ABSTRACT

"...A strong awareness of the local and regional identity is a most useful quality to have in the political situation of the world in the 1980s. It allows a country to remain open to foreign influences without much danger that its native traditions will be submerged. It allows a society to assimilate modern technology without the submersion of its ethos and values. It allows a culture to grow and develop by responding to stimuli and challenges coming from outside without losing its soul in the progress...."

Prime Minister of Malta¹

This essay reviews and discusses the problem of identity in the suburban development of Kuala Lumpur as a result of rapid economic growth and responses to global influences. In order to stake the role of architecture in the development of identity, it is necessary to review the suburban terrace house because it is the most common houseform lived in by the people of Kuala Lumpur; it also reflects best their socio-economic condition. The duality in form and function of the terrace house typifies the tension felt by the suburban dweller; it also represents the state of a transient or pseudo-modern society.

The observation is confined to the suburban areas of Kuala Lumpur, namely, Subang Jaya, Petaling Jaya, Damansara and Gombak District (Figure 1 & 2). A survey of these terrace houses included where possible the interior as well. The main findings suggest that the suburban terrace house in fact, reflect the dual lifestyle of the owners; living in a ‘modern’ world as endorsed by society and yet wanting to keep in touch with their traditional roots, thus, creating a confusion as to what ‘identity’ means for the city folk.

The bibliography research reveals numerous documentation of seminars dealing with the issue of Identity. Often the conclusions drawn are optimistic of the future but yet, there seems to be a lack of total commitment from all sectors. The realisation of the impermanent and negative influences of foreign cultures qualifies the search. The awakening of cultural consciousness demands the re-questioning of the modernisation process. In this rapid transition, there is a need to step back and view the events and changes taking place.