The Third Space in Postcolonial Architecture: Hybridity and Cultural Resistance in Singaraja

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ABSTRACT

Situated within the contested terrain of colonial architectural inheritance, this article interrogates domestic hybridity in Singaraja, Bali, as a site of spatial negotiation and epistemic dissent. Mobilizing Homi Bhabha's *third space* as both an analytic and a method, it explores how local *undagi* engage neoclassical forms not as passive recipients but as strategic agents of cultural rearticulation. Drawing on ethnographic immersion, architectural typology analysis, and dialogic interviews, ten heritage houses are examined as performative loci where mimicry and subversion intertwine. The study reveals that architectural hybridity emerges less as visual synthesis and more as a tactical disruption of colonial order, a vernacular counter-script enacted through space, symbolism, and ritual. In reframing architecture as a site of indigenous theorizing, the discussion foregrounds postcolonial spatiality not as peripheral to heritage discourse but central to its decolonial reorientation.

Keywords: *Third space*, architectural hybridity, postcolonial spatiality, vernacular agency, Singaraja.

INTRODUCTION

In moments where colonial legacies converge with indigenous cultural wisdom, what emerges is not merely a transitional juncture, but a generative "*third space*", a dynamic arena where identities, architectures, and symbolic meanings intersect and evolve. This conceptual framework reveals that cultural hybridity is neither a static amalgamation nor a passive outcome; rather, it is an active site of transformation (Bhabha, 1994). From the architectural synthesis of colonial façades with vernacular forms, to the plural identities shaped by dual inheritances, the *third space* offers a productive lens through which the dissolution of rigid boundaries gives rise to innovative cultural expressions. Resonating across disciplines and geographical contexts, this idea invites global readers to reconsider how cultural intersections foster resilience, creativity, and the rearticulation of identity in postcolonial environments. This study examines how the concept of the *third space* is reflected in the architectural identity of the local community in Singaraja, where postcolonial influences are integrated with local cultural practices, shaping a built environment that reflects this cultural negotiation.

The concept of the *third space*, as theorized by Bhabha (1994), marks a pivotal juncture in postcolonial discourse,

where the encounter between colonizer and colonized is neither wholly oppositional nor linear, but rather a reciprocal and generative engagement. Building upon this, Lombu et al. (2019) conceptualize the *third space* as an epistemic threshold that disrupts and reconfigures dominant cultural narratives, enabling emergent meanings to traverse and blur established boundaries. Young (2016) cautions that this site of identity negotiation, while fluid and adaptive, can also obscure power asymmetries, suggesting that hybridity may simultaneously conceal and reproduce colonial structures. Within this malleable terrain, identity is not a static amalgam of borrowed traits but a transformative process shaped by iterative cultural exchanges and shifting perspectives. Hall's (1990) notion of hybrid identity further reinforces this dynamic, portraying the *third space* as an arena of creative synthesis where singular affiliations dissolve and plural narratives take root. In architectural terms, this space transcends its physical manifestation to become symbolic, a crucible for the interplay of tradition and modernity, indigenous knowledge and colonial legacy. It is within this space that identity formation is continuously renegotiated through material forms and spatial practices.

The concept of the *third space* has been widely discussed in the context of architecture and culture, such as postcolonial residential architecture in India (Scriver, 2006), linguistics (Bhatt, 2008), educational spaces, community development, and cultural resilience (Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006; T. Hall, 2017; Stoltenkamp et al., 2017; Timm-Bottos & Reilly, 2015; Whitchurch, 2008), art exploration in cultural acculturation (Doyle et al., 2023; Gaillard, 2023; Greenwood, 2001), and the concept of *third space* in urban planning and community sustainability (Ebrahimi et al., 2017; Goosen & Cilliers, 2020; Mehta & Bosson, 2010). However, the application of *third space* theory to postcolonial architectural analysis in Bali remains unexamined. In postcolonial studies, Scriver (2006) has examined hybrid architectural forms in India, where British colonial influence resulted in distinctive architectural styles. This study can inform the current analysis of postcolonial architecture in Bali, where Dutch colonial legacies intersect with Balinese traditions to create new forms of identity in domestic spaces. Despite the rich tradition of *third space* studies across various fields, the application of this concept to postcolonial architectural analysis in Bali remains unexplored. Given Bali's unique colonial history under the Dutch and its enduring cultural heritage, understanding how hybrid architectural forms reflect this complex intersection of influences is crucial for advancing postcolonial theory and architectural practice.

Furthermore, the lack of academic studies on the postcolonial perspective of architecture in Bali presents a unique opportunity for this research. The novelty of this study lies in its application of the *third space* concept to analyze how Dutch colonial influences have shaped residential architecture in Bali. By exploring the hybridization of colonial and local architectural elements, this research uncovers how these forms facilitate the creation of a new postcolonial identity. This study goes beyond simply identifying architectural hybridity;

it illustrates how local communities use architectural forms to reclaim cultural agency and resist colonial legacies. It contributes significantly to postcolonial studies and architectural theory by offering a localized perspective on architectural hybridity. This research challenges dominant Western architectural paradigms and demonstrates how Balinese architecture embodies a dynamic cultural negotiation and transformation process in a postcolonial context.

The primary objective of this research is to identify and analyze how specific architectural features—such as building facades, spatial arrangements, and hybrid design elements—manifest the concept of the *third space* in postcolonial architecture in Singaraja, Bali. By examining the hybridization of colonial architectural styles with traditional Balinese elements, this research aims to understand how these architectural forms negotiate and represent postcolonial identity in the urban fabric. Additionally, this study will explore how architectural hybridization contributes to cultural resilience by creating spaces that reflect and accommodate diverse cultural narratives. Through case studies of residential buildings and qualitative methods, including interviews with residents and architects, this research will examine how these hybrid architectural forms help preserve and evolve local cultural identity in modern urban development. Ultimately, the findings will offer valuable insights for urban planners and architects, guiding future urban designs that balance modernization needs with preserving local traditions in postcolonial contexts.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore the hybridization of colonial and local architectural elements in Singaraja. The *third space* concept, a socio-cultural phenomenon rooted in local contexts, cannot be effectively analyzed through quantitative methods. The case study approach enables an in-depth examination of specific residential buildings, allowing for the exploration of how colonial and local elements merge in architectural forms (Neto, 2024). By focusing on key buildings in Singaraja, this research will uncover the meanings, symbols, and cultural identities embedded in architecture, providing insights into the negotiation of postcolonial identity. The case study approach is ideal for understanding specific, context-dependent phenomena without generalization, facilitating a comprehensive interpretation of hybrid architectural spaces (Kurniawan et al., 2013).

Participatory observation is central to this research, with the researcher visiting and engaging with colonial design elements in residential buildings across Northern Bali, particularly in Singaraja. Neighborhoods like Surapati Street, Banyuning Village, and Hasanudin Street were selected for their historical significance and the convergence of colonial and local architectural styles. This geographic spread offers a comparative analysis of hybrid identity manifestations in both urban and rural settings. Buildings were selected based on their representation of the Balinese community, integration of colonial influences, and excellent preservation of both colonial and traditional architectural features.

Ten houses were chosen for their historical relevance and physical integrity, providing a reliable basis for studying architectural hybridization.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with local government officials, academics, community leaders, and homeowners, as well as through direct architectural analysis. These methods provided in-depth insights into cultural narratives and the influence of colonialism on local architecture. Archival materials from local museums supplemented the analysis, offering a historical perspective on how colonial elements were adapted in Singaraja's architecture. The data were analyzed using a triangulation approach, combining participatory observation, interviews, and architectural analysis. This method cross-checked residents' perceptions of hybrid identity with the built environment, ensuring consistency and providing a comprehensive understanding of architectural hybridity in Singaraja (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 1999).

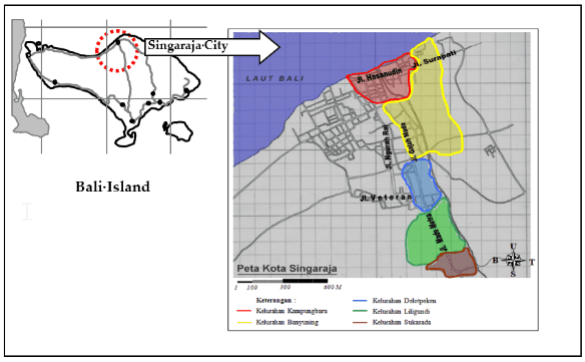

Figure 1. Distribution of Research Objects on the Map of Singaraja City
(Source: Author's document, 2024)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Postcolonial Architecture in Singaraja City

Postcolonial in this context refers to the development period in Balinese civilization following colonization. Postcolonial theory in architecture serves as an analytical tool to critique colonial practices, which were often tied to racism and unequal power dynamics (Lin, 2023), and to explore concepts such as hybridity and mimicry. Hybridity, the blending of the colonized culture with that of the colonizer, emerges through mimicry, where the colonized imitate the colonizer's architectural forms, and through resistance, as the colonized adapt these forms to local cultural needs (Jabbar, 2013). In Singaraja, for instance, hybridity is reflected in the fusion of colonial elements, such as neoclassical columns and symmetrical facades, with Balinese architectural traditions like open courtyards and spatial organization. This architectural mimicry embodies colonial influence and local adaptation to environmental and cultural needs, reflecting a negotiation between the colonial and local identities. Barlow (1997) further supports this view by noting that in East Asia, postcolonial theory reveals unique forms of modernity that have evolved independently of Western influences, offering a new framework for understanding identity and history in Asia, including Bali's postcolonial journey under Dutch rule.

The residential architecture of the local Balinese community in Singaraja, Buleleng, Bali, clearly reflects colonial influence. Dutch colonial power in Bali was established in Singaraja in 1849, following the fall of the Jagaraga fortress, marking the beginning of

significant urban development in the city. Singaraja's rapid growth during the colonial period, as it became the Residency of Bali and Lombok, introduced various architectural styles, including neoclassical features such as symmetrical facades, columns, and arched windows, elements adapted from European styles. These buildings physically represent the colonial power that once dominated the region. In the postcolonial period, architecture in Singaraja began to merge traditional Balinese elements, such as wooden carvings and open courtyards, with the neoclassical colonial features left behind, creating a unique hybridization. This architectural evolution reflects both resistance to colonial dominance and the persistence of local cultural identity. As Rahmawati (2023) observes, urban development in Singaraja during the colonial era was more rapidly than other parts of Bali, leaving behind a rich architectural legacy that continues to influence the city's residential forms today.

The research findings reveal that architectural forms in Singaraja, as a mimicry of colonial styles, prominently feature 'The Empire Style,' 'Landhuis,' and 'Modern' styles. In the harbor area of Pabean Beach, colonial residences in the 'Empire Style' display classical Greek and Roman architectural elements. Greek 'Doric' columns support the roof, while Roman arch patterns (voussoirs) frame the gate entrances, symmetrically arranged on either side of the building. These colonial features symbolize the power and dominance of the European colonial influence. In contrast, the 'Landhuis' style residences, along Gajah Mada and Ngurah Rai

Figure 2. Colonial architecture in North Bali with 'Empire Style' (A), 'Landhuis' (B, C) and 'Modern' (D, E, F) styles.
(Source: Author's document, 2022)

Streets, integrate traditional Balinese elements with colonial designs. These houses feature symmetrical floor plans with verandas at both the front and back and corridors connecting each room along a central axis. Bedrooms are placed on the left and right sides of the building, reflecting the importance of spatial organization around family and community spaces, which is central to Balinese culture.

Furthermore, traditional Balinese wooden carvings and open courtyards often accompany these colonial structures, blending the two styles into a hybrid form. This integration of local elements with colonial architecture serves as a symbolic form of cultural resistance, acknowledging colonial influence while adapting it to preserve and express local cultural identity. The hybridization process reflects colonial dominance and the resilience and continuity of Balinese traditions in the face of external power.

The walls of these buildings are decorated with molding, featuring linear patterns and circles. These circular patterns symbolize the moon, which is related to the colonial community's beliefs, specifically Christian

religious symbols. Furthermore, Singaraja's 'Modern' style residences, particularly along Ngurah Rai Street, represent a shift from colonial symmetry, incorporating geometric shapes and asymmetrical layouts. These designs prioritize functional space organization while maintaining a dynamic balance in composition. Modern architecture in Singaraja combines colonial elements, such as rectilinear facades, with new materials like cement, glass, and iron, signaling a break from traditional craftsmanship. This hybridization reflects the evolving postcolonial identity, where modernity intersects with colonial legacies. Unlike traditional Balinese architecture, which emphasizes open courtyards and natural materials, the Modern style focuses on functionality and urbanization. This shift marks a cultural transition towards more independent, self-defined architectural expressions in the postcolonial era.

The colonial residences in Singaraja, including those in the 'Empire Style,' showcase the integration of foreign materials and Western architectural forms, reflecting the hybrid identity of the postcolonial urban landscape. The buildings were constructed with load-bearing walls one brick thick (30 cm), reinforced at the corners to a thickness of 40 cm for roof stability. The door and window dimensions adhered to European standards, with doors sized 120 x 230 cm and windows 115 x 185 cm, and featured layered construction with glass panes on the inner leaf and paneling on the outer. Materials like cement plaster for walls and foundations, iron for ventilation, glass for windows and doors, and decorative yellow terrazzo tiles (20 cm x 20 cm) were used—products not native to Bali, symbolizing the colonial imposition of Western construction methods.

Figure 3. Kori (main gate) of Puri Kanginan Singaraja.
(Source: Author's document, 2022)

At the Puri Kanginan Singaraja residence, which exemplifies the 'Empire Style,' the Greek Tuscan columns, purely ornamental and non-functional, stand as symbols of colonial power. These columns were not used to support the structure but served as decorative features, symbolizing the hybridization of European architectural forms within the local context. Similarly, the Tympanium, a triangular decorative element above the side entrance door, highlights the merging of colonial aesthetics with local adaptations. While representing colonial authority, these architectural features are incorporated in ways that reflect a cultural negotiation, where local traditions and materials were adapted to retain a sense of identity while engaging with colonial influence. This fusion of Western and local styles exemplifies cultural resistance and adaptation in the postcolonial context of Singaraja.

The image of the *third space* is further reinforced through the presence of the Bale Loji building within the residential courtyard.

The Bale Loji is constructed with load-bearing elements resembling Greek Tuscan columns. Although the Greek columns in this building is not a replica, it is evident that there is an attempt at mimicry by the colonized people of the colonial culture. According to Homi K. Bhabha, in the context of postcolonial theory, the concept of mimicry is commonly employed by colonized societies. Bhabha further explains that this *third space* is inseparable from the process of mimicry. For Bhabha, the concept of mimicry draws on the perspectives of Fanon and Lacan, who describe the process of imitation carried out by colonized nations or societies toward the colonial (colonizer) culture.

In this context, imitation is not merely an act of copying; it also serves as a strategy to resist the dominance of colonial discourse. The act of mimicry by the colonized results in blending the native culture with colonial culture, creating a hybrid condition. In other words, hybridity occurs through mimicry—an imitation that is not a replica of colonial heritage, but rather one that transcends it while still utilizing the colonial legacy. This process ultimately leads to a state described as "almost the same, but not quite" (Yang et al., 2024). The concept of the *third space*, derived from the practice of mimicry, finds its context in the form of the Bale Loji columns in the Puri Kanginan Singaraja residence.

The complete imitation in the context of hybridity can be traced in several other study objects within this research. The findings indicate that the behavior of imitation, in its hybrid form, is evident in the Bale Loji through an analysis of the floor plan structure,

Figure 4. Greek Tuscan and Doric columns on the Bale Loji Puri.
(Source: Documentation owned by Puri Kanginan Singaraja, 2023)

construction system, spatial elements (floor, walls, and ceiling), fenestration elements, and building materials. This reality reveals a building form that appears different and does not represent the cultural identity of the colonized people or the colonizing nation. Further developments clearly show that the original layout of the Bale Meten, which functioned solely for sleeping activities, evolved into the Bale Loji, accommodating new functions that had not existed previously, such as a back veranda, d dining room, and living room.

An example is the Bale Loji owned by the local Balinese Brahmana descendants (Geria Sukasada) in Sukasada Village, Singaraja City. This building is in the residential courtyard, positioned in the "*kaja*" area, facing the courtyard's center (*natah*). The family temple (*Merajan*) is situated in the most important area, oriented towards the mountain and the sunrise, while the main gate (*Kori*) is located in the "*teben*" area, which is considered "*nista*." In principle, the spatial arrangement in this courtyard still adheres to the hierarchical

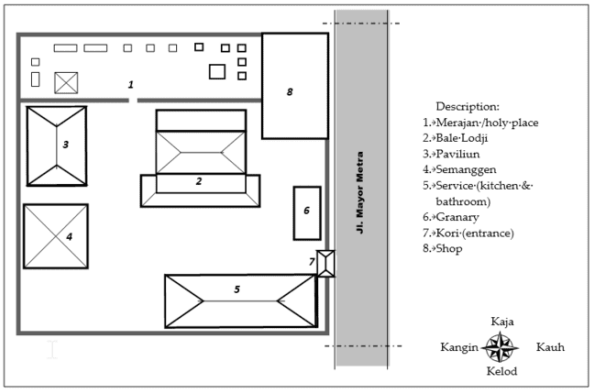

Figure 5. Site plan of Geria Sukasada on Jalan Mayor Metra No. 98

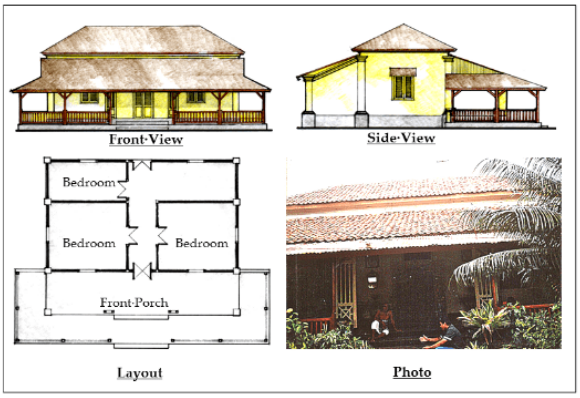

Figure 6. View and perspective of Bale Loji at Geria Sukasada on Jalan Mayor Metra No. 98

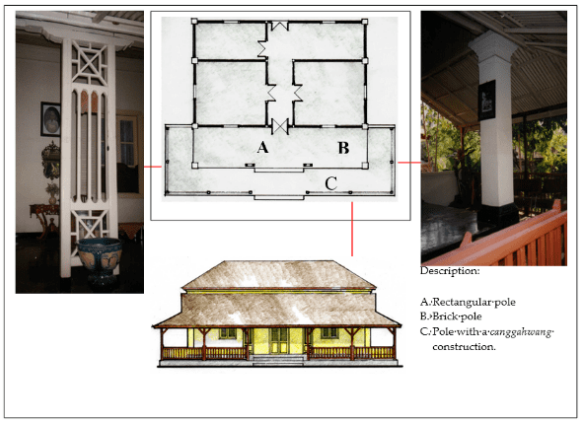

Figure 7. Details of the pillars of the Bale Loji Geria Sukasada

division of spaces *utama*, *madya*, and *nista*, found in traditional Balinese residential layouts.

The Bale Loji's floor plan closely resembles the layout of the colonial-style Landhuis residences. The building has a symmetrical floor plan, with verandas at both the front and rear of the house and bedrooms on the left and right sides. The connecting corridor between the rooms is centrally within the building, serving as the symmetrical axis. The symmetrical floor plan also influences the shape of the building's façade. The use of symmetrical composition aims to achieve the aesthetic beauty of the building's physical form.

A load-bearing wall construction system supports the roof load, with reinforcement and thickening at each corner. The wall thickness is 30 cm (equivalent to one brick), while the corner reinforcements increase the thickness to 40 cm. The wall finish is painted in clean white, with profiles (molding) applied at the top and bottom, similar to the colonial-style Landhuis residences.

The doors and windows of this building are constructed in European scale dimensions: 120 cm x 230 cm for the doors and 115 cm x 185 cm for the windows. The proportions of the windows, when viewed in terms of length and width, adhere to the ideal proportional size according to Western aesthetic theory, which originates from the Pythagorean school of thought in ancient Greece. This theory asserts that a visually pleasing balance that is considered beautiful is a form that has a ratio of 1:1.6. Alternatively, when expressed as a whole number, 3:5. This theory of beauty based on numerical balance has been supported by philosophers and artists through to modern times, which is why this balance is also known

as the golden ratio. The window proportions based on this concept are evident in the study cases. Thus, it cannot be denied that classical Western proportional theories have been considered, absorbed, and embodied by the Balinese in the design of the Bale Loji residences.

All the doors and windows feature double leaves. The outermost layer consists of a panel door with grilles, while the inner door is a glass panel framed in wood. The form, proportions, and sizes of the doors and windows are similar to those of colonial Landhuis-style buildings. The arrangement of the doors and windows on the front wall (facade) follows a symmetrical pattern, with the door positioned in the center as the symmetrical axis, flanked by windows on either side. The symmetrical composition of the doors and windows creates a calm and stable balance, contributing to the aesthetic weight of the building's front facade. The grille pattern on the door leaves, which is also present on the window leaves, is fundamentally intended to fulfill the aspect of unity in the building's appearance. The finishing of the window and door frames, as well as the door leaves, is done with a cream-colored wood paint. This color is analogous to the white color of the walls, thus easily creating harmony and visual unity between t these elements.

The **Figure 8** illustrates case objects with a high degree of similarity. This reality indicates the presence of a mimicry pattern, creating hybridity and establishing a *third space* within the residential courtyards of the local community.

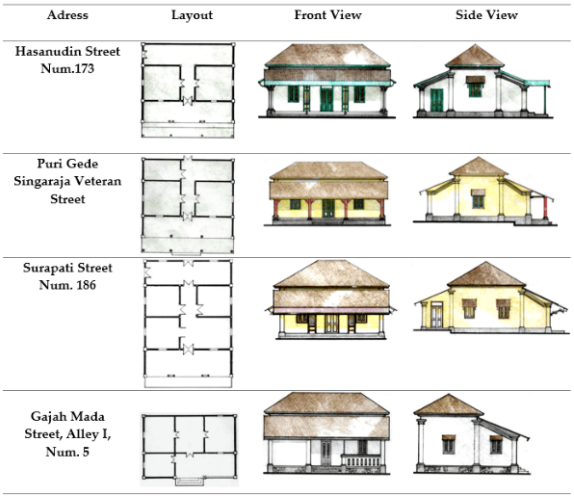

Figure 8. Visualization of Other Case Objects

Encoding Resistance: Tactical Hybridity and Vernacular Subversion in Colonial Residences

The colonial government's strategic inclusion of *undagi* (Balinese master builders) in constructing colonial residences not only facilitated the transmission of Western architectural technologies, but also seeded a transformative cultural interplay that would redefine the spatial and symbolic language of Balinese domestic architecture. Previously static housing forms, strictly adhering to traditional principles, evolved to meet the local population's practical needs and lifestyle demands. Colonial elements, such as neoclassical facades and Western construction techniques, were integrated into the spatial organization of traditional Balinese homes, creating a *third space* that reflects the interaction between Dutch colonial culture and Balinese traditions. Combining local and colonial influences, this hybrid architecture symbolizes a mixed identity from cultural negotiation. Based on the analysis, this encounter initiated three overlapping

stages of hybridity in Balinese architecture: 1) Mimicry stage: *Undagi*, the traditional Balinese architect, imitated neoclassical facades and window proportions to align with colonial aesthetic preferences; 2) Negotiation stage: *Undagi* adapted additional elements, such as replacing solid walls with open courtyards, to accommodate the climatic conditions and social needs of the Balinese community; 3) Reinvention stage: Hybrid architectural forms emerged, characterized by the coexistence of colonial columns and Balinese carvings, thereby affirming *Undagi*'s pivotal role in redefining architectural identity. These stages collectively demonstrate that the encounter transcended a simplistic narrative of traditional forms merely transitioning into hybrid ones. Instead, it underscores the active role of local agency, particularly *undagi*, in translating external influences and shaping a *third space* of resistance within this architectural evolution.

Building upon this transformative trajectory, the role of *undagi* extends beyond aesthetic adaptation, emerging instead as a critical conduit for technological knowledge transfer and cultural mediation within postcolonial architectural praxis. They meticulously studied colonial architectural plans, evaluated the properties of novel materials such as cement, iron, and glass, and subsequently integrated these into traditional Balinese building practices. Functioning as knowledge brokers, *undagi* translated the architectural vernacular of Europe into the spatial language indigenous to Bali. Their agency is particularly evident in the preservation of Balinese cosmological principles in construction, even as they incorporated columns inspired by the Doric order. *Undagi* carefully calibrated the integration of these columns to align with traditional Balinese spatial configurations, notably maintaining the axial relationship with the family temple. Further manifestations of their agency are observed in the strategic negotiation of scale and proportion. An illustrative instance of such adaptation involves the deliberate reduction of column diameters in specific structures, thereby obscuring colonial authoritative symbols within the guise of traditional Balinese architecture. This adaptive approach reflects a tactical maneuver to diminish the visual imposition of colonial elements while concurrently capitalizing on the prestige associated with colonial architectural forms.

At the intersection of these theoretical perspectives, *undagi* emerge not merely as cultural intermediaries but as subversive agents whose architectural decisions instantiate a localized rearticulation of power, identity, and tradition within the built environment of Singaraja. The phenomenon of mimicry and agency projected by the *undagi* resonate with Bhabha's (1994) statement that "colonial dominance is never absolute; the colonized retain agency." Similarly, Soja (2014) describes the *third space* as "a site of contestation" where cultural interactions between colonial and local groups create new forms of identity. Lubis (2015) characterizes this dynamic as "cultural intercourse," highlighting how indigenous practices both adapt and challenge imported forms. Edward Said (1979) further cautions that "colonialism was sustained through control over knowledge and cultural

representation." Within Singaraja's built environment, these four perspectives converge to frame architectural hybridity not as passive imitation but as a deliberate, resistance-infused negotiation that continuously redefines local identity.

Colonial architecture in Singaraja, characterized by the dominance of European aesthetics and materials such as neoclassical columns, symmetrical façades, and the use of concrete, glass, and iron, reflects Western standards that often disregard local cultural contexts. In contrast, postcolonial architecture shaped by *undagi* (traditional Balinese master builders) demonstrates an active transformation by integrating colonial elements into Balinese traditions, producing hybrid forms that embody both cultural resistance and adaptive agency. For instance, while colonial residences feature solid walls and large European-style windows, *undagi* adapt these features by incorporating open courtyards (*natah*) and recalibrating window proportions to align with Balinese cosmological principles and local climatic needs.

This analysis underscores that postcolonial architecture in Singaraja, as shaped through the active agency of *undagi*, reflects a distinct hybridity that transcends mere colonial adaptation. It functions as a manifestation of cultural resistance and an assertion of local identity. Unlike hybrid architecture in India, which often reproduces class hierarchies and the 'in-between' condition of Anglo-Indian communities (Scriver, 2006), the transformation of colonial elements in Singaraja, such as the scaling of Tuscan columns and their incorporation into traditional spatial systems, produces a *third space* that simultaneously challenges colonial narratives and preserves Balinese cosmology. As such, this architectural expression distinguishes itself from both pure traditional Balinese forms and colonial impositions, offering instead a dynamic and contextually rooted model of cultural negotiation.

In the context of hybridity as a tool of negotiation, parallels can be drawn between postcolonial architecture in Singaraja and the case of Nasova House in Fiji (Chatan, 2003). Unlike India's "in-between" architectural condition that reproduces entrenched class hierarchies, Nasova House embodies a more deliberate strategy of negotiation. Constructed by the local elite, the Cakobau Government integrates the symbol of the *vale levu* to assert Fijian aristocratic status, later undergoing British colonial modifications to serve administrative and diplomatic functions. This process exemplifies intentional hybridity, wherein both colonial and indigenous actors engage architecture as a medium for negotiating identity and authority.

In contrast, the architectural hybridity observed in Singaraja unfolds through three distinct phases: mimicry, negotiation, and reinvention. Local *undagi* (master builders) do not merely replicate colonial forms but actively transform them, generating new typologies that affirm local identity. However, this process is marked by epistemic ambivalence. Cultural resistance emerges within the design ethos, but the continued use of colonial materials and proportional systems risks inadvertently reinforcing Western aesthetic dominance. Thus, Nasova House illustrates hybridity not

as a liminal space trapped in class ambiguity as in Indo-Saracenic architecture, but as an active and symbolic strategy of cultural assertion.

What unfolds in Singaraja is not merely an aesthetic convergence of colonial and indigenous forms, but a contested spatial dialectic wherein the *undagi* emerge as insurgent agents of architectural resistance. By refracting colonial symbols through vernacular epistemologies like reduced columns, recalibrated proportions, and cosmological alignments, these builders instantiate hybridity not as benign accommodation but as strategic subversion. This *third space*, far from being a passive site of cultural compromise, becomes an architectural terrain of epistemic rearticulation, where mimicry unravels dominance and negotiation becomes reinvention. The comparative glance toward Fiji's Nasova House further deepens this reading: hybridity is not fixed in liminality but activated through symbolic design choices that encode sovereignty, agency, and cosmopolitical entanglement. These trajectories invite us to interrogate the very grammar of architectural knowledge, what is preserved, what is resisted, and what is inadvertently reinscribed. As the analysis advances toward the question of cultural independence, such spatial politics compel a critical rethinking of architectural taxonomies and the uneven legacies they perpetuate.

Architectural Dissonance and the Unfinished Project of Cultural Independence

Architecture, within the postcolonial condition, refuses containment. It gestures simultaneously toward memory, mimicry, and reinvention, evoking what Bhabha (1994) has termed the "*third space*": a site not of synthesis, but of tension, translation, and epistemological disturbance. In the architectural landscapes of former colonies and contact zones, built form became the medium through which colonial power encoded its presence, and the terrain upon which local actors inscribed negotiated resistance. Hybrid architectures, neither wholly indigenous nor wholly colonial, subvert the essentialist binaries of "native" and "Western" styles, articulating cultural difference not through purity, but through interruption, ambivalence, and reconfiguration.

However, hybridity remains haunted by contradiction. If it marks resistance to colonial hegemonies, it equally risks complicit reproduction of the aesthetic hierarchies it seeks to critique. Critics have argued that the *third space* may enable a covert alliance between colonial and colonized elites, an aesthetic collusion masquerading as liberation (Krishnan, 2017; Mercer, 2024). What emerges, therefore, is not just hybrid architecture as cultural resilience, but as a contested spatial politics: a terrain where the architectural reworking of identity risks reinscribing epistemic dependency (Klein, 1998; Memmott & Keys, 2015; Scriver, 2006). This chapter interrogates such double binds through a triangulated reading of Singaraja (Bali), Levuka (Fiji), and Siam (Thailand), each offering distinct modalities of architectural hybridity. Through comparative analysis, it proposes that the *third space*, when read architecturally, operates less as a refuge from colonial legacies than as a charged field of negotiation, where cultural independence

remains both pursued and postponed.

Singaraja's urban morphology, shaped under Dutch colonial governance (1849–1950), manifests a hybrid architectural idiom where Balinese spatial cosmologies fuse with European material expressions (Farram, 1997; Nordholt, 2010; Robinson, 2018). The palace of Puri Kanginan exemplifies this synthesis: curvilinear gables, Dutch pediments, and Tuscan columns appear in tandem with indigenous ornaments and hierarchical courtyard layouts. This entwinement is not a mere decorative collage but a performative reterritorialization of power, whereby Balinese elites employed mimicry as a strategic subversion. The palace reasserted authority within colonial hegemony, reframing imported styles through localized epistemes. Such hybridity carved out a *third space* of sovereign articulation, affirming cultural continuity and undermining colonial attempts at erasure. Simultaneously, Dutch policies like *Baliseering* (1920s–1930s) reveal the co-optation of hybridity: architects like Maclaine Pont and Karsten codified indigenous aesthetics into modernist frameworks, displacing *undagi* agency while manufacturing picturesque legitimacy (Achmadi, 2014; Noorwatha et al., 2024). Thus, hybrid architecture in Singaraja occupies a dual epistemic terrain, resistant and regulated, subversive and appropriated.

The postcolonial fate of Singaraja's built heritage underscores a troubling ambivalence. Structures like Gedong Kirtya and colonial administrative buildings embody plural histories, yet are increasingly marginalized by development logics that valorize economic expediency over historical consciousness (Farram, 1997). Their neglect, demolition, or aesthetic dilution signals more than urban transformation, it indicates epistemological displacement. The erasure of hybrid architecture erodes tangible evidence of cultural negotiation, severing links to past resistances against colonial dominance. As the *third space* dissolves beneath modern façades, the question arises: what remains of postcolonial autonomy when the material memory of subversion fades? The diminishing visibility of these built hybrids reveals a more profound crisis of inheritance, where architectural palimpsests are not preserved as sites of dialogic memory but overwritten by narratives of progress. In this context, cultural independence demands more than stylistic revival, it requires reactivating architectural hybridity as a living archive of agency, cosmology, and resistance.

The Nasova House case in Fiji offers a compelling spatial allegory of contested sovereignty at the intersection of indigenous agency and colonial governance (Chatan, 2003). Conceived as the architectural centerpiece of King Cakobau's short-lived hybrid state, its tripartite layout centered chiefly on the residence, flanked by colonial offices, mapped power hierarchies onto the built form. Drawing from the Vale Levu spatial tradition and grafting Victorian features like axial symmetry and dormers, the building embodied an intentional *third space*. Cakobau's council hall stood elevated atop a Fijian mound, while settler institutions occupied lower wings, visually enacting a negotiated partnership. In line with Bhabha's enunciation theory, the building did not simply

juxtapose styles but produced an ambiguous symbolism of co-sovereignty. This hybridity thus functioned as both aesthetic expression and political performance, a deliberate effort to reframe Western domination through localized architectural idioms.

However, the aspirations embedded in Nasova House proved vulnerable to shifting power dynamics. Settler distrust of the hybrid regime, exacerbated by economic instability and racial supremacist mobilization, culminated in the 1874 cession of Fiji to Britain. The building, once a testament to syncretic governance, came to symbolize the dissonance between visual unity and lived inequality. Its dual symbolism, chiefly legitimacy entwined with colonial administration, could not mask underlying tensions. Subsequently reappropriated by the colonial state as the Governor's residence, Nasova's *third space* was instrumentalized into imperial spectacle. The architecture's hybrid vocabulary was not erased but domesticated: Victorian privacy conventions displaced communal Fijian spatial logics. In this appropriation, Nasova exemplified how architectural resistance can be subsumed by the *third space*, once a locus of cultural assertion, becomes a tool for crypto-colonial control when reinscribed by dominant powers.

The trajectory of Nasova House underscores hybridity's double-edged nature within post/colonial architectural praxis. Initially envisioned as a declaration of cultural independence, a material negotiation of status and cosmopolitan identity, it was ultimately absorbed into the colonial administrative repertoire, losing its autonomous charge. This epistemic volatility reflects the broader ambiguity of *third space* politics: resistance and replication cohabit uneasily, and the aesthetic of fusion does not guarantee the politics of emancipation. Fiji's experience cautions against celebratory readings of hybridity that ignore the conditions of its appropriation. As colonial regimes adapt hybrid idioms to legitimize their rule, architecture itself becomes an unstable archive, one that simultaneously preserves indigenous agency and encodes imperial dominance. Postcolonial critique must therefore remain alert to the politics of spatial representation, where visual inclusion can mask structural exclusion, and the *third space* oscillates between utopian gesture and imperial instrument.

The architectural program under King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) illustrates how hybridity can operate as a proactive strategy in the face of colonial encroachment (Noobanjong, 2023). Monuments such as Chakri Maha Prasat and Wat Niwet Thammaprawat fused European aesthetics with Thai religious symbolism to generate a consciously representational *third space*: to the West, Siam appeared modern and civilized; to its citizens, the king remained a dhammaraja safeguarding cultural integrity. As Koompong Noobanjong argues, these structures do not merely mimic colonial styles, they function as instruments of identity negotiation and political legitimization. Chulalongkorn's architectural mimicry was one of "mimicry with a difference", a calculated reappropriation that blurred the contours of colonial dominance through localized reinterpretation.

This strategy, however, entails

inherent contradictions. In asserting cultural sovereignty, Siam's elite simultaneously internalized colonial idioms as markers of progress. Noobanjong (2023) identifies a "system of conspiracy" in which local power aesthetics engaged colonial modernity not to resist, but to consolidate authority within global discursive norms. The adoption of European styles thus produced a crypto-colonial condition, formal independence overlaying deep colonial influence in economic, aesthetic, and nationalist registers. Whether critiqued or celebrated as heritage, hybrid architecture remains a mediating force between affirmations of local identity and aspirations toward global legitimacy. Siam's experience underscores hybridity's structural ambivalence: it is both a strategy of resistance and a mode of complicity within the symbolic economies of colonial power.

The preceding case studies underscore that architectural hybridity within the *third space* remains an ambivalent strategy, capable of subverting colonial hegemony yet also vulnerable to co-optation and reinscription. While instances like Singaraja and Siam demonstrate native agency in rearticulating colonial aesthetics to affirm cultural sovereignty, critics warn that such hybridity can mask enduring power asymmetries, becoming a visual proxy for dependency rather than autonomy. As postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha, Chanady, and Acheraïou suggest, hybridity destabilizes fixed identities only insofar as it resists hegemonic framing; absent critical intent, it risks perpetuating colonial epistemologies under the guise of indigenized modernity (Acheraïou, 2011; Bhabha, 1994; Chanady, 1999; Pieterse, 2001). The phenomenon of crypto-colonialism in Siam and the post-independence adoption of Western architectural paradigms across the Global South reveal how the *third space* may serve both resistance and "new colonization," especially when modernity is equated with Eurocentric design narratives. Architectural hybridity thus becomes a site of discursive contestation: fluid, productive, and ideologically charged, its emancipatory potential lies not in the fusion itself but in who authors it, how it is framed, and whether it disrupts or entrenches systemic inequities.

Scholarly critiques caution against uncritical celebrations of hybridity, arguing that *third space* architecture, while historically layered, may replicate elite discourses that bypass subaltern experiences. Fusion buildings such as colonial-era church-mosque hybrids may evoke aesthetic admiration while obscuring the violence entangled in their creation (Shackford-Bradley, 2003). Moreover, hybrid spaces have often been constructed by and for elites, from royal palaces to state-led modernist boulevards, leaving village communities excluded from the architectural dialogue. Critics also warn that overextending the term "hybridity" can depoliticize the postcolonial condition, rendering acts of resistance indistinct from hegemonic appropriation. Yet rejecting hybridity wholesale is equally flawed: as Acheraïou (2011) reminds us, hybridity is the material and psychological reality of postcolonial societies. The analytical task is not to dismiss hybridity, but to interrogate its authorship, intent, and impact.

When contextualized critically, hybrid architecture reveals cultural independence as a negotiated terrain rarely pure, often strategic. Case studies such as Singaraja and Nasova House show how hybrid spaces functioned as transitional sites, bridging indigenous traditions with colonial or national orders. These forms offered quiet resistance by embedding local craft or symbolism within dominant structures, yet also risked becoming vessels for "soft colonization," where local aspirations conformed to imported frameworks. Hybridity, then, was never neutral. It carried the intentions of its makers and served as both a medium of expression and a battlefield of meaning. As Bentley observed (2004), architectural power lies not in the structure itself, but in how it is deployed. Across diverse postcolonial contexts, the *third space* emerges as a platform for plurality capable of empowering cultural agency, yet susceptible to reinscribing the very hierarchies it aims to dismantle.

Postcolonial architecture, viewed through the prism of hybridity, embodies the complex pursuit of cultural independence, a process neither linear nor unambiguous. The *third space* offers fertile ground for reimagining identity, contesting authority, and articulating local values in response to global pressures. Yet its ambivalence demands vigilance: the same architectural gestures that signal autonomy may also conceal complicity or privilege elite narratives. Comparative evidence from Southeast Asia and the Pacific reveals that hybrid forms have served both resistance and hegemony, functioning as adaptive strategies amidst shifting power dynamics. Ultimately, the architectural *third space* is not a static solution but an evolving framework for cultural negotiation. It challenges us to rethink freedom not as purity or origin, but as the capacity to continually recompose identities without erasing difference. Cultural independence, in this light, is forged not in isolation but through critical adaptation rooted in context, authored with intent, and open to multiple modernity.

CONCLUSION

Emerging from a spatial and historical interrogation of domestic architecture in Singaraja, this study asserts that the postcolonial *third space* is not a passive amalgam but a site of active negotiation and cultural agency. Through phases of *mimicry*, *negotiation*, and *reinvention*, colonial architectural languages, *Empire Style*, *Landhuis*, and *Modernist*, are recalibrated by local *undagi*, who integrate Balinese cosmology, spatial hierarchies, and material systems to articulate resistant and resilient identities. The study contributes to postcolonial architectural discourse by reframing hybridity not as ambivalence, but as epistemic contestation. By foregrounding the *undagi* as cultural and technological agents, the research expands theoretical understandings from aesthetics to space as a performative medium through which power, memory, and identity are rearticulated.

Practically, the research underscores the imperative to acknowledge hybrid spaces not as inert heritage artifacts, but as living cultural archives that demand planning paradigms grounded in local negotiation rather than

colonial reproduction. Its limitations include the narrow geographic scope and the potential elite bias embedded in case selection. Future research should interrogate hybrid spatial practices within subaltern communities and rural contexts, deploying visual and ethnographic methodologies to unearth submerged forms of agency. Ultimately, this study affirms that postcolonial architecture in Singaraja is not merely a palimpsest of colonial histories; it is a dynamic terrain of resistance, adaptation, and identity-making enacted through the grammar of space.

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