







# The Architecture of Ambivalence: A Semiotic and Postcolonial Analysis of Gedung Sate

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**Abstract.** Gedung Sate, Bandung's iconic seat of government, presents a paradox: it is simultaneously celebrated as a postcolonial civic symbol and preserved as a colonial monument. This study combines semiotic analysis, cognitive metaphor theory, and postcolonial reading to examine how the building's architectural form, institutional naming, and heritage policies produce and manage this duality. The analysis finds that the building authority is stabilized not by erasing its colonial past, but by continuously re-performing its ambivalent identity through hybrid architectural signs and naturalizing metaphors of order and belonging. This analysis reveals ambivalence as a productive cultural strategy, offering a new framework for interpreting colonial heritage not as a settled artifact but as an active site of meaning-making.

**Keywords:** Gedung Sate; Architectural semiotics; Cognitive metaphor analysis

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 The Paradox of Managed Ambivalence

Gedung Sate stands as Bandung's most recognizable civic icon, celebrated for its distinctive Indisch style [1] and central role in provincial identity. Yet, behind this prestige lies an enduring paradox: the building functions simultaneously as the active seat of the West Java Provincial Government and as a fossilized heritage museum. It is at once a symbol of postcolonial civic pride and a preserved monument of colonial governance.

This duality is not merely a historical accident but a constructed reality. It reveals how power and cultural meaning are intertwined through representation and preservation. The building's authority is stabilized by a complex heritage regime, spanning national laws on Cultural Heritage [25] to local technical regulations which operationalizes the Burra Charter principles [2]. These regulations revalidate colonial material language as the benchmark of stewardship, effectively normalizing a colonial administrative center as an object of shared national culture.

## 1.2 Thesis and Contribution

This paper argues that Gedung Sate's enduring civic authority is sustained not by resolving its colonial-postcolonial duality, but by performing it through an ongoing choreography of semiotic and metaphorical ambivalence. The paper asks: How do architectural signs and cognitive metaphors produce a "stable" civic symbol out of contested history? To answer this, the paper proposes a reproducible tri-pass analytical framework. This contributes to a novel methodology for heritage studies, moving beyond descriptive history to theorize "ambivalence" as a productive political strategy.

## 1.3 Theoretical Studies

### 1.3.1 Structural Semiotics: Reading Difference

Methodologically, we first adopt Ferdinand de Saussure's premise that meaning arises from differential opposition rather than inherent properties [27]. In this architectural reading, forms (axes, heights, ornaments) are analyzed as a system of signs where value is produced through contrast [4], such as the monumental versus the intimate, or the vertical tower versus the horizontal city. We posit that these architectural "signifiers" are arbitrary and stabilized only by collective social conventions. Thus, the inquiry maps how these formal codes are maintained to signify "order" across different political eras.

### 1.3.2 Cognitive Metaphor: Historicizing Thought

To understand how these abstract semiotic codes are internalized by the public, we utilize Fernández Sebastián's theory of cognitive metaphors [5]. Metaphors are treated here not as stylistic embellishments, but as historiographical instruments that "carry over" abstract concepts of authority into graspable experiences. We examine how dominant metaphors, such as "State as Household" or "Heritage as Treasure", act as "vehicles of thought," [17] naturalizing the building's power and translating colonial hierarchies into acceptable modern narratives of identity and progress.

### 1.3.3 Postcolonial Enunciation: Hybridity and Mimicry

Finally, these readings are situated within a postcolonial critique. Drawing on Edward Said's analysis of representation [26] and Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry [3], the paper examines the building as a "site of enunciation". It analyzes how the "same" colonial signs are repeated with difference, a process Bhabha terms mimicry to secure new nationalist authority. This lens reveals how the site's "ambivalence" is not a weakness, but a mechanism that allows the state to negotiate "newness" while retaining the aura of traditional power.

## 2 Research Design

### 2.1 The Tri-Pass Analytical Framework

This study employs a reproducible "tri-pass" analytical framework to operationalize the synthesis of semiotics, cognitive metaphor, and postcolonial critique. This design transforms the theoretical interplay of form, naming, and function into a structured path of analysis. It links three strata of inquiry: the current material context of Gedung Sate, the meaning operations to be read (sign systems and discursive framings), and the specific analytical outputs required to answer the research questions. The conceptual structure of this framework, showing the relationship between the research object and the analytical lenses, is illustrated in Figure 1.

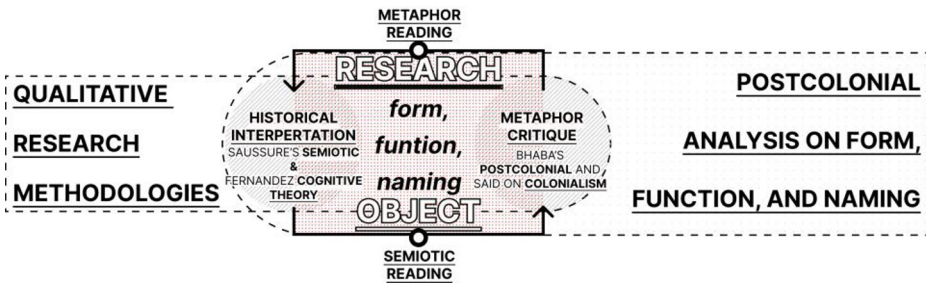


Fig 1 Research Framework

The framework assigns specific lenses to distinct dimensions of the building to produce targeted deliverables. First, a Semiotic reading examines Form to answer how architectural elements like scale, axis, and ornament signify order and authority. Second, a Cognitive Metaphor analysis examines Naming to determine which metaphors translate abstract concepts like 'state' and 'heritage' into familiar frames. Third, a Post-colonial critique examines Function to reveal how institutional practices and policies perform and naturalize colonial continuity. The specific alignment of these dimensions is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 Framework Passes

PASSES	ANALYSIS	QUESTION
SEMIOtics	FORM	How do architectural elements (scale, axis, rhythm, ornament) signify order and authority?
COGNITIVE METAPHOR	NAMING	Which metaphors translate abstract concepts like 'state' and 'heritage' into familiar, persuasive frames?
POSTCOLONIAL	FUNCTION	How do institutional practices (policy, tourism, ceremony) perform and naturalize colonial continuity?

## 2.2 Corpus and Data Collection

The study analyzes a stratified corpus spanning from 2010, the year of Indonesia's foundational Cultural Heritage Law, to the present. This selection captures the dynamic interplay between official regulation, public reception, and the material presence of the building. The evidence is organized into four categories:

1. Policy and Legal Texts: Key regulations governing preservation and use, specifically Law No. 11/2010 on Cultural Heritage [25], Government Regulation (PP) No. 1/2022 on the National Register [22], PP No. 87/2021 on the Advancement of Culture [23], and PUPR Regulation No. 19/2021 on Technical Guidelines [19].
2. Institutional Discourse: Official communications framing the building's meaning, including government websites, promotional materials, and speeches delivered during the 2020 centenary [15].
3. Public and Media Discourse: Materials reflecting public perception, including online travel guides, news articles, and visitor reviews from platforms such as Google Maps and TripAdvisor.
4. Architectural and Spatial Data: Publicly legible features, including plans, elevations, ornamental details, and sightlines documented in architectural studies.

## 2.3 Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeds in three recursive "passes," where findings from each stage are cross validated to ensure a robust reading. The complete methodological flow, detailing the movement from data collection to critical interpretation, is visualized in Figure 2.

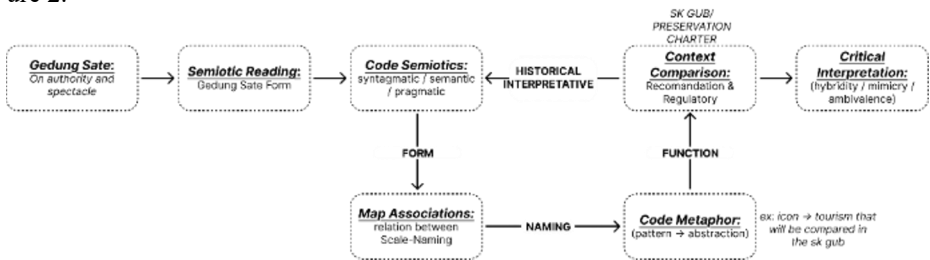


Fig 2 Methodological flow

The first pass which employs a semiotic reading of form as a system, This pass explicates how the building's form signifies meaning prior to evaluation by treating architecture as a Saussurean system of differences. The analysis examines "publicly legible form," specifically the skyline silhouette, the distribution of massing repetitions, and the cadence of openings. To determine meaning, these elements are not read in isolation but situated within the local "contrastive system" of Bandung's urban fabric. The immediate streetscape and neighboring building types are characterized to define the field in which values emerge; for example, a vertical axis is analyzed against the prevalent low rooflines to determine its specific value of "dominance" or "order". The output of this pass is a "sign table" listing salient signifiers and their candidate signified, which are explicitly anchored in these observed visual contrasts rather than inherent properties.

Moving from formal signs to thought patterns, the analysis then investigates how abstract concepts of authority are "carried over" into everyday understanding through metaphor. The corpus—comprising policy forewords, curatorial texts, tour scripts, and media captions—is coded to identify recurrent mappings [16] where a familiar "source domain" (e.g., household, treasure, magnet) structures the abstract "target domain" (e.g., state, heritage, tourism). The procedure involves "triangulation": the metaphors identified in the text are cross-referenced with the formal cues from the semiotic reading to observe whether the language amplifies, softens, or redirects the architectural message. Additionally, a counter-sample of non-institutional materials, such as independent reviews, is analyzed to identify friction points where official metaphors fail to align with public experience. This yields a metaphor ledger that tracks which mappings successfully stabilize public recognition across different media.

Finally, these findings are situated within the procedures of postcolonial governance, treating architecture as a "site of enunciation" where meaning is performed rather than inherent. The unit of analysis is the "public act," defined here as any specific instance of addressing an audience, from the choreography of a flag ceremony to the text of a museum wall label. The analysis operates on two temporal axes. Synchronically, it maps "enunciation sites" to determine who speaks and to whom. Diachronically, it plots "inflection points"—such as legal updates or renovations—on a timeline to trace "re-articulations," moments where the "same" architectural sign returns with a difference. These acts are systematically coded for hybridity (double-inscriptions of meaning), mimicry (repetition of colonial forms for national purposes), and ambivalence (areas where the narrative requires anxious ritual restaging) to demonstrate how stability is achieved procedurally.

### 3 Case Study: Gedung Sate

Gedung Sate is a historic public building in Bandung, Indonesia, designed by Dutch architect J. Gerber and completed in 1924 [21]. Architecturally, it exemplifies the *Indisch* style, a colonial-era hybrid that combines European Neoclassical and Art Deco forms with local Indonesian influences [6]. Distinctive features of Gedung Sate's design include Moorish (Islamic style) arches, layered roof structures reminiscent of Asian pagodas, and the iconic central "*tusuk sate*" finial (shaped like a satay skewer), a motif often interpreted by visitors as a symbol of local identity and pride [1]. Over its history, Gedung Sate has transitioned from serving as the Dutch East Indies Department of Public Works to becoming the office of the Governor of West Java and a public museum, making it today not only a governmental center but also a popular cultural heritage attraction [9]. This analysis examines Gedung Sate from three perspectives: semiotic, cognitive, and contextual to illuminate how its architectural form conveys layered meanings, how people perceive and remember it, and how its significance is shaped by historical and conservation contexts [20].

#### 3.1 Semiotic Analysis

Gedung Sate's design features a rich play of formal contrasts—vertical vs. horizontal, European vs. Indigenous, monumental vs. intimate—that generate cultural meanings in

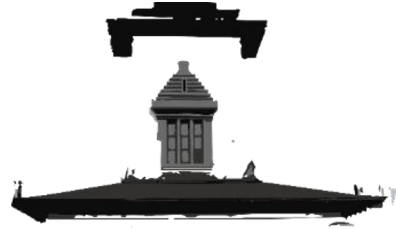
context [4]. Key elements acquire meaning relationally: the central vertical tower gains significance by not being the horizontal wings, staging a dialogue between centralized authority and civic openness. Likewise, the European neoclassical columns signify order and state power only through contrast with local and Islamic elements [6], such as the tiered pagoda-like roofs and floral carvings. These oppositions are detailed in Table 2. This interplay is integral to Bandung's urban fabric. As illustrated in Figure 2, the building stands at the intersection of the “monumental” and the vernacular.

**Table 2** Semiotic Analysis of Gedung Sate Architectural Signifiers

Architectural Signifiers	Visual Contrast/Opposition	Candidate Signified
Central Vertical Tower topped by “tusuk sate” finial (satay skewer ornament)	vs. Horizontal Wings of the building’s base plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central authority (tower asserts upward hierarchy) vs. grounded civic foundation (horizontal span reaching the public)</li> <li>• Unity of power at the “center” vs. plural diversity spread laterally</li> </ul>
European Neoclassical forms (symmetry, columns) and Art Deco geometry	vs. Local Nusantara motifs, Moorish arches and pagoda-like layered roof	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Western rational order vs. Eastern spiritual heritage (colonial order meets indigenous sacred forms)</li> <li>• Modernity (Euro-American styles) vs. Tradition (Islamic &amp; pre-Islamic motifs) as a visual syncretism signifying Indisch cultural fusion.</li> </ul>
Monumental Scale and Ornaments (grand facades, iconic “satay skewer” pinnacle)	vs. Human-Scale Spaces (open arcades, verandas, surrounding public plaza)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colonial authority and grandeur vs. approachable intimacy, the building as both an imposing monument and everyday social space.</li> <li>• Official state power (symbolized by grand ornament viewed as “iconic” of Bandung) vs. Local identity (the nickname Gedung Sate itself is a playful, familiar reference to a local satay skewer, rooting the monument in local culture).</li> </ul>



**VERTICAL TOWERS  
VS  
HORIZONTAL WINGS**  
*Central Authority vs. Civic Foundation*



**NUSANTARA MOTIFS  
VS  
EUROPEAN FORMS**  
*Colonial Order vs. Local Identity*



**Fig 3** Architectural Axes & Height Dominance



**Fig 4** Nusantara Motif vs Colonial Comparison



**MONUMENTAL SCALE  
VS  
HUMAN-SCALE PLAZA**  
*State Power vs. Public Accessibility*



**Fig 5** Monumental vs Human-Scale Thresholds

The difference between the high vertical tower and the low surrounding city is maintained to keep Gedung Sate as the primary signifier of order. While the monumental aspects signify colonial state authority, the vernacular touches visualized in Figure 4 and Figure 5 signify intimacy and belonging within the local cultural landscape.

In summary, the vertical spire connotes hierarchy, the horizontal wings signify stability, and the "tusuk sate" finial acts as a playful local icon transforming an imperial steeple into a civic emblem.

### 3.2 Metaphor Analysis

Beyond formal architectural signs, Gedung Sate's significance is continually reimagined through metaphors in institutional discourse, tourism media, and public commentary. Table 3 presents a metaphor ledger of several prevalent mappings used in describing Gedung Sate, along with emblematic examples drawn from various discourses.

**Table 3** Metaphor Ledger: Key Mappings in Official Discourse on Gedung Sate

Conceptual Metaphor (Target ← Source)	Example from Discourse	Interpretation
<p><b>STATE as HOUSEHOLD</b> – The province/government conceptualized as a family or home</p>	<p>"Gedung Sate 'bukan hanya simbol perjuangan dan pemerintahan... tetapi juga berperan sebagai ruang publik yang dapat dinikmati oleh seluruh masyarakat' <i>Paraphrased from an interview by Then Governor of East Java Ridwan Kamil, 29 July 2020.</i></p>	<p>The building is cast as the "house of the people." Once an exclusive colonial office, it is now metaphorically a <b>public home</b>: a familial space where all citizens feel ownership.</p>
<p><b>HERITAGE as TREASURE</b> – Cultural heritage conceptualized as wealth/asset</p>	<p>"Indonesia as a nation is endowed with extraordinary natural and cultural wealth (kekayaan)... heritage...must be passed on without loss of value [14], even enhanced in value, as an initial capital for the future." - Indonesia Charter for Heritage Conservation, 2003.</p>	<p>This institutional discourse treats heritage sites like Gedung Sate as <b>treasures</b> or <b>capital</b>. The metaphor frames heritage as something to be safeguarded, invested in, and grown, much like a financial asset. Describing Gedung Sate as a "legacy" of great value encourages policies of preservation (to "not diminish its value") and promotion (to "enhance its value"), similar to managing a treasure for profit.</p>
<p><b>ORDER as CENTER</b> – Spatial centrality conceptualized as source of order/authority</p>	<p>"No building may exceed the height of Gedung Sate's tower, in order 'untuk mempertahankan dominasi visual Gedung Sate sebagai landmark' (to maintain the visual dominance of Gedung Sate as a landmark)." [10] - Paraphrased from Bandung planning policy, consistent with regulations forbidding vertical development in the surrounding conservation area.</p>	<p>Urban design metaphors present Gedung Sate as the <b>center of order</b>: the city's axis mundi that must remain visually dominant to preserve cosmic balance (mountain views) and aesthetic harmony. By literally centralizing the building in height and style, Bandung's planners enact the metaphor "<b>Central Government as organizing center</b>". The building anchors not only the bureaucracy but the visual and symbolic <i>order</i> of the city. This reflects a deeper mapping of political order to geometric center: power radiates from the Governor's central seat and maintaining that centrality (spatially and symbolically) is equated with maintaining <i>order</i> in the urban cosmos.</p>
<p><b>TOURIST ATTRACTION as</b></p>	<p>"Visiting this historic and important building is a journey</p>	<p>The building draw is likened to a <b>mag-net</b> pulling people in. This common</p>

<p><b>MAGNET</b> – Gedung Sate’s appeal conceptualized as a magnetic force</p>	<p>through time, a chance to marvel at the beauty of the architecture, dive into history, and feel the pulse of Bandung's pride." - <i>Indonesia.Travel, Official Tourism Site</i>.  <i>"Gedung Sate menjadi magnet bagi wisatawan lokal maupun Manca Negara"</i> [28].</p>	<p>media metaphor highlights the <b>irresistible attraction</b> of Gedung Sate its iconic status exerts a quasi-physical pull-on visitor. This tourism-oriented metaphor frames heritage not as a static object but as a dynamic, immersive experience. It emphasizes affect and personal discovery, inviting the visitor to become an active participant in the historical narrative.</p>
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These metaphors surface repeatedly: "State as Household" [18] emphasizes unity and access, while "Heritage as Treasure" promotes protection and investment. However, a significant gap exists between these official narratives and lived experiences. The official metaphor of the "State as Household" implies openness, yet the reality is a high-security office. This friction is documented in Table 4, where public counter-narratives reveal that the "home" is often experienced as a closed fortress.

**Table 4** Metaphor Ledger: Key Mappings in Public Discourse on Gedung Sate

Official Metaphor/ Narrative	Counter-Evidence from Public Discourse	Interpretation
<p><b>STATE as HOUSEHOLD</b> – The building is framed as an open, accessible "public home for all."</p>	<p><i>"Definitely worth a visit - BUT! Note that the museum is small... you don't actually get to walk through the building and see the beautiful internal architecture. This is because it is still a functional/working office..."</i> – Visitor review on Wanderlog.</p>	<p>This review directly confronts the "home" metaphor by emphasizing the building's primary identity as an inaccessible "working office." The visitor's experience is one of exclusions from the main "house," revealing that the symbolic invitation of the metaphor is not matched by physical reality. The "BUT!" marks the precise point where the official narrative breaks down.</p>
<p><b>HERITAGE as ACCESSIBLE ATTRACTION</b>– The building is promoted as a key tourist site, "open to the public as a tourist attraction"</p>	<p><i>"Some people may be feel curious... But the curiosity has not been answered because access to entry into the building is very limited... it's not just anyone can enter."</i> – Commentary on an online tourism forum.</p>	<p>This comment highlights the frustration that arises from the building's dual identity. The promise of discovery inherent in its status as a tourist "attraction" is unfulfilled due to its administrative function. This complicates the HERITAGE as TREASURE metaphor: the treasure is put on display but kept in a locked case, making it an object of admiration rather than exploration and engagement.</p>

This dual function of it being the government seat and public landmark is not ad-hoc but structured by Indonesia's legal framework. As shown in Table 5, a cascade of regulations legally enables this ambivalence, balancing material preservation with public utilization.

**Table 5** Heritage Laws and Their Operational Effects on Gedung Sate

Instrument (Year)	Effect in Gedung Sate
<p><b>Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage</b></p>	<p>Balances preservation with utilization by legally permitting education/culture/tourism uses of heritage thus enabling a museum and public programs inside an active government HQ.</p>
<p><b>PP No. 1 of 2022</b> (National Register &amp; Preservation of Cultural Heritage)</p>	<p>Implements Law 11/2010 via the <b>izin pemanfaatan</b> (utilization permit) and clear procedures thereby formalizing and legitimizing Gedung Sate’s dual use.</p>

PP No. 87 of 2021 (Implementing Law No. 5/2017 on Advancement of Culture)	Reframes use as <i>Pemajuan Kebudayaan</i> positioning programs as national education/identity work so resources and ongoing public-facing activities are justified.
PUPR Reg. No. 19 of 2021 (Technical Guidelines for Heritage Buildings)	Protects material integrity through technical standards (minimal intervention, respect for <i>nilai penting</i> ) so adaptations (exhibits/HVAC/flow) don't compromise the fabric.

Together, this web of regulations provides a comprehensive script for performing Gedung Sate's ambivalence. It legally enables its dual function, provides a high-minded cultural justification for its public role, and specifies the technical procedures for its physical management. This governance framework is the invisible scaffolding that holds the building's paradoxical identity in place, allowing it to function as both an exclusive center of power and an inclusive symbol of public heritage.

### 3.3 Critical Interpretation

From its inception, Gedung Sate's design was a hybrid, a deliberate amalgam of Western and Eastern idioms (the Indisch style combining European forms with Islamic, pre-Islamic, and European concepts. This architectural hybridity encodes what Bhabha calls the "assimilation of contraries" in the colonial context. The Dutch, in an orientalist gesture, incorporated Moorish arches and a *pendopo*-like roof not only to adapt to climate but to project a styled image of the East that would buttress their authority. As Said (1978) would argue, such design choices were part of Orientalism's discourse, portraying the colony through curated aesthetics: "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" [26]. The building's very ornamentation was an act of mimicry: the colonizer mimicking elements of the colonized culture. However, this mimicry was never complete or authentic as it was "almost the same, but not quite". The Dutch architects appropriated local forms, but under a Western framework that kept colonial hierarchy intact. This yields an ambivalence: the building simultaneously asserts European supremacy (through its symmetrical plan, institutional monumentality) and reveals European dependence on the local (needing indigenous motifs to claim legitimacy or climate suitability) [7].

Crucially, when Indonesia gained independence and Gedung Sate transitioned to the seat of the West Java Governor, the terms of hybridity shifted. The formerly colonial architecture was *reclaimed* by the local population, a process Bhabha might describe as **reversing the gaze**. The Indonesian government and public began to **reinscribe** the building with new meanings: from a symbol of Dutch power to a symbol of local pride and heritage. This is evident in the timeline of rearticulations in Gedung Sate's history (see Fig 5)

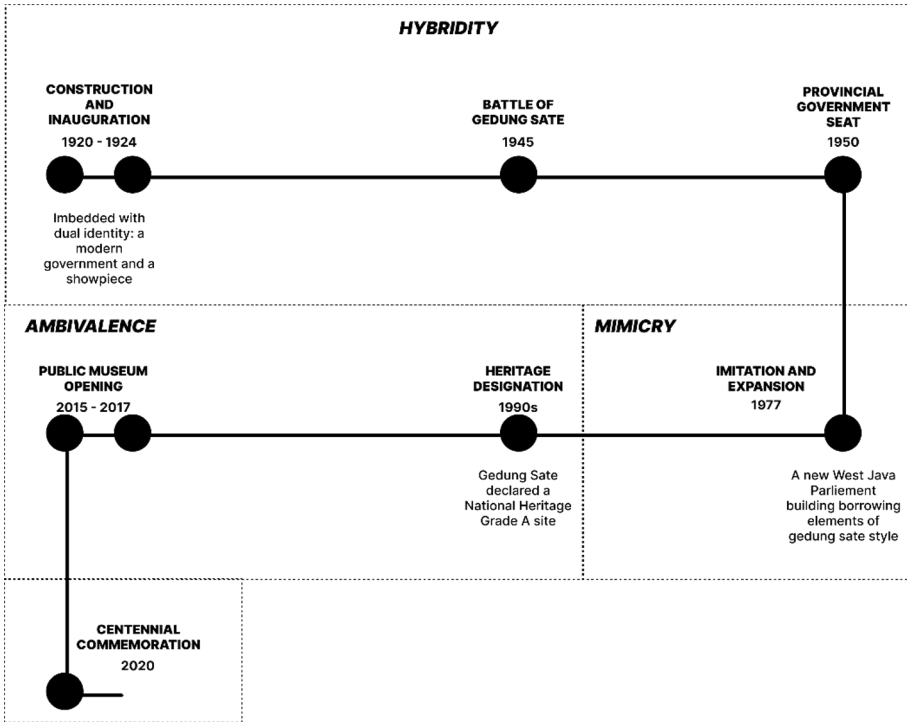


Fig. 5 Key Rearticulations of Gedung Sate’s Meaning (1920–2020)

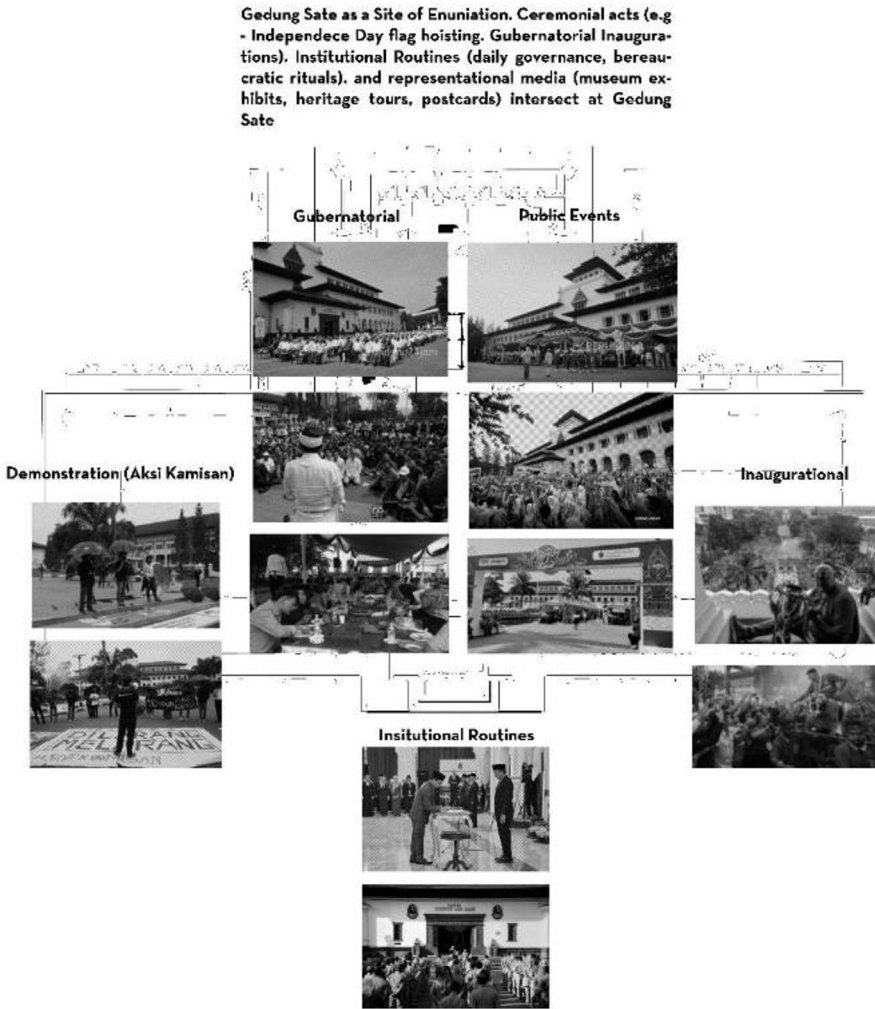
This timeline illustrates how each era rearticulated Gedung Sate’s meaning, through what Bhabha terms “iteration,” a repetition with difference in a continual process of translation. The building’s hybridity made it a malleable text: colonial authorities, independence fighters, provincial administrators, and modern urban planners each projected new narratives onto it. Far from being a stable sign, Gedung Sate functioned as a discursive node where power is symbolized, contested, and transformed.

Bhabha’s concept of **colonial mimicry** is particularly illuminating in analyzing these dynamics. Colonial mimicry was the strategy to make colonized subjects “*re-formed, recognizable Others*” being similar enough to be civilized, but different enough to maintain superiority. In architecture, Gedung Sate was a mimicry of indigenous forms, a controlled incorporation that flattered the colonizer’s self-image as benevolent ruler. Yet mimicry has a way of turning into “*mockery*”, of unsettling the very authority it seeks to stabilize. The “**menace of mimicry**,” as Bhabha writes [3], is that it **doubles and displaces** the original presence, creating a blurry “**partial vision**” of authority that can be subversive. We see this in how Gedung Sate’s hybrid style was meant to signal a seamless fusion of East and West under Dutch control but ended up facilitating its adoption by Indonesians as their own. The mimicry in stone enabled a mimicry in governance: the independent state could step into the colonial guise and appropriate its power, precisely because the building’s meaning was *ambivalent* enough to allow it. Bhabha notes, “*mimicry is at once resemblance and menace*” where in Gedung Sate’s case, resembling local culture (to appease the colonized)

ended up empowering locals to later claim the structure, which became a menace to the exclusivity of colonial authority.

Even today, there is an **ambivalence** in how Gedung Sate is framed: It is celebrated as a proud regional icon (erasing the discomfort of its colonial origin) but also fetishized for its exotic “European-Oriental” elegance (echoing the colonial aesthetic discourse). This ambivalence surfaces in public culture, for instance, Dutch-era elements like stained glass or Italian marble are admired as part of Bandung’s cosmopolitan heritage, yet the narrative carefully centers Indonesian agency (crediting local workers, interpreting the satay skewer ornament through Sundanese folklore, etc.). In Bhabha’s terms, the building exists in an “*in-between*” state [3] that challenges binary notions of colonizer/colonized. It exemplifies **hybrid identity**: what is authentically “Indonesian” about Gedung Sate is precisely that it is *not purely indigenous* but a product of cross-cultural exchange. As Herwindo et al. (2023) observe, the building’s style is a blend of Indo-European themes that has become an inspiration for subsequent buildings [8]. The *hybridity* is thus normalized and celebrated as a distinctive local character.

Bhabha also speaks of “**sites of enunciation**” contexts where cultural statements are made, often characterized by hybridity and *performativity*. Gedung Sate, through **ceremonial, institutional, and representational practices**, operates as such a site. We can visualize this in a conceptual diagram (Figure 6) of how various practices converge to produce meaning at Gedung Sate:



**Fig. 6** Key Rarticulations of Gedung Sate’s Meaning (1920–2020)

Image above, we see that **hybrid enunciation** is an ongoing process: each ceremony or representation at Gedung Sate performs a new interpretation. For example, an annual *Islamic art festival* held in its courtyard reframes the building through a religious-cultural lens, emphasizing purported Islamic design influences and positioning the secular state building as a backdrop for Muslim identity of which a form of “**appropriation by supplement**” (adding new meaning layers). Conversely, when Dutch alumni or heritage tourists visit, they might highlight the European aspects, effectively re-colonizing the narrative momentarily. These differing enunciations do not settle into one truth; rather, Gedung Sate’s meaning is **polyphonic**. This aligns with Bhabha’s idea

that cultural symbols have no unitary origin or essence but are defined in the moment of enunciation, laden with “**the ambivalence of colonial discourse**” that can always be read in multiple ways.

Finally, applying Said’s concept of **Orientalism** helps critique how Gedung Sate has been aesthetically positioned. The building was a product of Orientalist imagination as it reduced diverse local architectures into a few stereotyped motifs (dome, arch, tiered roof) to represent “The East” as understood by Dutch designers. This was part of what Said calls the “*Orientalized Orient*”, where the real culture is less important than the image constructed by outsiders. However, the postcolonial reappropriation of Gedung Sate has subverted this to a degree. Bandung’s local narratives have indigenized the meaning: rather than a European image of the East, it is now a *Sundanese image of a colonial building*, a subtle inversion. Still, the Orientalist legacy persists in the sense of **aestheticization**: Gedung Sate is often admired (in guidebooks, etc.) for its “*exotic blend*” and *romantic Orient* appeal, which can inadvertently echo the colonial gaze that exoticized colonized lands as living museums. The challenge for contemporary interpretation is to avoid uncritical celebration of the aesthetic while confronting the power structures it embodied. The 2023 study by Herwindo et al., which examines Islamic and other influences in the ornamentation [8], is a step in decoding these “**ornamental codes**” critically by understanding not just their style but their symbolic functions and origins. By doing so, heritage scholars and museum curators aim to peel back the layers of meaning: how a Javanese *lotus motif* or an Arabic calligraphic pattern ended up on a Dutch building, and what that says about cultural hierarchy and exchange.

## 4 Conclusion and Limitations

### 4.1 Conclusion

In response to its central question, this study concludes that Gedung Sate's stability as a civic symbol is an active, ongoing production rooted in the performance of its colonial-postcolonial ambivalence. This process is achieved through the interplay of architectural form, metaphorical framing, and institutional practice. The key findings of this analysis are:

1. Gedung Sate's meaning is actively produced through a tri-layered process. Its architectural grammar uses formal contrasts (vertical/horizontal, monumental/intimate) to signify state authority. This formal message is then naturalized by a set of powerful institutional metaphors (STATE as HOUSEHOLD, HERITAGE as TREASURE) [18] that frame this authority in positive, accessible terms. This entire semiotic and narrative structure is legitimized by a national legal framework [25] that formally sanctions the building's paradoxical dual use for both governance and public utilization.
2. The building's "ambivalence" is a contemporary, productive condition managed by the state. It is not merely a historical residue but a dynamic state that allows the building to function simultaneously as an exclusive seat of power and an inclusive symbol of accessible heritage. This managed ambivalence is a strategic asset, enabling the state to project multiple, sometimes contradictory, messages to different audiences.

3. This management creates a significant gap between official narrative and public experience. The most potent official metaphor that of the STATE as HOUSEHOLD projects an image of openness and collective ownership. However, this narrative is directly challenged by the public's lived experience of the building as a largely inaccessible "working office." This friction, clearly articulated in public counter-narratives, reveals a key site of tension in the building's contemporary meaning and exposes the limits of institutional storytelling.
4. The Durability of Semiotic Order: The building's architectural grammar with its axial approaches, measured symmetries, and vertical dominance creates a durable sign-system that consistently signifies 'order' and 'authority'. This stable formal canvas has allowed it to anchor shifting political meanings across different historical eras.
5. The Work of Metaphorical Naturalization: Official discourse employs powerful cognitive metaphors, such as STATE as HOUSEHOLD and HERITAGE as TREASURE [14], to translate this architectural order into familiar, emotionally resonant concepts. This rhetorical work makes the building's authority feel natural and benign, effectively masking experiential frictions like its limited public accessibility.
6. The Performance of Procedural Ambivalence: Postcolonial governance, through heritage policy and tourism programming, does not erase the building's colonial origins but re-authors them through procedures of mimicry and hybridity [3]. These practices allow the 'same' colonial forms to signify 'new' national pride. This ambivalence is not a contradiction to be resolved but is the very mechanism of the building's cultural endurance and contemporary legitimacy.

## 4.2 Conclusion

This study's contribution is twofold. Substantively, it shows how an Indisch landmark acquires contemporary legitimacy through coupled semiotic and metaphorical operations embedded in policy and publicity. Methodologically, it demonstrates a reproducible tri-pass a semiotic reading, cognitive-metaphor analysis, postcolonial procedure, that can be carried to other colonial legacies where government use, heritage policy, and tourism co-produce "obvious" continuity.

This analysis, however, also reveals the profound limitations of the current heritage governance model. The existing legal framework (such as Law No. 11/2010 [25] and PP No. 1/2022) [22] is highly effective at enabling managed ambivalence by providing the legal architecture for the state to "balance" preservation with utilization (Finding 1). Yet, it fails to provide any mechanism for interrogating the power structures this ambivalence preserves. The regulations are silent on meaning, memory, and public experience, focusing instead on material integrity and procedural permits. Based on this study's findings, we propose three justice-oriented principles for reform that directly critique and aim to correct this regulatory silence:

1. A Principle of 'Substantive Utilization': Critiques the vague "utilization" (*pemafaatan*) in Law No. 11/2010, which allows symbolic access (a small museum)

to mask a "working office" reality (Finding 3). These principal mandates that "utilization permits" for symbolic public sites to be conditional on substantively fulfilling the official public-facing narrative. If the metaphor is "home," access must be real, not just symbolic.

2. A Principle of 'Mandated Semiotic Interpretation': Addresses the failure of technical guidelines (like PUPR Reg. No. 19/2021) that protect only the material form of authority (Finding 4) while ignoring its meaning. These principal mandates that preservation plans include a "Critical Interpretation Plan," legally requiring institutions to publicly interpret the building's semiotic grammar of colonial power, thus forcing a shift from passive aesthetic celebration to active critical engagement.
3. A Principle of 'Discursive Access': Challenges the top-down nature of heritage laws (like Law No. 5/2017) that enable a singular, state-managed re-authoring of meaning (Finding 6). This principle calls for regulations that codify a public "right of reply," legally empowering and funding community counter-narratives to be co-located with the official interpretation, ensuring the site's enunciation is genuinely poly-vocal.

### 4.3 Limitations and Future Work

This study's analysis is primarily based on publicly available textual, visual, and architectural evidence. It does not include ethnographic methods, such as interviews with government officials, museum curators, or long-term observation of visitor behavior, which could provide deeper insights into the production and reception of meaning at the site. The focus on English-language sources for non-official perspectives also presents a limitation.

Future research should address these gaps through participatory methods, including visitor studies conducted in Bahasa Indonesia [16] and co-curated workshops with local community groups, to explore how alternative narratives might be integrated into the museum's programming. Furthermore, a comparative analysis applying this paper's tri-pass framework to other major Indisch style government buildings in Southeast Asia, such as the Sultan Abdul Samad Building in Kuala Lumpur, could further test and refine the methodological and theoretical claims about the productive nature of postcolonial ambivalence in heritage-making.

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