creates a narrative that shows the cultural and architectural superiority of the West amidst the colonial environment. The palace was not only the governor-general's residence but also a physical representation of Dutch power, highlighting the structured and unified colonial control. Here, the author shows how European architectural styles were adapted and expanded to assert colonial dominance in the Dutch East Indies, thus creating a visual and symbolic hierarchy between local architecture and colonial buildings.

Leclercq's description also continued with the temple buildings that were the object of his interest as a Western explorer. In detail, he observed the ruins of Prambanan Temple, especially Roro Jonggrang temple, showing his interest in the magnificent structure and regularity of local architecture.

Les ruines de Parambanan se composent d'un groupe de temples connus sous le nom de Tjandi Loro Djonggrang, ou temple de la Vierge. Bien que la plupart des édifices soient tellement ruinés qu'il n'en subsiste plus que les fondations, il est cependant facile d'en saisir le plan, qui était grandiose dans sa simplicité. Le groupe se composait de six grands sanctuaires érigés sur une terrasse carrée, autour de laquelle cent soixante petits temples, dont le quart sont encore debout, formaient trois rangées successives disposées en carré: la rangée la plus voisine de la terrasse en comptait quarante-quatre, la deuxième cinquante deux, et la troisième soixante. Tous ces édicules, de forme carrée, étaient à peu près identiques d'aspect et de dimensions; leur porte d'entrée était toujours vers le côté extérieur du carré. (Leclercq, 1898, pp. 147–148)

The ruins of Prambanan consist of a group of temples known as the Tjandi Loro Djonggrang, or Temple of the Virgin. Although most of the buildings are so ruined that only the foundations remain, it is easy to grasp their plan, which was grand in simplicity. The group consisted of six large sanctuaries erected on a square terrace, around which one hundred and sixty small temples, a quarter of which are still standing, formed three successive rows arranged in a square: the row nearest the terrace had forty-four, the second fifty-two, and the third sixty. All these aedicules, square in shape, were nearly identical in appearance and dimensions; their entrance door was always towards the outer side of the square.

Leclercq describes the temple complex as "majestic in its simplicity" (*grandiose dans sa simplicité*) with a regular arrangement of smaller temples surrounding six main temples. This depiction shows the observer's appreciation of the order and symmetry of the temple architecture, which is seen as a form of beauty that reflects a culture and aesthetic values different from Europe. This analysis indicates that, despite the architectural style differing from European standards, the explorer was impressed by the complexity and planning underlying the arrangement of the Prambanan temples. His view of the temples, particularly with its emphasis on the orderliness of the arrangement and the structural function of the buildings, reflects an attempt to understand or even judge the local culture in terms of those understood by the Western observer. Here, the fascination with temple architecture becomes clear; the observer approaches the temples as evidence of a local cultural progress emphasizing the harmony between simplicity and grandeur.

3.2. Leclercq's Views on Javanese Architecture in *Un Séjour dans l'Île de Java*

In this section, we will discuss how Jules Leclercq, as one of the European explorers in the 19th century, viewed architecture in Java in his travelogue *Un Séjour dans l'Île de Java* (1898) and how this view was influenced by his background as part of the European nation: “*très couleur locale, cette rue chinoise aux courbes imprévues, bordée de maisons basses dont les toitures font saillie, avec des enseignes verticales, le tout de cette architecture bizarre que tout le monde connaît et qu'on ne peut décrire.*” (very local color, this Chinese street with unexpected curves, lined with low houses with protruding roofs, with vertical signs, all of this bizarre architecture that everyone knows and that we cannot describe) (Leclercq, 1898, p. 52). Leclercq's description of the architecture of Chinatown houses, which he called “*bizarre*” reflects his unfamiliarity and confusion in understanding architectural elements that did not conform to European norms. The phrase “*qu'on ne peut décrire*” suggests that Leclercq, though intrigued, found this architecture difficult to understand within a Western cultural framework. He observed distinctive features, such as “*très couleur locale*” which added to the impression of exoticism. Leclercq perceived the architecture as something different from European architecture. This description, which

seemed amazed but also implied confusion, reflected the perspective of a Western explorer who, rather than truly understanding, often labeled local elements as eccentric or even mysterious. Gifford (2002) argues that individual perceptions are influenced by personal experiences and the environment. As a European, Leclercq saw Chinese architecture that was foreign to him differently, while for the Chinese, the architecture had a certain value. Leclercq's strange view arose from his personal perception of Chinatown architecture.

When Jules Leclercq visited central Java, he expressed his views when he saw Borobudur Temple.

Seul sur mon observatoire aérien, je m'abstins de respect devant cette scène sublime: le temple de Boroboedoe éclairé par les feux du soleil levant. Et je songeais que depuis mille ans cette scène se renouvelle tous les jours. L'imagination, en remontant le cours des siècles, essaye de se représenter ces terrasses, ces gradins, ces galeries, ces promenoirs, aujourd'hui déserts et muets, tels qu'ils étaient lorsque ce même soleil éclairait les longues théories de prêtres et de pèlerins qui s'y déroulaient en chantant les louanges de Bouddha. (Leclercq, 1898, p. 136)

Alone on my aerial observatory, I was overcome with awe before this sublime scene: the temple of Boroboedoe lit by the fires of the rising sun. And I thought that for a thousand years this scene has been renewed every day. The imagination, going back over the centuries, tries to represent these terraces, these steps, these galleries, these promenades, today deserted and silent, as they were when this same sun illuminated the long theories of priests and pilgrims who took place there singing the praises of Buddha.

Leclercq expressed his admiration for Borobudur temple by combining respect for its majestic beauty and resilience. For him, Borobudur was not just an ancient site, but a spiritual symbol that seemed to transcend time. In his writings, he imagined Borobudur as a place once alive with religious activities and rituals, as if he could feel the traces of history that could still be felt in every relief and structure of the building. This admiration shows his appreciation for the local cultural heritage that, although foreign to him, he still sees as a monumental achievement on par with other world architectural wonders.

After seeing the splendor of the temples on Java Island, Leclercq felt that there was something wrong with Islam arriving in Indonesia. He wrote that :

Les Javanais ont perdu l'art de ces admirables bâtisseurs du Boroboedoe et des Mille Temples; ils ne savent plus faire des arches, des coupes, des voûtes. L'introduction de l'islam a étouffé chez eux le génie de l'architecture. Quoi d'étonnant qu'une religion aussi sensuelle soit contraire au développement des arts! De tous les musulmans, il n'en est point de plus tolérants et de plus industrieux que les Javanais, et cependant ils ont rétrogradé comme tous les peuples chez qui a été prêché le Coran. Cette funeste religion imposée par le glaive a détruit les créations du génie et les chefs-d'œuvre de l'art dans toutes les contrées de l'ancien monde où elle a pénétré: depuis les rives du Bosphore jusqu'à celles de l'archipel indien, le Coran règne sur des ruines. Ce fait proclame hautement la honte de l'islamisme. Et cependant les Hollandais ne font rien pour extirper de leurs belles possessions la puissance musulmane, ni pour y propager le christianisme. (Leclercq, 1898, p. 152)

The Javanese have lost the art of these admirable builders of the Boroboedoe and the Thousand Temples; they no longer know how to make arches, domes, vaults. The introduction of Islam has stifled the genius of architecture among them. What is surprising that such a sensual religion is contrary to the development of the arts! Of all the Muslims, there are none more tolerant and more industrious than the Javanese, and yet they have retrograded like all the peoples among whom the Koran has been preached. This fatal religion imposed by the sword has destroyed the creations of genius and the masterpieces of art in all the countries of the ancient world where it has penetrated: from the banks of the Bosphorus to those of the Indian archipelago, the Koran reigns over ruins. This fact loudly proclaims the shame of Islamism. And yet the Dutch do nothing to eradicate the Muslim power from their beautiful possessions, nor to propagate Christianity there.

The above long quote highlights the negative view of the influence of Islam on culture and art, especially architecture in Java. Leclercq argues that since the arrival of Islam, the Javanese have lost the ability to build magnificent architectural works such as the Borobudur and Sewu temples. He believes Islam has hampered the progress of architectural art in Java, describing the religion as a barrier to the development of art and culture. Although acknowledging that the Javanese are tolerant and diligent

Muslims, Leclercq still sees them as regressing, like other societies that follow Islamic teachings. In addition, Leclercq also criticizes the Dutch colonial government for not making efforts to reduce the influence of Islam or promote Christianity in Java. This view shows a tendency to blame Islam for the decline of Javanese culture. Leclercq feels that the magnificent architectural heritage in Java should be maintained, but the arrival of Islam is considered to have changed the situation.

4. CONCLUSION

In his travelogue *Un Séjour dans l'Île de Java* (1898), Jules Leclercq describes architecture in Java in a way that is heavily influenced by the colonial perspective typical of 19th-century Europe. Leclercq's descriptions of Javanese buildings, both traditional and colonial, reflect his view of local culture as exotic and different from Western culture. In Leclercq's view, architecture functions not only as a marker of space or residence but also as a symbol of the broader cultural differences between the Western and Eastern worlds. However, in some descriptions, it appears that Leclercq also acknowledges the beauty and grandeur of some aspects of Javanese architecture that combine traditional elements with colonial innovations, although he still considers them as 'different' or 'foreign.'

In addition, this study also shows how the representation of architecture in Leclercq's travelogue functions not only as physical documentation but also as a means to reinforce the social and cultural constructs of the dominant colonial view at that time. In Leclercq's works, the descriptions of buildings and spaces in Java display the inequality between European and local cultures, where European culture is often placed in a superior position. Thus, this travelogue provides an overview of Javanese architecture and shows how colonialism shaped how Europeans viewed and interpreted the cultures they encountered in the outside world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study is part of the research project *Multiculturalism in 19th-Century French Travel Writing: A Postcolonial Study*, which is funded by the Faculty of Languages, Arts and Culture, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta.

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