The city is a site where the meaning of buildings, monuments, open spaces and behaviour interweave, and where ideologies and power relations between three agents (the state, civil society and the market) are inscribed in the urban iconography and everyday life, forming interlacing triangles of relationships. This article studies the networks of actors involved in the transformation of the Masjid Raya (Grand Mosque) and alun-alun (the traditional Javanese central urban square) in Bandung, Indonesia. It explores the complexity and the shifting nexus of power relations, and examines the merging and distancing practices between agents, and the blurring of boundaries. Civil society is of central importance in place-making, yet it is diverse and plural. Thus a particular group’s identity politics can dominate the production of space with ideologies influencing interactions and the social construction of space. Individual actors and their social relations play important roles in producing and appropriating urban spaces, as well as constructing and reconstructing spatial meanings.

After being closed for almost three years, in early 2007, the alun-alun – the main square – in Bandung was finally opened to the general public. In front of thousands of people including the Mayor of Bandung, Governor Danny Setiawan opened the square and renamed it Taman Alun-Alun Masjid Raya Bandung Jawa Barat (Main Square Garden of the Grand Mosque of Bandung, West Java). The new alun-alun, as described in the opening speech of the Governor, would be the centre of growth and development in the city, and is meant to be central to the social, economic and cultural interaction of its people (Disinkom, 2007).

The new square is vast, reasonably clean, greener and more appealing than the old one. Complete with water fountains, benches and well-designed landscape gardens, at first glance it appears to be a promising public square. Some think of it as the long-lost heart of the city. Some reminisce and wonder whether it will be able to revive its glorious past. In the distant past, it was the most convivial square in the city. It was a civic space where people from various walks of life mingled in a range of activities (Kunto, 1986). Today, more than a year after the opening ceremony, one might ask...
whether it really functions as the main square, the heart of the city, where people of different identities and ideologies freely and comfortably gather and socially express themselves. There is no definitive answer to that question, and this article does not attempt to provide one. Instead, it tries to disentangle the relationship between the production of space and the uses of space to show how social actors can project their identities and/or ideologies by being dominantly involved in the production of public space.

While we recognise the importance of civil society in place-making practices, this article illustrates that civil society is diverse and plural. Although it is often seen to be a moral ‘good’, it does not automatically produce values that could easily be embraced by each and every individual within the society. Set within the context of the state’s crisis of legitimacy, through the case of the Grand Mosque and the alun-alun this article also shows that while there is a decline in the state’s role compared to the Suharto regime of pre-1998, in urban development post-1998 the state remains an important actor; both civil society and the market need it to legitimise their authorities over the production of urban space. The story of the Grand Mosque and the alun-alun also shows that civil society groups can endorse their own identity politics and thus dominate the production of space with certain ideologies. This identity and its ideologies are embedded in the produced space and thus influence the ways that society interacts with and constructs the meanings of the space. This article shows the tensions and contradictions within the plural society, and challenges the romanticisation of civil society in place-making literature (Friedmann, 2007; Lefebvre, 1991).

**Civil society, identity and place-making**

The state and the market often operate in tandem as goliaths of urban development. They hold the power, the authority and the capital needed to transform places, but frequently cause a detachment of place from local inhabitants. Capitalist-driven urban development prioritises profit over people’s wellbeing, and thus contrasts the interests of the market and of civil society (Lefebvre, 1991; Gottdiener, 1985; Zukin, 1991) The opposition between market and place creates tension in defining the ‘sense of place’ of the city (Zukin, 1991). Defining a ‘place’ as a space that entails cultural quality and local attachment, Friedmann (2007) argues that only civil society has the capacity to define a city space as a place. Place-making is a process in which the people attach meaning to city space. On the other hand, the market and the state often perform place-breaking, which Friedmann sees as a top-down intervention to break the relationship between urban space and society. Nevertheless, the alun-alun transformation between 2001 and 2007 occurred through the work of the state and civil society religious groups, despite criticisms from other groups such as the Bandung Heritage and the Indonesian Institute of Architectural Historians. This case shows
that various civil society groups that may not share similar understandings of the same space can affiliate with the market or the state to support the creation of what they perceive to be an appropriate public space.

Places that various groups of civil society experience in their everyday lives are often different from what state-controlled or market-sponsored planners understand (Rapoport, 1977; 1990). ‘People do not use city open space just because it is there and because city planners or designers wish they would’ (Jacobs, 1989, 90), and the actual use of space is the humanly experienced and locally attached space that Lefebvre (1991) terms ‘lived space’. Friedmann’s definition of ‘place’ (2007, 1) echoes Lefebvre’s ‘lived space’ by stating that place-making is a ‘purely social creation, endorsed by society’ and ‘emerge[s] spontaneously from within civil society itself’ (also see Low, 2000). The ‘lived space’ is different from the ‘representations of space’, which is a ‘conceptualised space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists … the dominant space in any society’ (Lefebvre, 1991, 38). These real social spaces (the lived spaces) often escape the attention of state urban planners, let alone the market, which does not have the civil society’s wellbeing as its priority. Different groups in civil society have different levels of access to policies and decisions about the built environment.

Little was known about the actual uses of the alun-alun during the Dutch occupancy, other than its intention to celebrate colonial power, but the concentration of informal sector activities in this space prior to its latest transformation in 2000 reflected how people constructed space to fit their daily uses, separate from the original design intention. City officials viewed the daily presence of street vendors as a problem (FAKTA, 2004), denying the fact that the informal sector is an inseparable part of Indonesian public spaces. ‘The meaning of the alun-alun as the symbol of culture and leadership diminished, because the function changed into a public park full of concrete flowerpots. At night, the place became the marketplace of lower class prostitution’ (Suganda, 2003, translated from Indonesian). Those whose everyday lives connect with or depend on the public space often have to endure marginalisation because their identities do not match what the powerful groups intend to promote. Both the informal sector in the alun-alun and the group of architects who promoted the new design were parts of civil society, but the latter belonged to the elite civil society that could collaborate with the state to realise its ideas.

The right to the city

Lefebvre (1995) claims that the city is an oeuvre (also see Smith, 1998), a ‘work’ of appropriation on the part of its residents. Urbanites can legitimately claim their rights to the city through their participation in public spaces. Diverse social groups can participate in the ‘work’ of the city by contributing to the visual, commercial, social and political transformations occurring there.
The story of Bandung’s *alun-alun*, like the stories of US and European cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, shows how the way in which popular classes assert their claims to the ‘work’ of the city is often obscured by the dominant roles of elites (civil society), the market and the state in these processes. Rather than associating the elites with the state or the market, this article see them as parts of plural civil society that have more access to decision-making powers, due to their class and status. From 1850 to 1930, architects and planners in Barcelona, Berlin, London, Paris and New York modernised their cities in an effort to appease bourgeois sensibilities and solve urban problems, like crime and health epidemics (see Hardoy, 1988). Public spaces, in particular, were sanitised, aestheticised and commercialised.

Transforming the public spaces of the city, as in the renovation project of the Grand Mosque and the *alun-alun*, is thus coupled with a social engineering project aimed at disciplining and civilising bodies, behaviours and appearances. The public space is thus transformed into a glass-walled space where everything is visible, monitored and disciplined to create urban images deemed suitable for a ‘good’ city. Rather than creating a great city, the beautification of public space is accomplished at the expense of the vibrancy and vitality of the city’s civic life.

**Contesting identities, instilling ideologies: historical and social context of the *alun-alun***

Historically, the *alun-alun*, a square in the centre of the city where grass grows and Banyan trees stand at the four corners, was a landmark of Bandung when the city was first laid out in 1810. Regent Wiranatakusumah II, who is considered the founder of Bandung, built it when the capital of the Bandung regency was moved from the flooded area of Karapyak (Dayeuhkolot) to the present-day location.

In 1810, the Dutch East Indies Governor-General Daendels ordered the city to be resettled near the Grote Postweg (Great Post Road). The road was the main spine of trading activities between the west and east parts of Java (Kartodiwirio, 2006, 15). Regent Wiranatakusumah II chose a site near the holy wells on the western bank of the Cikapundung River, which were supposedly under the protection of the ancient goddess Nyi Kentring Manik (LSAI, 1999). The Regent constructed Bandung’s town centre on the site in accordance with Javanese town planning principles; it featured a main square with the palace (*keraton*) on the south side, the Grand Mosque on the west side and the Pasar Baru market on the eastern side. Meanwhile, to physically symbolise its colonial rule, the Dutch built the Resident Assistant’s office on the north side. Hence, in the early times of the *alun-alun*, the representations of space strongly showed the colonial power of the Dutch over the local population.

Despite the strong presence of the dominant power, historically the Javanese *alun-alun* was central to both the physical and the cultural lives of its people. While it did...
not function as a democratic space, it nonetheless had a more civic nature than its surroundings, although this was mostly symbolic (Lim, 2008, 213). The *alun-alun* was the only part of the palace that was publicly accessible. The space functioned as an arena for delivering opinions and demands to the authorities (Wiryomartono, 1995), for public activities sponsored by the ruler, and for religious ceremonies (Padawangi, 2006) to celebrate the ruling power of the king. This kind of ‘colonised civic space’ (Lim, 2008, 213), as shown in various social histories of Javanese cities, could be a template for future civic actions, a proto-civic space. In the history of popular movements in Indonesia, the *alun-alun* has always been the site of people’s resistance to the authorities, because it is adjacent to government offices. Medan Merdeka Park, the *alun-alun* of Jakarta, was the site of the great meeting in 1946 that pushed for Indonesia’s independence (Lim, 2008, 214). Protesters continued to use the park to challenge the ruling power, symbolised by the Presidential Palace to the north; examples include the student movements of the mid-1960s and 1970s. On 20 May 1998, public spaces in front of local parliaments in various cities across the archipelago – including Manado (North Sulawesi), Palu (Central Sulawesi), Ujung Pandang (now Makassar, South Sulawesi) and Medan (North Sumatra) – hosted demonstrations that pushed for Suharto’s resignation (Suara Pembaruan, 1998).² The Bandung *alun-alun* also saw post-Suharto protests in 1998.³

Unlike typical Javanese *alun-alun*, however, because the entire vicinity of the square had been established under Dutch colonial rule, the *alun-alun* in Bandung retained a different socio-political dynamic. During this period, the Dutch-run state played a dominant role in producing, controlling and manipulating urban spaces, leaving very little room for the locals to be involved. Located in the nexus of Dutch and (local) Regency authorities (north–south) and religious authorities and the market (west–east), the dominant colonial power overshadowed the square; yet struggles and contestation over power continued to permeate the space. During the day people used it for public activities such as ram fights and football; in the evening it became a night market where people shopped, dined and were entertained (Kunto, 1986, 226). In one instance, a protestor held a peaceful protest by sitting down with his wife and children on the grass, wearing white clothes, until the Regent came and heard his complaints (Kunto, 1986, 230). During the pre-independence period (pre-1945), the Dutch authorities used it for the public display of coercive power, for example by

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² Although these protests occurred outside Java, in these cities Dutch power had been mixed with local influences in urban development from the seventeenth century to the first half of the twentieth century. Thus they share similar patterns in terms of power domination in the central urban squares.

³ It was specifically after the removal of Suharto in 1998 that the Presidential Palace started to become a popular target of protests. During Suharto’s New Order regime (1966–98), the Palace and the Medan Merdeka Park were the highest-risk areas for military repression. Therefore, in the 1998 student movement, the Parliament Building was by far the most popular protest target (Padawangi, 2008).
hanging offenders against the forced agriculture system as a public warning.

The appearance of Bandung’s alun-alun changed along with the political and economic landscape of the country. The population of Bandung grew threefold, from 511,000 in 1950 to almost 1.5 million in 1975, as the Indonesian economy peaked under the developmental state led by President Suharto. As manufacturing industries grew on the fringe of Bandung, the alun-alun became a weekly meeting place for migrant workers from rural areas (Kunto, 1986). The oil-boom-driven economic growth shifted Bandung from an economy based on agriculture to ones based on industry, and resulted in rapid urbanisation and speedy commercialisation. From the 1970s to the 1990s, ‘within the semi-capitalist (i.e., state capitalist) systems of the Indonesian New Order under Suharto, the market could enjoy the patronage of the state as long as it could supply the state materially or bolster the state’s domination over society’ (Lim, 2003, 241). Consequently, the market, shoulder-to-shoulder with the state, dominated the production and control of urban spaces. The alun-alun’s surroundings changed to encompass commercial uses: shops, department stores, hotels and offices. The area became a space of consumption for those employed in the surrounding service sector outlets, and others who worked in the growing spaces of production on the city’s periphery (Padawangi, 2006). In the past decade, Bandung has also witnessed a proliferation of shopping malls and factory outlets that have turned urban spaces into spaces of consumption; tourists from Jakarta have flocked to the city to shop and dine. Market domination has outshone even the Grand Mosque. The alun-alun and the Grand Mosque quickly became institutions situated somewhere between the market and the state. These in-between entities are rapidly evolving into a form of shadow state (see Wolch, 1990; Brown, 1997; Mitchell, 2000); public spaces deliver affordable goods and services to the people through street vendors and pedlars. The space also supported the informal sector’s livelihood, unlike the government, which was unable to do so because of rampant corruption and the prioritisation of market interests and elites in urban planning.

The agglomeration of commercial activities encouraged the growth of the informal sector, which shows the divergence between the real lived space and the representations of space. The urban–rural development gap in Indonesia resulted in waves of migrants who dreamed of getting a better future in the city. In 1989, at least 10 per cent of the population in nearby villages worked in the informal sector, which was comparable to the proportion of the population working in the formal sector (van Bruinessen, 1989). During the economic boom, the alun-alun functioned as an open space in a commercial zone, rather than as a governmental or religious symbol (Padawangi, 2006; Setia Budi, 2001). For street vendors who needed crowds and street pedlars who wanted to expose their services to passing trade, the alun-alun was the perfect spot. However, their informal status did not fit with the image of cleanliness and order, and they were stigmatised as eyesores of the alun-alun.
The transformation of Bandung’s *alun-alun* occurred during the encroachment of religion in Indonesian politics, which went further than rhetoric about religious freedom and belief in God. While controversies between moderate groups and Islamists (those who wanted to establish an Islamic state) had taken place since the early days of independence, religious fundamentalist groups in Indonesia mostly started to show themselves publicly after the fall of Suharto.\(^4\) Although the state and civil society may have had an unequal relationship in terms of surveillance and punishment, in the post-1998 era some fundamentalist groups have successfully secured access to social control by becoming pseudo-police or street-police, who penalise those who do not conform to their religious values (LaMoshi, 2006).\(^5\) For example, the Islamic Defenders Front presents its attacks on private establishments as acts of religious cleansing. Its supporters routinely smash ‘twilight’ cafés which are deemed to be violating Islamic values because they have live music and serve alcoholic drinks (BBC News, 2000; MetroTV, 2007), and raid food vendors who operate during Ramadan (MetroTV, 2007). A group of 500 damaged the newly established Playboy office in Jakarta in 2006 because it did not conform to the image of the anti-pornography, *sholeh* (holy) Indonesian. Religion is used to justify violence and to punish ‘inappropriate’ uses and users of urban space.

The Grand Mosque of Bandung managed to retain its cultural-religious and symbolic importance through its historic location and its religious function, catering for Islam as the religion of the majority. It has undergone at least three major renovations since it was first built. Its traditional Javanese three-layered roof (*joglo*) was rebuilt as a Middle Eastern or Eastern European-influenced onion-shaped dome in the 1950s as part of a city beautification project in the lead up to the Asian–African Summit in 1955.\(^6\) This adoption of non-traditional form tied in with political efforts to demonstrate Indonesia’s readiness to join the international community.\(^7\) Interestingly, it occurred under the leadership of Sukarno, who strongly promoted nationalism over religious identity. The reconstruction of the mosque was very much in keeping with

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4 President Sukarno’s nationalist agenda overpowered the Islamists during the founding of the Republic and throughout his presidency, from independence until 1966. Religious fundamentalist groups had to operate underground during the New Order from 1966 to 1998, and it was only in the 1990s that the national political arena observed an ‘Islamic turn’ through the formation of the Muslim Scholars Association (ICMI) and President Suharto’s Haj pilgrimage (Liddle, 1996).

5 Another example is the controversy surrounding the anti-pornography bill of 2006, when fundamentalist religious groups attacked the offices of those who opposed the bill, calling them ‘immoral’ (interview with Yeni Rosa Damayanti, activist, October 2007).

6 The 1955 Asian–African Summit was the foundation of the Non-Aligned Movement, spearheaded by President Sukarno, President Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt) and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (India).

7 B. Setia Budi (2001) noted that the onion-shaped roof form ‘legitimised the use of Middle-Eastern form on the island of Java in the following years’. He cited the examples of the Syuhada Mosque in Yogyakarta (1952) and the Al-Azhar Mosque in Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta (1950).
Sukarno’s attempts to make Indonesia the centre of the new world, with reference to countries outside both the Soviet and US-led blocs (Lim, 2008, 214). Undoubtedly, the roof design was part of Sukarno’s attempts to establish the image of Indonesia as a new world power by showing a familiar prestigious symbol in the city to various country leaders. A similar attempt can be found in the building of Hotel Indonesia and the Welcome monument in Jakarta, which greeted foreign athletes to the Asian Games in 1962 and to the Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEFO). It was not about endorsing religious identity or Islamist political ideology, but rather was part of nationalistic, anti-capitalist and anti-feudalist agenda.

The encroachment of religious function into the alun-alun started in 1974, when the mosque underwent another major renovation. The roof’s shape was changed back to the traditional shape, and a bridge was constructed connecting the second floor of the mosque to the alun-alun. The renovation also included a taller tower than before. The roof reconstruction, as with Sukarno’s effort in the 1950s, was not so much about religious identity. Suharto, who wrested power from Sukarno in a bloody coup, legitimised his power by painting a new type of national identity — New Order rather than Old Order — on urban spaces all over the archipelago. The traditional Javanese roof was restored as a nationalist urban icon of the New Order regime (see Figure 1).
[T]hrough one of his foundations, Yayasan Amal Bakti Muslim Pancasila (YAMP), Suharto located hundreds of mosques with homogenous architecture across the country... The mosque has a Javanese type of roof (joglo) and standardised dimensions. With the homogenous form and design, this mosque became an institution that disciplined the community who used it. In his YAMP mosque, Suharto co-mingled faith with the state, thus magnifying the state’s identity and transforming it into an intangible spiritual level – the divine – and instilled in people the associated fear of divinity with his rule. By locating this mosque in every community, Suharto also created spaces where people disciplined themselves in cultivating their social lives to be in accordance with the will of dominant power. (Lim, 2008, 218)

To emphasise the mosque’s grandeur, in 1980 designers added a large stairway and a gigantic concrete gate to the bridge. Since then, during the celebration of Idul Fitri, the most important Islamic holiday, the alun-alun has temporarily become an extension of the mosque, and mass prayers are held there. Islam as a religious identity has become inseparable from the state’s agenda. In this context, religion served as a nation-state apparatus to legitimise the state’s power.

**Transforming hell to heaven**

With such a history, it was not surprising that the 2000 renovation project of the Grand Mosque included a plan to take over the alun-alun as its plaza. It included the creation of wudhu fountains in the plaza, which made the integration of the alun-alun with the mosque clearer than before. It is important to note that the first attempt to integrate the alun-alun with the mosque, via the overpass bridge, was physically successful but not socially successful. In fact the bridge was often known as the ‘bridge between heaven and hell’. The bridge’s gate remained locked most of the time to prevent people from entering the mosque (heaven) through the alun-alun (hell), although locking it was not in line with the idea of making a connection in the first place. The bridge became famous as the location of nocturnal prostitution at the alun-alun. Therefore, the new development was promoted as an attempt to ‘cure’ a (morally) deteriorating public space.9

This very bold attempt to shift the meaning of the alun-alun from secular to religious took place in the post-authoritarian (post-1998) era, along with the collapse of state legitimacy, a prolonged economic and political crisis, and the rise of civil society. In 1999–2000, the state apparatus (as represented by the regional administra-

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8 *Wudhu* (Arabic) is translated as ‘ablution’ in English. ‘*Wudhu* is a ceremonial act of washing and wiping the hands, face, arms, head and feet before praying or touching the text of the Quran. Without *wudhu* those activities would be void and unlawful’ (Islamic Dictionary, 2008).

9 The project was funded by the provincial government (US$3.3 million), the city (US$1.05 million) and some residents of Bandung (*Bappeda Jabar*, 2007).
tion of Bandung municipality) attempted to make the Islamic character of Bandung prominent as a way to relegitimise its identity through the city beautification project. Embracing this attempt, some Muslim clerics who are affiliated with the West Java Islamic Centre (PUSDAI) came up with the idea of renovating the Grand Mosque and the alun-alun. PUSDAI was developed under the umbrella of a non-governmental organisation named Darma Asri Foundation. However, informally, key personnel at PUSDAI are very much connected to high-ranking officials at the provincial administration office.10

This idea was very much welcomed by both the provincial and the municipal administrations, as well as by the Management Council of the Grand Mosque of Bandung, since for a long time the alun-alun had been criticised, mostly by Muslim clerics and leaders, as being immoral, and the city was under the pressure to clean it up. Both offices agreed to use some money from city and provincial budgets for the project. Not too long after the proposal, in 2000, the Development Committee of the Grand Mosque of Bandung was established (see Figure 2). It consisted of some individuals from PUSDAI, the Management Council of Grand Mosque, the admin-

10 In 1987, PUSDAI successfully gained financial and legal support from the provincial administration office to secure land and even expand the mosque and the Islamic Centre at the centre of Bandung.
istration offices of West Java province and Bandung city municipality, and the Provincial Planning Bureau. They directly appointed a design team consisting of Keulman, Slamet Wirasonjaya (who was the planner/architect of the PUSDAI mosque), and Ahmad Noe’man.11

Unlike previous renovation projects, this is not solely a state project, so different representations of space are potentially involved. The success of this project is closely tied with the successful lobbying of certain individuals and groups within civil society, namely Muslim clerics from PUSDAI and the Management Council of the Grand Mosque Bandung. However, civil society is not and never has been a homogeneous entity; it is diverse, and can represent various interests. For example, while Muslim clerics joined forces with municipal and provincial administration officials in putting forward the project, the Bandung Heritage Association, one of the associations concerned with the conservation of culture in Bandung, was very much against it.

Harastuti, the chairperson of the Bandung Heritage Association, said that in 2000 Muslim clerics and regional administration officials invited the association for a discussion on the proposal to renovate the Grand Mosque. From the beginning, the eagerness to turn the *alun-alun* into a complement to the mosque had been clear. Harastuti said: ‘We differed in opinion with the *ulama* [Muslim clerics] but lost the debate. They wanted only the glory of Islam, while we wanted them not to forget the city’s history and identity’ (Suwarni, 2005).

Opposition to the plans came not only from Harastuti and her Bandung Heritage Association; some other civil society actors, such as the Indonesian Institute of Architectural Historians, various architects, urban design practitioners, academics and journalists were also against the idea. Dr Martokusumo, a Professor of Architecture at the Bandung Institute of Technology, claimed the reconstruction plan lacked public transparency. He criticised the public forum held by the planners as ‘too little, too late’ because it occurred shortly before the construction started, when everything had been decided (Martokusumo, 2001).

The power of the pro-renovation network, supported by some individuals in the private sector (PT Waskita Karya) (see Figure 2), was overwhelming. Despite some delays due to financial constraints, the project continued until its completion in early 2007.

**Eliminating sex in the city**

Within just two years, the mosque has changed from being a combination of Middle Eastern and Sundanese styles to being similar to Taj Mahal Mosque... Believe it or

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11 Keulman, one of the architects, stated that the new Grand Mosque would echo the atmosphere of Masjidil Haram in Mecca and Masjid Nabawi in Madinah, because the Bandung Mosque’s location resembled the two holy mosques, in the midst of a business district (Kompas, 2003).
Figure 3 The renovated Grand Mosque of Bandung with its tower. Photograph: Yulian Firdaus, 2007. Reproduced by permission of the photographer.
not, the beauty and the grandeur of the Grand Mosque of Bandung can be seen from afar. As soon as visitors place their feet in the plaza of the mosque, they can see the beauty of its twin towers. The towers are 81 metres high ... the tallest buildings in Bandung... From its top visitors can enjoy the views of Bandung... Now, the tower has become a religious tourism object that attracts many tourists. (Dinar, 2007, translated from Indonesian)

The new alun-alun (see Figure 3) is distinct from its previous form because of the changing physical representation and spatial relationships with its surroundings. One major change is its integration with the Grand Mosque of Bandung, which now looks like the Taj Mahal mosque (Pikiran Rakyat, 2003). Two-thirds of the square has become the mosque’s plaza, and the rest is a parking area. Although it had always been located opposite the mosque, before the latest renovation project the alun-alun had been an independent square, a centre rather than part of something else. It was the nexus where the everyday bustle of life – political, cultural, religious and economic – fused. Now that it has become a part of a religious entity, it is fair to ask whether the square can still be open to a broad spectrum of society. The mosque’s takeover of the alun-alun is also an example of how religion as a symbol of righteousness is used to justify control over public space.

Ideally, people think of central urban squares as their outdoor living rooms, where they feel connected to their city and fellow citizens (Low, 2000; Carr et al., 1992; Webb, 1990). However, patterns of design and management that exclude some people and reduce social and cultural diversity have existed throughout history, and these practices reflect social inequality in civil society. As much as the Athenian agora is glorified as an archetypal civic space (Kitto, 2003; Webb, 1990), women and slaves were excluded. In the early twentieth century, ‘black children who went to [New York’s Central Park] faced the taunts of white youths’, which signified how the park ‘has not always been equally accessible to all New Yorkers’ (Rosenzweig and Blackmar, 1992, 7). In some cases this exclusion is the result of a conscious project to weed out the ‘undesirables’, and in others it is a by-product of privatisation, commercialisation, historic preservation, gentrification, and other strategies of design and planning. Nonetheless, these practices undermine the very concept of public space, which relies on the diversity of users for its vitality and vibrancy (Mitchell, 2003). The cross-class and multicultural uses of public space create a range of space interpretations and social constructions, which opens up possibilities of interactions, tensions and ever-changing territorial markings (Chaffee, 1993, 17–18) that are the main ingredients of an active public realm (Padawangi, 2008).

In the case of Bandung’s new alun-alun, the design might encourage more tourists and residents to visit. Pious people, who previously were hesitant to visit the square

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12 On the social construction of space, see Low, 2000.
because of its infamous reputation, can now sit there without feeling ashamed or unsafe. Less than a decade ago, the alun-alun was notorious for the nocturnal activities of its sex workers and their customers. Some Bandung residents see this transformation from ‘sexual’ to ‘religious’ as a positive thing.

For some, such as 32-year-old Asep Romli, the transformation is not beneficial. Asep is a vendor of bottled drinks and cigarettes in front of the fountain on the west side of the alun-alun. As someone who earns a living there night and day, Asep sees the night workers as sources of his income: ‘I sell things to ordinary people during the day, but at night my customers are sex workers. Well, for me they are just customers. What matters to me most is that what I do is not something my religion forbids’ (Suwarni, 2005).

In 2000, when the renovation of the mosque and the square started, Asep and dozens of sex workers lost their livings. Currently, Asep rents a room in a narrow alley somewhere in downtown Bandung and has moved his small business to the eastern side of the square. Just like the majority of Bandung residents, Asep is a Muslim. But, as with other Indonesian Muslims, Islam is not his only identity. He is also an Indonesian, a Sundanese, a husband and a father who tries his best to be a responsible provider for his family. He has a right to the city, and to the square, as do other street vendors, sex workers and other residents of Bandung.

The transformation of the alun-alun into a religious square is an attempt to cut corners; to make urban social problems invisible without curing them. Prostitution is an easy target; it distracts the public from other social problems. To city authorities, eliminating eyesores such as prostitutes and street vendors is an effective way to improve the city, to cleanse it, as if the violation of moral codes is the only explanation for the declining quality of life. In reality, the informal sector is part and parcel of urban public spaces, but the marginalised lack the ability to influence policies.

This article does not claim that prostitution is ‘better’ than religious activities, or that prostitutes and street vendors are more important than religious people and tourists. However, it does argue that each and every urban-dweller has a right to the city, and that the shared nature of public space in the city should bring people of diverse ways of life together, thus subverting simple systems of social control. In fact, elite notions of the modern, ordered city depend upon a large body of poor and marginalised labourers to maintain physical appearances and to service leisured lifestyles. For the men and women who earn their livelihoods working in public spaces as street-sweepers, vendors, night-guards, gardeners, shoe-shiners, newspaper hawks, porters, domestic servants or even prostitutes, city life embodies other experiences, agendas and aspirations.
Monuments [and historic sites] are human landmarks which men have created as symbols for their deals, their aims and for their actions. Monuments [and historic sites] have to satisfy the external demand of the people for translation of their collective force into symbols. (Sert et al., 1958, 48)

Bandung’s alun-alun is important not only to street vendors and sex workers. Nearly every Bandung resident has his or her own memory of the alun-alun. For some, it was a place to hang out and chat with friends. For others, it holds various nostalgic memories: cultural, social, political or even romantic.¹³

Redefining and preserving the quality of public spaces is one way for citizens to connect with their city and their community. The sustainability of public spaces depends on what kind of connection people have with it. ‘Physical reminders provide a sense of place attachment, continuity and connectedness… that plays a significant role… in our “place-identity” or “cultural identity” as members of families or ethnic groups’ (Low, 2000, 245). Achmad Tardiyana, an urban designer in Bandung, remembered the alun-alun as the centre of Independence Day celebrations; he also remembered playing football there when it was still an open grass field (Padawangi, 2006). The more people see the relevance in the public space, the more they are connected to that space. In the Bandung-based Pikiran Rakyat newspaper, an article by Aam Permana (2005, translated from Indonesian) said that ‘the huge space called alun-alun in front of the West Java Grand Mosque seems to have been eradicated.’ The new alun-alun does not present local people’s (hi)stories in the space, but has become a place-breaking gesture removing physical representations of past memories to build a completely new religious tourism site.

Regrettably, most historic and monumental sites, by definition, are permanent lasting structures with a unifying authority: one truth, one history, one memory, one ideology, one identity. Authorities build monuments to preserve values deemed important in society, regardless of whether the values represent the actual aspirations of the people. This brings Friedmann (2007) to claim that monumental sites cannot be places, because the role of the state is so strong that it dominates the people’s voices. According to one of the architects, the rebuilding of alun-alun was supposed to provide a symbol that the city could be proud of, and the 81-metre towers (see Figure 3) enable tourists to see Bandung from above (Padawangi, 2006). These aims have been achieved; according to a report by Radio Mustika, a local radio station in Bandung, the new Grand Mosque had been crowded with visitors since the completion of its renovation. The towers have become a popular attraction; a junior high student from a local Islamic school claimed that he visited them almost every day with friends, and tourists are delighted with the views of Bandung (Radio Mustika, 2008). However, the

¹³ Based on various interviews conducted in June–July 2007 and July–August 2008 by Merlyna Lim.
new design assumes a homogeneous and universal vision of a religious *alun-alun*; since the universality and homogeneity of the public is a myth (Mitchell, 2003), the *alun-alun* has become a socially unjust space that has alienated certain groups.

For me, it is not that [the new *alun-alun*] is less comfortable, but it is less public when compared to the old one. In the past I felt that I had the right to use the *alun-alun*. I could just hang out there drinking my bottled tea... Now it feels like it belongs to the mosque. I do not feel it is appropriate to just hang out there. (Abi-ha-ha cited in Firdaus, 2007, translated from Indonesian)

The shadow of the twin towers of the Grand Mosque, the splashing water of *wudhu* fountains and the sound of the *azan* define the communal authority of one kind of identity while simultaneously obscuring personal experiences.

## Conclusions

The rebuilding of the *alun-alun* has wiped out marginalised groups and alienated locals. Conflicts of interests among civil society groups over how the *alun-alun* should develop reflected the importance of the place, but the marginalised had few opportunities to voice their aspirations. The Bandung Heritage Association is one of the main civil society groups that were disappointed by the authorities’ decision to carry out a religious renovation. However, at least the association was able to participate in the formal debate to decide the future of the *alun-alun*, unlike street vendors and sex workers who were unable to affect decision-making about their public space.

Although Indonesian politics separate religion from the state, religious ideology provides ways to pursue a *sholeh* (holy) Indonesian society, free from Western phenomena such as *Playboy* magazine. Religion’s central role in defining justice and decency throughout Indonesian society translates into the beautification of urban space as a perceived cure for urban problems. Yet this type of physical change in the cityscape denies the actual social problems caused by capitalism: gaps in wealth and education that drive the marginalised to make their living through the informal economy. Rather than solving the urban problems previously visible in that space, the new *alun-alun* simply displaced them. The way in which the remodelled *alun-alun* represented religious virtues instead of prostitution became more important than the space itself. The remodelling is a civil society-initiated project, but it satisfies some groups in civil society while alienating others.

While various civil society groups have a spectrum of interests and aspirations regarding the *alun-alun*, the state continues to validate its authority over urban public spaces, especially one as central as the *alun-alun*. As much as state authority declined

14 The *azan* or *athan* (Arabic) is ‘the call to pray recited before prayers commence; it is done to make people aware that the prayer is going to begin’ (Islamic Dictionary, 2008).
Contesting alun-alun

after Suharto’s dictatorship ended in 1998, the state remains the actor that controls decision making with regard to public urban spaces. The 1998 Reform Movement brought a legitimacy crisis, which caused the state to become an opportunist actor that would side with other actors (civil society groups and private sector interests) in the decision-making process. The shift from a repressive to an opportunistic state gives opportunities for civil society to participate in political decision making, including decisions about urban public spaces. Compared to the pre-1998 situation, the participation of the Bandung Heritage Association, journalists and activists in the early planning stages reflected a civil society that has grown to claim its rights over public spaces. Whether these claims can be successful remains to be seen, but even incremental changes towards participatory planning are meaningful steps.

The city is a place where difference thrives, and so the right of various people and groups to inhabit the city is always a cause of struggle. Different people with different projects struggle with one another over the shape of the city, the terms of access to the public realm, and even rights to citizenship. The new alun-alun is an example of how the state and religious groups in civil society can work to change the built environment, overshadowing the prevalence of the market on the site through religion.

The new space imposed a homogenised order, denying the existing bricolage of polarised images in urban spaces. Civil society is an important dimension and should be included in place-making processes, especially for spaces as public as the alun-alun. However, rather than simply celebrating the role of civil society, it is important to recognise it as complex entity that represents differences. The case of Bandung’s alun-alun shows that while one civil society group was able to exercise control over the space and re-enforce its identities and values, others struggle to claim their rights to the city. The challenge is to maintain the plural public realm by translating the differences of civil society into the shared nature of public space in the city. While it is impossible to achieve an ideal public space, an alun-alun that represents more than just one kind of cultural image – more than just a certain religion – where people from different religions and cultures can sit down without feeling out of place, is definitely more desirable.

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