

# (Co)Production of Urban Public Space: Contested Informality in an Indonesian *Alun-Alun*

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This article demonstrates the various ways that state and other authoritative entities have attempted to (re)produce the meanings and representations of Alun-Alun Kota Malang, a major urban square in Malang City, Indonesia; and it reveals the effect of “othering” that has emerged as a consequence of each transformative period. Despite official attempts to exclude nonprescribed users and uses from it, however, this urban space also has a long history of accommodating practices and perceptions reflective of the social, economic and political struggles of the local population. Through a spatial-ethnographic account of temporal and spatial interactions between the state apparatus and informal street hawkers, the article thus attempts to show how the sustained insurgence of urban informality may be a crucial, albeit contested, coproducer of urban space. It further argues that such a pattern of insurgence can provide a counter-narrative to state depictions of public space as conceptualized and produced under forces of modernization, or by the larger socioeconomic forces bearing on the state.

*Satpol! Satpol! Satpol!*

As these shouts arise from the northern corners of Alun-Alun Kota Malang, hawkers across the square instantly pack their belongings and begin to disperse out its southern margins.<sup>1</sup> Among them, a roast-corn vendor runs with a clay bowl full of burning coal on her head. Others discreetly slip smaller-sized goods back into their pockets or sling bags, blending in with the crowd. First-timers to this central and historically significant public space in Malang City, East Java, may find this scene bewildering, but this is a drill that the hawkers and regular visitors have memorized by heart.

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Since its most recent redesign in 2015, a typical day and night on and around Alun-Alun Kota Malang brings a choreographed dance, as hawkers pirouette around Satpol PP officers (members of a special unit charged with maintaining public order).<sup>2</sup> The 2015 redesign was part of an effort to re-brand Malang as a clean, orderly city; indeed, the transformation of Alun-Alun Kota Malang through modernistic design and aggressive policing was central to that reimagining. Nowadays, therefore, the square is ground zero in a state effort to discipline the population into accepting new “civilized ways” to occupy public space (FIG. 1). Specifically, according to a logic of “returning” such areas to the people, the state will no longer tolerate the presence of informal hawkers or squatters there, an attitude that has effectively (re)produced these groups as “others.”

In Indonesia, the *alun-alun* is a traditional urban space whose history dates to the time of precolonial Javanese monarchs. Under their rule, *alun-alun* were created in part to fend off popular uprisings by giving commoners a sense of representation and a symbolic place in the urban hierarchy. But such spaces also have a long, dynamic history of accommodating processes of “othering” such as those currently in evidence in Malang.

Several studies of the significance of *alun-alun* by scholars of Indonesian urbanism have recognized this phenomenon. Notable are those by Merlyna Lim and Rita Padawangi on the transformation and (re)construction of the spatial identity of *alun-alun* in Bandung; by Kim Dovey and Eka Permasari on the changing political meanings and everyday uses of Jakarta’s Monas and Merdeka Square; and by Purnawan Basundoro on changing popular perceptions of Alun-Alun Kota Malang throughout history.<sup>3</sup> This article seeks to complement this existing work by documenting the transformations of *alun-alun* as produced and reproduced by both the state and civil society; and it seeks to build on it by offering a contemporary, spatial-ethnographic account of how members

of civil society, particularly those currently being reproduced as “other,” may provide a counter-narrative through insurgent and informal place-making.

In his 1991 reflection “What Is Tradition?” Gerald L. Bruns offered a reading of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s notion of tradition, which argued against its interpretation as a “homogenous master narrative in which everything is joined together in a vast program of conceptual integration.”<sup>4</sup> Instead, Bruns suggested that tradition is not a structure at all, but “the historicity of open-ended, intersecting, competing narratives that cannot be mastered by any Great Code.” Based on this view of tradition as a process that recognizes others in all their differences, and in resistance to any single interpretation of this process, this article has two main objectives. First, through a historical investigation, it will highlight how the meanings and interpretations of Alun-Alun Kota Malang have changed over time, and how this has contributed to its status today as a place where the marginalized continue to struggle for their rights in the city — and, in a larger sense, their rights to a liberated life. Second, using spatial-ethnographic field interviews and observations conducted between June 2017 and May 2018, it will illustrate the dynamic spatial and temporal interaction, which, according to Asef Bayat’s notion of “quiet encroachment,” presently unfolds there between informal hawkers and the apparatus of state surveillance and control.<sup>5</sup>

In conclusion, the article will argue that the sustained insurgence of informal, nonprescribed uses of urban space (otherwise known as practices of urban informality) may provide a counter-narrative to the state’s interpretation of what a public space should and should not be.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, these practices may be a crucial, albeit contested, coproducer of public space, in the sense of Henri Lefebvre’s “lived space” or John Friedmann’s “place-making,” whereby vibrant urban spaces are a social creation, lived in by and emerging from civil society, not conceptualized or planned by the elite or by experts.<sup>7</sup>

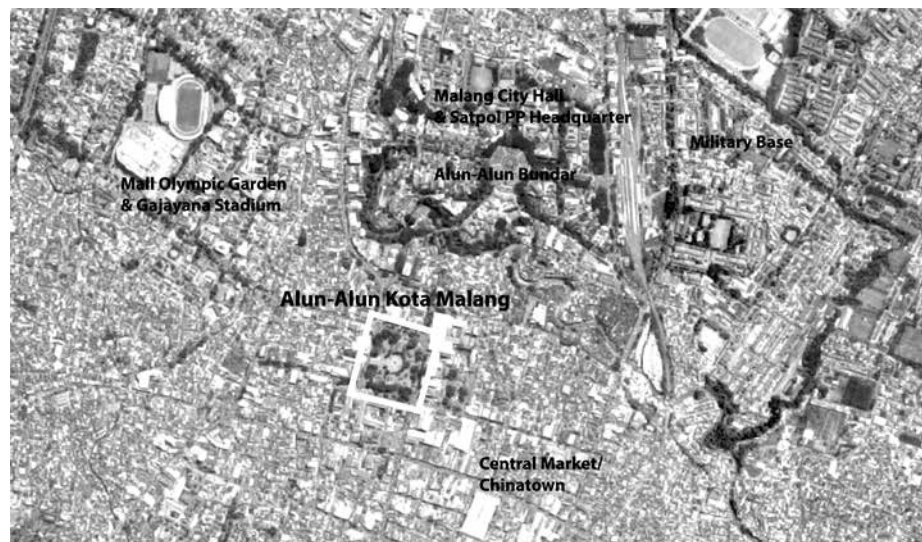


FIGURE 1. Alun-Alun Kota Malang in relation to other landmarks in modern-day Malang. Based on: Google Maps satellite image, 2019.

## ALUN-ALUN: A JAVANESE PUBLIC SPACE

To understand the spatial and symbolic significance of Alun-Alun Kota Malang requires establishing its relationship to the early Javanese concept of *alun-alun* as a public space. Throughout history, in a typical Javanese town, an *alun-alun* would have been the most recognizable landmark, one that indicated the town center. Traditionally, it thus would have been located directly in front of the *keraton* (Javanese palace), or the residence of the *bupati* (regent).<sup>8</sup> The *alun-alun* would likely also have taken the modest form of a large, four-sided open field, dotted with a few old-growth banyan trees — an image far from that of a modern, landscaped city square (FIG. 2).

Under the old Javanese monarchies, the *alun-alun* played three formal roles: it symbolized authority over a certain territory; it served as a sacred place of ritual; and it was instrumental for displaying sovereign supremacy, mainly by accommodating the official functions of a traditional Javanese monarch.<sup>9</sup> As a spatially and symbolically central element of a kingdom's capital and its image of celestial order, it was thus more important to projecting the greatness of a kingdom's culture and the integrity of the state than to facilitating actual governing practices.<sup>10</sup> Informally, however, the *alun-alun* was also a place where common people could practice *pepe*: sitting or lying on the ground in the full sun facing the palace as a form of protest against bureaucratic misconduct, or misconduct by the ruler himself.<sup>11</sup>

With the arrival of the Dutch, the Javanese concept of *alun-alun* became a focus of interest for colonial administrators because of its relation to the concept of power. Indeed, all across Java, as the Dutch set foot in old towns, they began to use *alun-alun* to symbolize their conquest of territory by appropriating it as a symbol of their sovereignty. *Alun-alun* were thus surrounded by colonial administrative and recreational buildings built using the typologies and styles of

nineteenth-century European architecture, and a colonial assistant resident's house would commonly be situated to the south of the *alun-alun*, alongside the native regent's house, to emphasize the shift of authority.<sup>12</sup>

Malang's relationship with its *alun-alun*, however, was distinct from that of most other Javanese towns because the highland city had not had one in the precolonial era.<sup>13</sup> Thus, when the Dutch created one under the name of Aloon-Aloon in 1882, it was not a traditional *alun-alun* in any sense of the word.<sup>14</sup> To begin, the configuration of the colonial Aloon-Aloon did not follow the spatial principles or north-south axis of an old Javanese town center, as based on local cosmological beliefs and practices. And, instead of being located to its south, the house of the native regent was situated to its east, alongside a prison. The house of the regent was also somewhat removed, since it was not oriented toward Aloon-Aloon but faced south toward another main street. Meanwhile, to the south, where the palace of the regent would traditionally have been, stood the house of the Dutch assistant resident, which did face Aloon-Aloon. And to the north stood buildings for the Bioscoop Rex and Societeit Concordia — a social club and an entertainment center, respectively, for colonial society.<sup>15</sup> Significantly, these two establishments also played a critical role in projecting a sense of Western grandeur, which the city's colonized inhabitants were not allowed to take part in.<sup>16</sup>

Basundoro has argued that across the island during this period the weakening of traditional Javanese influence led to a change in common people's interpretations of old *alun-alun*.<sup>17</sup> This was particularly evident in Malang, where the *alun-alun* had never played the role of a sacred space, shared by monarchy and commoners. Produced primarily to imitate an old Javanese *alun-alun* and signify conquest by the Dutch, Malang's Aloon-Aloon was never imbued with such meaning or significance. On the contrary, it primarily provided a stage on which the colonized could demonstrate their silent resistance to the practices of colonialism. Thus, dozens of locals would sit under its banyan trees, selling food and drink and using it as they would any other public space, without observing the sacred meanings it was intended to reproduce in the interest of reinforcing the narrative of colonial superiority (FIG. 3). This established a pattern of local vending, traditional dancing, and theatrical performances that allowed the colonized locals to congregate against a backdrop of Western balls, pool and card games, and movie theaters, from which they were excluded.

The presence of such activities, which claimed and appropriated a space central (both spatially and symbolically) to Dutch governance, subtly, yet directly, challenged the symbolic power of the European establishments around the space. And, to a certain extent, this challenge succeeded, as the Dutch administration eventually ceased to view Aloon-Aloon as a suitably modern, European-dominated center of command.<sup>18</sup> Realizing that they had failed to (re)produce Aloon-Aloon in a way that would project an aura of colonial greatness and integrity similar to that of the old Javanese



FIGURE 2. Kinderen onder een boom op de aloen-aloen te Malang [Children under a tree in aloon-aloon, Malang], circa 1895. Source: Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 16473 (<http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:783662>).



**FIGURE 3.** Markt op de aloen-aloen te Malang [Market in aloon-aloon, Malang], circa 1895. Source: Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 12030 (<http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:703245>).

kingdoms, the Dutch in 1922 instead chose to construct a second *alun-alun*, the JP Coen Plein, or what is now known as Alun-Alun Bunder (circular *alun-alun*), as their new municipal center.<sup>19</sup> The JP Coen Plein and its surrounding establishments thereafter became the nexus of colonial power in Malang, a command center as well as punishment ground for offenders, defectors and prisoners.

When imperial Japanese forces arrived in many parts of the Indonesian archipelago in 1942 after the defeat of the Dutch, they were at first regarded as “older siblings” by the colonized locals. Indeed, upon their arrival in Malang, the Japanese settled their local administration around Aloon-Aloon instead of JP Coen Plein as a way of embracing the local population and acknowledging the sense of ownership and belonging ordinary residents had for the space.<sup>20</sup> Shortly thereafter, however, imperial Japanese soldiers began using the space as a stage for displays of power. In particular, public executions were regularly held there, some in the cruelest manner, to send a message to the city’s inhabitants and to remaining Europeans. And this conduct effectively erased any sense of Aloon-Aloon as having once belonged to the colonized local population, as having provided a common space where they had been able to express silent protest against the Dutch.

The above history helps reveal how various meanings of Alun-Alun Kota Malang have been produced and reproduced by both sovereign power and the local population since its earliest days. But what may be most important here is that the very conception of this space was originally based on a shift away from a traditional spatial arrangement largely based on cosmological beliefs to a configuration whose dominant narrative was a colonial transfer of power. The creation of Aloon-Aloon by the Dutch thus bypassed the democratic, albeit symbolic, role that traditional *alun-alun* played in accommodating the needs and concerns of a ruled Javanese population. Instead, Aloon-Aloon became a place of “other-

ing,” where the city’s colonized inhabitants experienced their exclusion from the city’s spatial-structural hierarchy, but where they could still come together to stage silent resistance by way of “place-making” — appropriating the conceptualized public space for vernacular, noncolonial practices. This condition was, however, superseded by an act of “place-breaking” by the imperial Japanese; and their occupation transformed Aloon-Aloon into a space of vacuum, as the local population faced an elevated level of risk seeking to maintain their previous relationship to the space.<sup>21</sup>

#### POSTCOLONIAL ALUN-ALUN KOTA MALANG

Access to *alun-alun* and other public spaces took center stage in the political rhetoric that accompanied the country’s independence movement circa 1945. Soekarno, the leader of the movement, who went on to become Indonesia’s first president, was known for his passionate public orations, which helped mobilize grassroots politics and encourage the occupation of public spaces by the Indonesian people. In Malang, the reclamation of Aloon-Aloon also involved the appropriation of the surrounding European establishments, as their names were changed and they were opened to the city’s formerly colonized residents. Thus, although the space and its buildings were not altered physically, both the meanings imbued in them and the way Indonesians viewed them changed drastically. It was as if a colonial wall between Aloon-Aloon and the surrounding buildings had been leveled.

Following the fall of Soekarno and the rise of Soeharto as Indonesian president in 1968, however, the country embarked on a new economic and political course, commonly referred to as Orde Baru, or the New Order. From then on, capitalist ideology ushered in new programs of foreign investment, industrial growth, and increased productivity.<sup>22</sup> The economic boom that followed in the 1970s and 80s was largely fueled by oil income from state-owned enterprises and was accompanied by agricultural modernization in rural areas of Java.<sup>23</sup> However, across the archipelago, uneven economic growth and access to opportunity subsequently spurred a mass movement of population between regions, and from rural to urban areas.

In the case of East Java, New Order policies gave local commercial sugarcane producers a major boost, which concentrated economic opportunity in the hands of a few.<sup>24</sup> It also limited the land available for traditional sharecropping, reducing the demand for labor in subsistence agriculture. An oversupply of labor thus emerged in areas dominated by sugarcane production, forcing workers to seek employment in nonagricultural activities, which were naturally limited.

In their study of socioeconomic changes in rural Java, Ernst Spaan and Aard Hartveld found that in the early 1990s, many residents of Pakong, a rural area in the southern district of Malang, who had previously depended on agricultural em-

ployment, were being forced to migrate to East Java's major urban centers, such as Gresik, Surabaya and Malang — or even as far away as Jakarta.<sup>25</sup> It is relevant to note that many of these residents had originally migrated to Pakong from the island of Madura — known for centuries of outmigration — and from areas in Central Java. Their outmigration to urban centers also created a new network between their places of origin and the urban centers. In these urban areas, Malang included, migrants typically resorted to creating their own employment opportunities by way of the informal sector, working as *becak* (pedaled, three-wheeled taxi) drivers or food vendors.

Not much, if anything, has been written about the state of Malang's *alun-alun* or other public spaces during this period. The New Order regime, however, was notorious for selling control of urban spaces to the highest bidders or to large-scale investors.<sup>26</sup> Politically, Soeharto also assumed a stance opposite to Soekarno's love for democratic public space. In general, the leaders of the authoritarian and militaristic New Order regime dreaded the potential for democratic action embodied in true public access to these spaces, because they had seen how Soekarno had used public space to mobilize the common people and revolutionize a nation. And to maintain the status quo, they sought to instill a fear of public space in the minds of the people, particularly members of the growing middle class. Public space was thus painted as threatening — where the dead bodies of criminals might be found. Killed in silent military operations, these would be left in the open to reinforce a message of dependence on military power for public safety. This perception of a lack of safety eventually led the middle class to retreat from urban public spaces like *alun-alun* to gated, privately owned and monitored compounds. In the capital, Jakarta, this effectively dispersed any potential concentration of grassroots political activities from the city center.<sup>27</sup>

The next step in this campaign to “water down” urban public spaces was to “repair” their physical appearance. Streets were thus cleared of uneducated laborers from the countryside, of *becak* drivers and street hawkers, of peddlers and prostitutes. Such people were not only seen as unattractive, but were perceived as a threat to public order, and were therefore criminalized.<sup>28</sup>

Following the violent fall of the New Order in 1998, national and local authorities embraced a more populist approach to governance. In terms of urban governance, this included taking a small step back from militaristic attitudes toward public space and the spatial othering of the poor and informal; and in the years that followed, street hawkers and informal workers moved to stake a stronger claim on the urban public spaces, without fear of eviction and criminalization. In Malang, Alun-Alun Kota Malang became a center for this new occupation of the public domain by informal hawkers and other semipermanent squatters.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, in a study of power relations in Bandung in conjunction with the 2000 renovation of the adjacent

Grand Mosque, Lim and Padawangi suggested that, despite the decline in the state's role in urban development since the New Order, the state remained an important actor in the (re) production of urban spaces such as the city's *alun-alun*.<sup>30</sup> The remaining sections of this article, however, will present a case study that also argues for the importance of informality as an everyday coproducer of such urban public spaces. This insurgent coproduction is made possible through discreet spatial and temporal dynamics that allow their tactical appropriation by “others.”

#### ALUN-ALUN KOTA MALANG TODAY: REIMAGINING A MODERN PUBLIC SPACE

One Monday morning in July 2017, no hawkers were to be seen in Alun-Alun Kota Malang. When our research team had visited a few days before, we had asked one of the hawkers whether she knew of an upcoming event in the city called APEKSI. “Nobody is allowed to vend on Monday,” she had said. “But we will still come on the Sunday before, because there will be a lot of visitors here.”

APEKSI is short for Asosiasi Pemerintah Seluruh Indonesia, or the Association of Indonesia Municipalities. Each year, mayors and representatives from municipalities across the country gather in a host city to discuss regional, national and global issues, particularly with regard to socioeconomic development and partnerships between local governments.<sup>31</sup> Host municipalities typically use this event to demonstrate their infrastructure, tourism industry, and wealth.<sup>32</sup>

Leading up to its staging in Malang, one Satpol PP officer had informed us that his force would be increasing the frequency of its patrols and enforcement of local regulations, among which is the eviction of informal hawkers from important public spaces. Alun-Alun Kota Malang was one of the city landmarks that the delegates would visit as a representation of what a modern, orderly city square should be — an image which informal hawkers did not fit into.

The image of a modern city in contemporary Asia is typically one that highlights the efficacy of municipal government, because the modern image is not only about beauty but about political power and legitimacy.<sup>33</sup> An orderly city thus suggests that the state has made significant investments in infrastructure, public safety, and public health — attributes considered key to the growth of the overall economy.

The idea of urban order has deep roots in nineteenth-century Western planning. But in recent decades this discourse has taken on new life in large Asian cities. Megacities in Asia are home to millions of residents, many of whom remain in lower income brackets without property rights or formal employment. As their number continues to increase, there is bound to be some friction between the haves and the have-nots, the urban “natives” and the migrants, the formal and the informal — those who desire order and modernity

and those who are trying to carve out a space in the city for themselves.<sup>34</sup> Dovey and Permanasari have documented this dynamic in their study of Monas and Merdeka Square as a “symbolic order of an imaginary nation which the real practices of poverty and disorder contradicted and interrupted.”<sup>35</sup> On the one hand, they found the militaristic transformation of the nation’s most monumental public square has to a certain extent been welcomed by the middle classes of Jakarta. Yet on the other, reframing the space as an unapproachable spectacle has drained it of the life it had previously supported through the informality and flexibility of an everyday street economy.

After the fall of the New Order in 1998, Malang has had three different mayors: Suyitno (1998–2003), Peni Suparto (2003–2013), and Mochamad Anton (2013–present). The hawkers we spoke to in Alun-Alun Kota Malang did not reflect much on Suyitno’s term, but they did have a lot to say about Pak Peni (Mr. Peni).<sup>36</sup> Generally, he had left a positive impression, with most hawkers telling us how much easier their lives were during his two five-year terms. During his administration, although hawkers were not exactly welcomed, they were left alone, free to roam around and even camp on the city’s *alun-alun* grounds. According to one hawker, “Back when Pak Peni was the mayor, life was good for us [hawkers]. He was very tolerant, so there was no fear of eviction among us.” And this vendor echoed the reflection of many other hawkers that their vending activities in and around Alun-Alun Kota Malang had changed under different municipal administrations.

Although viewed positively by most hawkers, however, Pak Peni’s lack of action with regard to Alun-Alun Kota Malang did prompt a different evaluation from visitors — and even a few hawkers. One visitor told us they had not visited the space until recently, and gave a lack of attractions and order as the reason. Surprisingly, a few hawkers agreed with this view. One newspaper vendor who had practically grown up vending in the area recalled the messiness and lack of safety in Alun-Alun Kota Malang in the 2000s. At that time many hawkers were able to set up tents and semi-permanent kiosks all over the space, and pickpocketing was rampant. Another hawker recalled the state of Alun-Alun Kota Malang circa the 2000s: “At one point, there must have been around 200 hawkers here, selling all sorts of things, including clothes and women’s undergarments. It was unsightly.”

Mr. R, one of the division heads within the Satpol PP, confirmed Alun-Alun Kota Malang’s condition in the 2000s:

*Some of the kiosks were painted. The hawkers even drilled their own boreholes and acquired electricity. They slept and they defecated on the site. We tried to talk them into vacating the area, but it was very difficult. They argued that the land belonged to God. So then I said, “The land in front of your house also belongs to God. Would you object to me building a shack there?” We eventually had to come in with the heavy equipment.*

The election of Mochamad Anton in 2013 signaled the beginning of a major (re)production of the form and image of Alun-Alun Kota Malang. Sworn into office on September 13, 2013, he launched a public competition for the redesign of Alun-Alun Kota Malang seven days later.<sup>37</sup> Among the city’s rationales for revitalizing the space was that it might “become more impressive than Alun-Alun Kota Batu” (in a neighboring suburb of Malang), which signaled their ambition to make Alun-Alun Kota Malang a beacon in reimagining the city.<sup>38</sup> The redesigned space officially opened to the public in June of 2015.<sup>39</sup>

The new Alun-Alun Kota Malang now features a central dancing water fountain, a children’s playground, an open amphitheater, a skateboard park, manicured grass and beds of flowers, and park benches. It is also, ironically, devoid of the fences that had previously surrounded it (FIGS. 4, 5). The mayor claimed that the removal of the fences was intended to serve as a reminder that all members of the public were equal, and should have equal access — a symbolic gesture of welcome for all.<sup>40</sup> In reality, however, there appear to be several groups that the new design intends to exclude: the



FIGURE 4. Central feature in the redesigned Alun-Alun Kota Malang. Author’s personal collection.



FIGURE 5. Fences that had previously surrounded Alun-Alun Kota Malang were removed in the new design. Author’s personal collection.



**FIGURE 6.** One of Satpol PP's monitoring points along Alun-Alun Kota Malang. Source: author's personal collection.

hawkers and the beggars — thereby (re)producing them as the “other.” And instead of using passive design measures to keep them out, as had previously been the case (and as is the case in the more prominent Monas and Merdeka Square in Jakarta), the city now relies on public militarization through the presence of Satpol PP officers (FIG. 6).<sup>41</sup> Yet, despite this presence, with regard to Asef Bayat's notion of the “quiet encroachment of the ordinary,” informal street hawkers manage a “silent, protracted, but pervasive advancement” on the *alun-alun* out of imperatives of survival and a desire to improve their lives.<sup>42</sup>

#### BEYOND THE (PERCEIVED) ORDER: TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL INTERACTIONS

A couple of weeks following the APEKSI, we returned to Alun-Alun Kota Malang and were able to observe a stark contrast between how much vending was now being allowed to occur there compared to the period before and during the event. Our visit took place on a Sunday morning, when the space would typically be noticeably more crowded than on a weekday morning. Normally, there would have been plenty of hawkers on and around the space on a Sunday morning, but they would have disappeared by the time the Satpol PP officers arrived around 8 AM. On this Sunday morning (August 6), however, the hawkers continued to linger around the periphery of the space even after the officers arrived on the scene. When we asked several hawkers why they were not running away from the Satpol PP officers, they explained that it was okay for them to vend across from the *alun-alun* outside the post office and the mosque.

This morning scene reminded us of our slightly out-of-the-ordinary observation from the previous night. Along the western edge of the *alun-alun*, facing the grand mosque, we

had at that time observed a group of about half a dozen Satpol PP officers standing and sitting around. Meanwhile, across the street, several balloon and toy vendors were attempting to sell their wares, unfazed by the officers' presence. This was a situation that would clearly not have existed in the lead-up to the APEKSI event. And one officer we approached confirmed that the hawkers were actually not supposed to be vending at that location.

*What we do is try to get them off the street and the sidewalk. They may technically be allowed to vend on the mosque's yard, because that is a privately owned space and therefore outside of our jurisdiction, but the mosque's caretakers do not allow them on their property either. But . . . when it is a “stomach business” they will do whatever it takes. . . .*<sup>43</sup>

The episode showed us that there is always a degree of personal discretion involved in decision-making on the part of the field officers with regard to disciplining hawkers. This could clearly encompass a shift in the officers' attitudes — ergo, in those of the hawkers' — prior to and after a big event such as the APEKSI.

Similar shifts have been identified in studies of Seoul, South Korea, and Guangzhou, China. Although street hawkers in Seoul are faced by constant harassment, it is only when the city is playing host to an international event that they may be forcibly removed by the authorities (at times aided by gang members).<sup>44</sup> A similar fluctuation in the degree of law enforcement with regard to hawking has been observed on the streets of Guangzhou, reflecting the government's desire to protect the city's image while hosting mega-events, yet allowing the survival of hawkers at other times.<sup>45</sup> These findings are further consistent with Ray Bromley's review showing that aggressive policing of a city's public spaces may be particularly notable prior to major events, as part of an effort to improve the image of that city to visitors.<sup>46</sup>

A typical morning for the hawkers on Alun-Alun Kota Malang prior to the big event started around 6:30 AM. The regulars would have included a *soto* (chicken soup served with rice) vendor with his three-wheeled cart (parked on the side of the street at the southwest corner of *alun-alun*; a *kerupuk* (deep-fried crackers) vendor carrying one or two big plastic sacks who walked the ground; a few beverage vendors, one of whom kept his tools and goods on a pedicab parked across the street; a few toy vendors who tended to stay close to the playground, especially when children were present; a newspaper vendor who was always on his feet; and a handful of fritter vendors who were typically more discreet in carrying their goods around, often using unassuming plastic bags (FIGS. 7, 8).

A *kerupuk* vendor we met early in our fieldwork walked us through the space ballet that all the hawkers had to perform on a daily basis.<sup>47</sup> She would arrive at the *alun-alun* around 6:30 every morning with a big sack of *kerupuk*, two

**FIGURE 7.**  
A hawker vending out of small plastic bags in an attempt to be discreet. Author's personal collection.



**FIGURE 8.** A hawker with his three-wheeled cart standing by on the outer periphery of Alun-Alun Kota Malang. Author's personal collection.

on Sundays. Other hawkers would arrive around the same time, between 6 and 7 AM. Many of them would spend most of their time circling the south side of *alun-alun*, where the children's playground is located and where visitors with kids gather. But every now and then, hawkers would take a lap around the square, stopping at its center, where people typically sit and linger near the water fountain. But instead of loudly trying to catch customers' attention, as a typical street hawker would, they would approach visitors personally and speak to them in a lower volume.

Around 7:30, the hawkers would start to become more alert, keeping an eye out for incoming Satpol PP trucks from the north side. Those who displayed their goods on the ground and chairs would start to pack them back into their bags or baskets. Everyone would then start to inch toward the



**FIGURE 9.** Hawkers move to safer areas around the outer periphery in anticipation of Satpol PP officers' arrival. Author's personal collection.

south side of *alun-alun*, or wherever their preferred route of escape was. A fritter vendor would hop on a pedicab that was always waiting nearby for her (FIG. 9). And the *soto* vendor would wheel his cart one block to the west where he would wait for his last customers to finish eating. As he explained, "I will keep the cart here and retrieve the bowls later, which is safer than being caught by the officers."

As soon as the officers' trucks turned the corner between 8:00 and 8:30, it would take less than a minute for the hawkers to clear the space (FIG. 10). So quick would the transition be that if you were a first-time visitor you might not even catch it unfolding. Where the hawkers went varied widely. The *soto* vendor would move two blocks east, where he would set up a regular spot behind a police station. The *kerupuk* vendor would ride her scooter home, with whatever remained of her goods from the morning tied to the back. Some of the other hawkers, not having another location they could vend from, would head home — either to do household chores or pursue other jobs. Some, such as the *kerupuk* vendor, would return to Alun-Alun Kota Malang in the evening.

The same pattern of self-organized movements would then be reenacted every evening around 6:30 PM, when the officers on the day shift headed back to their headquarters (FIG. 11). It typically takes around an hour or two for a new group of officers to arrive for the night shift. And as soon as the trucks of the day-shift officers left the area, hawkers would storm the space from all four corners. Cries of "*Per-aaang*. . . ! *Perang!!*" ["War. . . ! War!!"] would then be heard faintly from hawkers, signaling to their comrades that it was now safe for them to enter the grounds. When we asked how they knew of the officers' whereabouts, one toy vendor explained, "We have a WhatsApp group for the night hawkers here to exchange information and forewarn each other."<sup>48</sup>

A toy vendor from Jakarta who was new to the area informed us that she and her daughter usually waited around



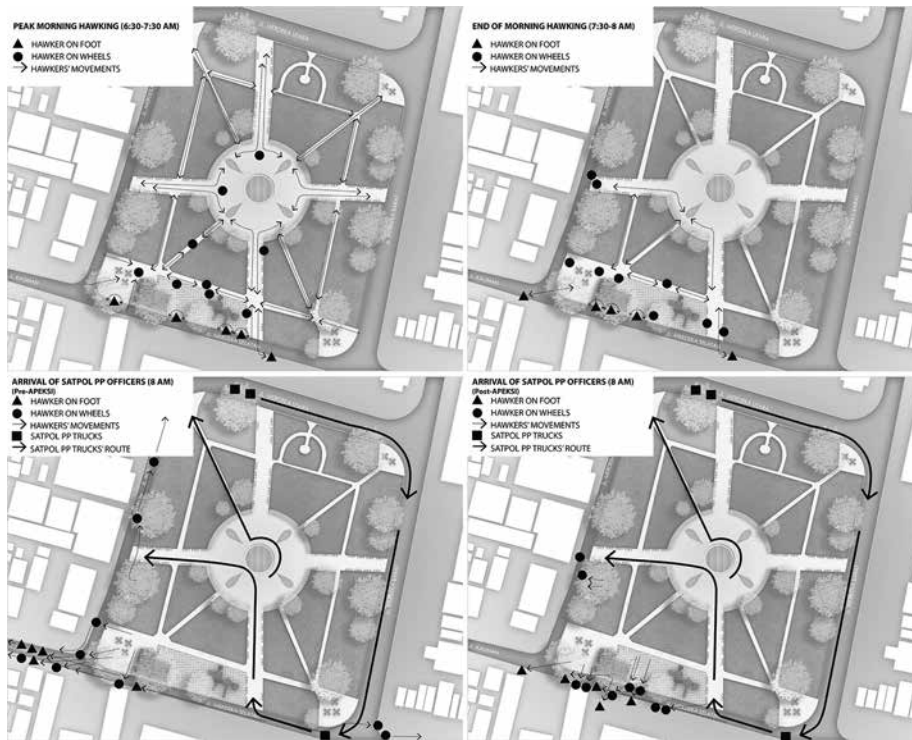


FIGURE 10. Temporal mapping of hawkers' movements in the morning as a response to Satpol PP's presence. Drawing by author.

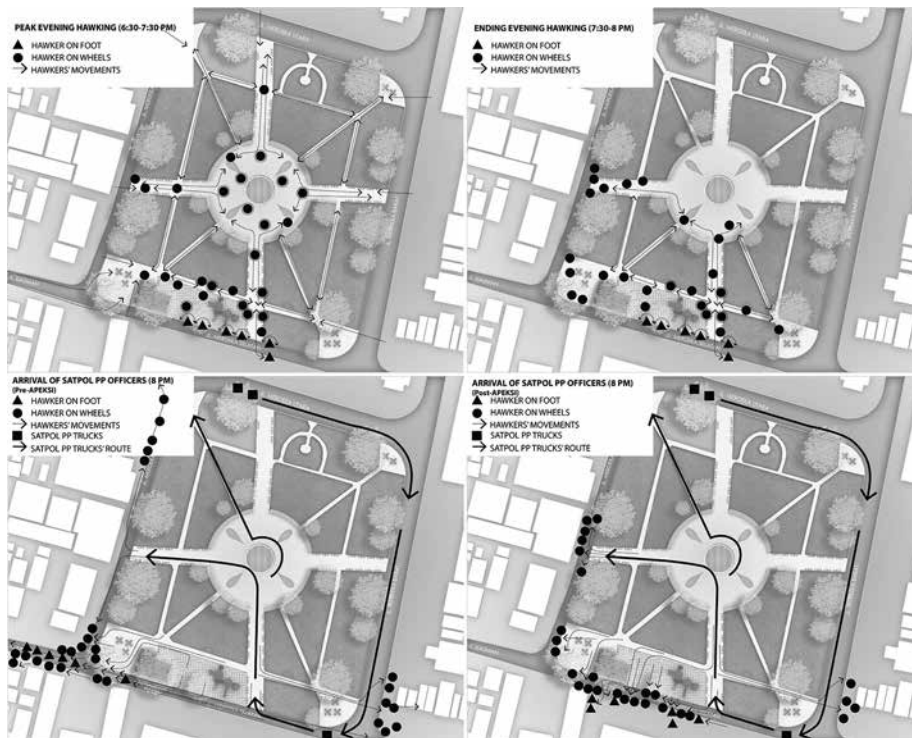


FIGURE 11. Temporal mapping of hawkers' movements in the evening as a response to Satpol PP's presence. Drawing by author.

the parking lot until the officers left. They would pack their goods in a small, unassuming black suitcase that they stored on their scooter. But, she elaborated, "Other local hawkers prefer to hide one block away and wait, because they fear that the officers have already recognized their faces" (FIG. 12).

A few of the morning hawkers, like the *kerupuk* and tofu vendors, would return in the evening; but most of the nighttime hawkers are exclusively there during the night, when there are significantly more visitors. More than half the hawkers then sell various children toys, since nighttime visi-



**FIGURE 12.** Nighttime hawkers waiting for Satpol PP officers to end their rotation from across Alun-Alun Kota Malang. Author's personal collection.

tors bring their children more than morning ones. On a peak Sunday night there might be as many as two dozen hawkers on the *alun-alun* grounds, in addition to the ones along the streets on the south and west sides.<sup>49</sup>

In general, nighttime hawkers are less discreet about their presence than those in the morning. The *kerupuk* vendor typically carries around two big sacks of *kerupuk* in the evening, as opposed to one in the morning. And vendors of children's toys may sell objects that light up in bright, flashing colors (FIG. 13). Instead of small hand baskets, tofu vendors carry their snacks in a big basket (FIG. 14). The most eye-catching personage is perhaps the roast-corn vendor. Sitting on the ground at an intersection of walking paths, she vigorously fans a handful of corns over a large clay bowl full of burning coals (FIG. 15).

Our team did not witness any Satpol PP raid take place during our fieldwork, but one of our hawker friends described a typical raid scene:

*Everybody just sprints when the officers get here. The roast corn hawker would run while her coals are still burning. During the last raid, I fell down when they chased me. I told them, "Let me pull myself together, and you can take whatever goods I have." They wrote me up so I asked them how much the fine would be, and they said around 250,000 Rupiah.<sup>50</sup> Usually I would not even pay the fine, I would be okay not redeeming my goods, but this time they took my KTP, so I will have to appear before a judge on the 23rd.<sup>51</sup> I feel bad for other hawkers who have to pay a larger amount of fine, like the beverage or toy vendors. The officers will also confiscate the carts from hawkers with carts, and carry the carts on the back of their trucks along with other goods they have confiscated.*



**FIGURE 13.** An evening hawker with a bucket of flashing toys. Author's personal collection.



**FIGURE 14.** Nighttime hawkers tend to carry a larger amount of goods. Author's personal collection.



**FIGURE 15.** A roasted-corn vendor fanning corn cobs over a bowl of burning coals. Author's personal collection.

When we brought up the issue, Mr. R, the division head of Satpol PP mentioned earlier, provided another perspective on the raids.

*We started putting up signs all over the city in the 2000s, announcing that certain areas are off-limit for vending. Even when we caught hawkers violating the rules, we would only give them a notice the first few times. But they continued to break the rules, so we had no other choice. Our officers always try to conduct themselves in a fair and courteous manner, even during a raid. They always humanize the hawkers. If a hawker volunteers to relocate permanently but does not have the means to do so, our officers will help their relocation process with the manpower and transportation. Sometimes, however, it is the hawkers themselves who like to overreact during a raid. They toss their goods, making a mess of the place, and scream to attract attention and make it appear as though the officers were destroying their livelihoods.*

There are three units of Satpol PP officers assigned to patrol the city's public spaces, each led by a different commander with a different character and approach to hawkers. According to the hawkers, the three unit commanders were Mr. M, Mr. N, and Mr. S. Three individuals we interviewed (two hawkers and one parking attendant) provided a similar account of Mr. M in particular. As a *kerupuk* vendor recalled:

*The duration that a Satpol PP unit stays guard in alun-alun depends on the unit's commander. Earlier today it was Mr. [M], so the officers were on guard in the alun-alun around the clock, always sweeping the premises from end to end. Now we know that his unit will be back in three days.*

And, as a Jakartan hawker said candidly, referring to her status as an "outsider" from the capital city: "Mr. M instills panic in the hawkers' minds. I personally respect Mr. N, because he does not discriminate among the hawkers." A parking attendant shared his own observation of what typically occurred during Mr. M's rotation:

*He is known to be the least forgiving of all the unit commanders. When it is his turn on the field, a lot of the hawkers know to vend out of plastic bags to blend in. That does not really help them in terms of sale, however, since visitors may be unaware that they are selling something.*

The hawkers have become so familiar with the layout of the land that they have the Satpol PP officers' schedule memorized by heart. They know not only when the officers will leave and return, but also who will be in charge. This information helps them in their decision-making process in terms

of how they go about their vending practices and how cautious they need to be at any particular time. This window of opportunity creates a relatively stable temporal dynamic, where time and space align to allow the emergence of nonprescribed uses of the space. This routine is not orchestrated by a single conductor. Instead, it is an accumulation of relationships and experiences that produce a shared network of knowledge.

As some of the interviewees suggested, relationships have clearly formed among the hawkers. Some of these are obvious and positive, like the group messaging network. But others are negative and less widely acknowledged, implying competition among different hawkers. While the hawkers we spoke to seemed to be proud of the general sense of harmony and comradery, they were less willing to acknowledge the competitive nature of the business. Most instead referred to *pasrah*, a notion acknowledging how most things in life are out of one's control, and how it is therefore futile to worry about them.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, a popular saying among these hawkers was "our fate is in the hands of God" — or a variation of it, "everyone has their own fortune," and that another person cannot interfere with it.<sup>53</sup>

While those thoughts may be well-spirited, we witnessed quite the opposite during our observation one Friday night. Shortly after a new hawker from Jakarta confessed to us about her struggles as an outsider, her daughter was confronted by an older, more senior male toy vendor from Madura, a nearby island from which many of the hawkers originate.<sup>54</sup> The eleven-year-old reported to her mother that she had been shoved and yelled at by the man. The mother then told us that this was not the first time that other hawkers had harassed them, and that her daughter had once been hit by another female hawker. When the male hawker approached us we recognized him as one of the hawkers we had spoken to the night before. And when we prodded him with questions about the competition among hawkers that night, he claimed that there was no fear of competition between the hawkers, because everyone was aware of "their place." The unfolding scene, however, suggested otherwise. He then raised his voice at the mother-daughter team:

*What did you tell her? What did your daughter tell you? Tell her that this is not the way to vend! You are supposed to stick to your territory and not go roaming into other people's! If you steal a customer one more time I will hit you!*

This encounter suggested that whatever balance existed among the hawkers had been momentarily disrupted by the breaching of their unwritten informal rules, and that one of the spatial performers was behaving out of sync. This composition is tight and complex, and it may be hard for someone from the outside who is not already connected in some way to join the network. Thus, we witnessed how hawkers must be aware of multiple kinds of rules, both formal and informal.

## A PLACE IMBUEW WITH OTHERING: INFORMALITY IN URBAN PUBLIC SPACE

This article has demonstrated the various ways that state and other authoritative entities have attempted to (re)produce the meanings and representations of Alun-Alun Kota Malang, and it has explained the notion of “othering” that has persisted through a number of a transformative periods. A history of changing practices and perceptions is involved in this situation: of separation between the Europeans and the colonized inhabitants of Malang; of the othering of the poor; and today, of the narrative of informality. Yet through it all Alun-Alun Kota Malang has continued to evoke the emergence of non-prescribed uses as a reflection of the people’s enduring social, economic and political struggles.

In current scholarship, informality is viewed as a mode of urbanization particularly dominant in cities of the global South.<sup>55</sup> However, this research demonstrates that the notion of informality itself can be understood as the product of “othering” by the state, and by forces influencing the state’s actions, through the construction and reconstruction of categories of legitimacy and illegitimacy. Because the state has the power to determine what is considered informal and what is not, its designation can serve as a means to delegitimize certain civic groups’ claims to urban public space, as in the case of Alun-Alun Kota Malang — or in a larger picture, claims to their rights to the city.

Yet, this spatial-ethnographic account of informal hawkers in Alun-Alun Kota Malang has also demonstrated that, despite the state’s perception of them as the excluded “others,” the insurgent, unplanned activities of the urban poor are still integral to the everyday (re)production of urban public space. In Indonesia, this coproduction of the public realm — conceptually by the state, but also through the informal practices of ordinary citizens — occurs largely according to two different, but interrelated dynamics.

First is the persistence of municipal governments in seeking to use public spaces like Alun-Alun Kota Malang to mold a certain image of the city, one that can be associated with modernity, order and wealth. But this is continually set against the background of a grassroots practice of resilient, though somewhat covert, informal vending. And although the relationship between the two may appear to be contradictory, the way it plays out on the ground paints a different picture. While the municipal government may claim they play by the book, Satpol PP officers in the field tend to practice personal discretion, suggesting a thoughtful complexity in the enforcement of regulations, as opposed to the persistence of a mindless police state. Such discretion creates a relatively stable temporal dynamic that affords hawkers an opportunity to construct a strategy not only around space, but also around time. And it is this temporal consistency, however fragile, that has allowed the continuance of the hawking scene in Alun-Alun Kota Malang, so long as all actors stick to the agreed-upon scripts and choreography.

The second dynamic occurs at a more personal level, and is less visible to those outside local hawking networks. This spatial dynamic is comparably more flexible, yet it is equally complex due to the nature of personal relationships. Before the redesign of Alun-Alun Kota Malang in 2015, the movements of hawkers were not nearly as limited. Therefore, competition for territories was greater, and open confrontations between hawkers occurred more often. The tight control that came after the redesign, however, leaves only a narrow space and time for hawkers to operate; therefore, they tend to focus more on how they can tactically appropriate the space. The inconvenience of this limited stage has naturally eliminated many of the original occupants of the space — in a way leveling the playing field for the remaining actors. It does not mean, however, that there exist no informal rules of conduct among the hawkers. These rules are unwritten, rarely spoken, and most of the time unobservable, and are built on the common understanding of acceptable behaviors in the space.

In most parts of the world today, public spaces are becoming more and more regulated, raising the question of how democratic these spaces truly are. But the informal practices in the public spaces of cities of the global South can provide a counter-narrative, both spatially and temporally, to such depictions as produced by states, and by the external forces bearing on them. As this article has observed in the case of Alun-Alun Kota Malang, they may also provide an avenue for the marginalized, and those whose participation in public spaces has been delegitimized, to challenge the notion of democracy, or lack thereof, in such public space through a tactical performance of place-making. Although these informal practices are largely carried out by street hawkers on an individual basis, as an ordinary, everyday exercise, the fact that they cumulatively encroach on public space and expand in terms of spatial (re)production may be seen to seriously challenge the state’s notion of order, of an exercise of power that takes shape in the control of public space, and of the line between public and private goods.<sup>56</sup> This may be particularly apparent when the hawkers’ advancements, which are typically made quietly, individually and gradually, are threatened by the state, at which time the hawkers may respond collectively and audibly.

Asef Bayat has suggested that cities in the global South seem to be more tolerant of such quiet encroachment, particularly of their public spaces, compared to their Western counterparts.<sup>57</sup> This is partly due to the limitation on the technological and institutional apparatus needed to carry out widespread surveillance of the population, which might detect and prevent everyday advances on urban spaces by the marginalized before their real expansion and impacts are too substantial to restrain. Owing to the intrinsically complex and largely informal urbanization process in the cities of global South, it is thus likely that the dynamic spatial interactions and “quiet encroachment” associated with informal practices will continue to (co)produce urban public spaces there, amidst contestations from political regimes and the pursuit of order and modernity.

## REFERENCE NOTES

I would like to offer a special thank-you to the Chester-Fritz Fellowship Award at the University of Washington for partially funding overseas fieldwork for this article; to my Ph.D. advisors Dr. Robert Mugerauer and Dr. Jeffrey Hou; and to the research-assistant team from Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia (Umamah Al Batul, Oktavia Rudinanda, and Agung Satria) who assisted me in data collection on the ground.

1. *Alun-alun* is a traditional form of public space in Javanese towns. It is typically centrally located and square in shape, and for this reason has been referred to interchangeably as a “square” throughout this essay.
2. Satpol, or Satpol PP, is short for Satuan Polisi Pamong Praja [Public Order Municipal Police Unit].
3. M. Lim and R. Padawangi, “Contesting Alun-Alun: Power Relations, Identities and the Production of Urban Space in Bandung, Indonesia,” *International Development Planning Review*, Vol.30 No.3 (2008), pp.307–26; K. Dovey and E. Permanasari, “New Orders: Monas and Merdeka Square,” in K. Dovey, ed., *Becoming Places: Urbanism/Architecture/Identity/Power* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp.153–66; and P. Basundoro, “The Two Alun-Alun of Malang (1930–1960),” in F. Colombijn and J. Coté, eds., *Cars, Conduits, and Kampongs: The Modernization of the Indonesian City, 1920–1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), pp.272–99.
4. G.L. Bruns, “What is Tradition?” *New Literary History*, Vol.22 No.1 (1991), pp.1–21. The article discusses interpretations of H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, J. Weinsheimer and D. Marshall, trans. (New York: Continuum, 1989).
5. A. Bayat, “The Quiet Encroachment of the Ordinary,” in Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).
6. This is not to suggest that there is a clean-cut dichotomy between “the state” and informal users of public space. The state and the actions of such other groups are embodiments of the many external (with regard to the scale of this research) forces that are always in play in cities — such as the local, regional and global economies, as well as the wider ideology of modernization. The author acknowledges the influences that these forces have in urban public space; however, the scope of this current research is unable to accommodate this discourse in length.
7. As discussed by Lim and Padawangi, “Contesting Alun-Alun.” For more, see J. Friedmann, “Place and Place-Making in Cities: A Global Perspective,” *Planning Theory & Practice*, Vol.11 No.2 (2010), pp.149–65; and H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
8. A regent, or *bupati*, is the head of one form of municipal government in Indonesia. Both under the precolonial monarchies of Java and the Dutch colonial government this was an appointed administrative position. Nowadays regents are elected directly by popular vote.
9. J. Santoso, *Arsitektur-Kota Jawa: Kosmos, Kultur & Kuasa* (Jakarta: Centropolis, 2008).
10. P. Wheatley, “Envoi,” in Wheatley, *Nāgara and Commandery: Origins of the Southeast Asian Urban Traditions* (Chicago: Department of Geography, University of Chicago, 1983), p.423. The discussion here centers on Clifford Geertz’s Doctrine of the Exemplary Center and Doctrine of the Theater State (1968).
11. Santoso, *Arsitektur-Kota Jawa*.
12. An assistant resident, who would have reported to the resident, served as an extension of the Dutch colonial government in Javanese municipalities. Even though, ceremonially, the highest administrative position still belonged to the native regent, real power lay in the hands of the colonial assistant resident. For more, see Moerdjoko, *Alun-Alun Ruang Publik Bersejarah Dan Konservasi* (Jakarta: Penerbit Universitas Trisakti, 2005).
13. Another Javanese town with a Dutch-constructed town center and *alun-alun* is Bandung. For more, see Lim and Padawangi, “Contesting Alun-Alun.”
14. Kota Malang, *40 Tahun Kota Malang* (Malang: Dewan Pemerintahan Kota Malang: 1954). The Dutch name Aloon-Aloon will be used in place of Alun-Alun Kota Malang when discussing this space during the colonial period.
15. Kotapradja Malang, *Kotapradja Malang 50 Tahun* (Malang: Kotapradja Malang, 1964).
16. Throughout this article, the use of “the colonized inhabitants of Malang” is interchangeable with “the colonized locals,” or simply “the colonized.”
17. Basundoro, “The Two Alun-Alun of Malang (1930–1960).”
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. Friedmann, in “Place and Place-Making in Cities,” sees this as a top-down intervention by the state, antithetical to the principals of “place-making.” For more, see J. Friedmann, “Reflections on Place and Place-Making in the Cities of China,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol.31 No.2 (2007), pp.257–79.
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24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. M. Budiman and P. Basundoro, *Dua Kota Tiga Zaman. Surabaya Dan Malang: Sejak Zaman Kolonial Sampai Kemerdekaan* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2009).
27. A. Kusno, *Ruang Publik, Identitas, dan Memori Kolektif: Jakarta Pasca-Suharto* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2009).
28. G. Jaya, *Catatan H. Ali Sadikin, Gubernur Kepala Daerah Khusus Ibukota Jakarta, 1966–1977* (Jakarta: Pemerintah Daerah Khusus Ibukota Jakarta, 1977).
29. Aloon-Aloon will be referred to as Alun-Alun Kota Malang again from here on out.
30. Lim and Padawangi, “Contesting Alun-Alun.”
31. <http://apeksi.net/>.
32. <https://malangkota.go.id/2016/08/29/kota-malang-terpilih-menjadi-tuan-rumah-rakernas-apeksi-tahun-2017/>.
33. A. Kim, *Sidewalk City: Remapping Public Space in Ho Chi Minh City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
34. Due to constant urbanization, it is very hard to define who the “natives” now are in contemporary cities.
35. Dovey and Permanasari, “New Orders: Monas and Merdeka Square,” p.164.
36. Partly due to the fact that many of the current hawkers had migrated to the area only in the last decade or so.
37. <https://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/di-jakarta-ada-ahok-di-malang-ada-abah-anton.html>; and <https://jatim.antaranews.com/berita/118088/desain-alun-alun-merdeka-kota-malang-dilombakan>.
38. <https://jatim.antaranews.com/berita/118088/desain-alun-alun-merdeka-kota-malang-dilombakan>; and <https://mediacenter.malangkota.go.id/2013/10/sayembara-penataan-alun-alun-kota-malang/>.
39. *Ibid.*
40. <https://malangkota.go.id/2015/06/18/face-off-alun-alun-malang-sukses/>.
41. For more on Monas and Merdeka Square, see Dovey and Permanasari, “New Orders: Monas and Merdeka Square.”
42. Bayat, “The Quiet Encroachment of the Ordinary,” pp.43–65.
43. A direct translation of *urusan perut*, an Indonesian expression commonly used to describe a situation where people are willing to do almost anything to fulfill basic necessities — e.g., not going hungry.
44. For more, see S. Bhowmik, “Street Vendors in Asia: A Review,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.40 No.22/23 (2005), pp.2256–64.

45. For more, see D. Xue and H. Gengzhi, "Informality and the State's Ambivalence in the Regulation of Street Vending in Transforming Guangzhou, China," *Geoforum* 62 (2015), pp.156–65.
  46. R. Bromley, "Street Vending and Public Policy: A Global Review," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Vol.20 No.1/2 (2000), pp.1–28.
  47. Adopted from David Seamon's "place ballet," a phenomenological notion used to describe the regularity of a place founded in habit, routine, and supportive physical environment. D. Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979).
  48. A popular mobile messaging app in Asia.
  49. This is an informed estimation, since the hawkers tend to be highly mobile.
  50. Around US\$18.
  51. KTP, short for Kartu Tanda Penduduk, is a national identification card for residents.
  52. Often associated with the saying "everything happens for a reason."
  53. "Semua orang punya rejekinya masing-masing"
  54. It is uncommon for a hawker in Malang to originate from the capital city. The hawking scene in Malang is generally dominated by local hawkers and hawkers from the neighboring island of Madura or rural areas of East Java.
  55. A. Roy, "Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol.71 No.2 (2005), pp.147–58.
  56. Bayat, "The Quiet Encroachment of the Ordinary."
  57. Ibid.
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