# Guarding the Viruses Away: Gardu, Moral Panic, and Pandemic Reflections in Yogyakarta

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## Abstract

Historical narratives highlight the gardu, a bamboo gateway structure, as a traditional Javanese technology for neighborhood security. During the initial three months of the COVID-19 pandemic, a resurgence of gardu construction was observed in Yogyakarta as communities adapted this cultural practice to shield themselves from the virus. These structures became a means of mitigating both the pandemic's spread and the accompanying flood of panic-inducing rumors. Communities increasingly viewed outsiders as potential virus carriers, often metaphorically equating them to thieves or malevolent forces threatening their safety. This paper explores the community's experience in responding to the coronavirus crisis through the immediate construction of gardu in urban housing complexes. It examines how moral panic shaped community perceptions and actions, such as the erection of these structures to create physical and symbolic barriers against outsiders. Also, this study explore the community perception of gardu after the pandemic. Ethnographic research, including observations and interviews, was conducted in two gated hamlets in Yogyakarta. Additional data were sourced from prior studies on community responses to pandemics, with a focus on experiences from 2020, and their current perception of gardu after the pandemic. This study seeks to analyze gardu as a local, culturally embedded form of lockdown, assessing its effectiveness from an anthropological perspective. It also aims to reflect on the ways in which pandemic situations disrupt community behaviors and to draw lessons for future crisis preparedness; as well as decribe the community changing perception towards gardu and the post pandemic situation.

Keywords: COVID-19, Gardu, Moral Panic, Reflection, Surveillance, Yogyakarta

## Introduction[1]

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Indonesian government, led by President Joko Widodo, initially refused to impose a lockdown, despite global recommendations to restrict movement between countries. While the public demanded stronger government safeguards, social and economic activities continued in the name of national development.

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[1] This article is dedicated to all of COVID-19's bereaved families and survivors, both live and die. We really hope, if a pandemic hits us again someday, we can learn from this article.

On the ground, however, the situation was different. Informal laborers, who relied on daily wages for survival, faced an urgent dilemma: how would they sustain themselves if isolation deprived them of income, savings, and social security benefits (ILO, 2022)? Meanwhile, some middle- and upper-class individuals urged the state to enforce restrictions, prioritizing public health over economic concerns. After a month and a half of mounting pressure, Jokowi finally introduced Pembatasan Sosial Skala Besar (Large-Scale Social Restrictions or LSSR), limiting activities in schools, government offices, public spaces, and transportation, among others. The government popularized the slogan "work, pray, and study from home" as part of its mediated response.

In Yogyakarta, however, the local response diverged from the national narrative. The Yogyakarta Sultanate expressed skepticism about the necessity of lockdowns, suggesting that the virus could be managed through medical treatment—as long as people maintained self-discipline (Lazuardi, 2020). The Sultanate's silence reassured the public that there was no need for excessive concern, provided individuals stayed home except for essential activities.

This cautious optimism, however, was soon overshadowed by a surge in media coverage amplifying fears. Yogyakarta was increasingly portrayed as a city under siege, with rising case numbers and deaths dominating the news. Stories of rapid local transmission heightened public anxiety, while television and digital platforms reinforced a sense of looming danger. Similar patterns were observed in Jakarta, Semarang, and Bandung, where responses reflected collective efforts to resist the perceived existential threat of COVID-19 (Purba, 2020). Media and government narratives fueled widespread fear, prompting people to retreat into their homes—not merely in compliance with regulations, but as a means of self-preservation (Sari et al., 2022).

The fear of scarcity led to panic buying, with residents stockpiling food and essential goods in anticipation of shortages. Once-bustling streets emptied, and commercial districts fell silent. In response to the overwhelming influx of alarming news, local communities took security into their own hands, initiating village lockdowns (Semedi, 2021). Warnings about unclear safety measures and the dangers of unchecked movement spread rapidly, fueling public anxiety (Brown & Hanlon, 2014). This panic translated into physical barriers—Yogyakarta residents reinstalled gardu, small sentry posts traditionally used in Javanese culture for community security, at the entrances of hamlets to regulate movement and restrict outsiders.

This paper explores how gardu—a traditional bamboo gateway structure in Javanese culture—resurfaced as a localized security measure during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic in Yogyakarta. Historically associated with neighborhood defense (Kusno, 2006), the gardu became a tool for communities to manage perceived threats, reinforcing a politics of anxiety (Hier, 2011) driven by fears of outsiders as potential virus carriers. By constructing these symbolic and functional barriers, Yogyakarta's residents sought to protect their neighborhoods from both the virus and the onslaught of fear-inducing media coverage. This study examines how gardu shaped local lockdown practices and how community perceptions have evolved as the pandemic has subsided.

## Method

Data for this study were collected from two sites: Pradi, a village, and Ondok, a housing complex, both of which had installed portals—barriers similar to traditional gardu. All data were gathered during the earliest stage of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Gardu were examined both as a physical and social space to better articulate and contextualize the broad concept of lockdown within Yogyakarta's local setting. The implementation of these portals was primarily driven by community gatherings, with their main function

being to monitor and regulate entry and exit points. Residents, typically congregating in a 2x4 meter space, would sit together with coffee, cigarettes, and drinks in hand, conducting portal surveillance—as if socializing in this manner was the most effective way to counter the virus. This practice became a widespread coping mechanism across kampung-kampung (urban villages) in Yogyakarta, where nearly every neighborhood established similar protective measures.

Pradi and Ondok were selected as research sites because they actively sought to shield their communities from COVID-19, yet their practices contradicted the government's Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). For example, while the portals were intended to block outsiders—requiring them to wear masks and wash their hands before entering—residents frequently gathered in small, enclosed spaces. These gatherings, led by self-appointed "guardians" of the community, involved sharing coffee, cigarettes, and even alcohol, often from the same glass. Ironically, while enforcing strict measures on outsiders, residents would remove their masks to smoke, drink, and socialize. This behavior underscores how the community perceived the virus as an external threat while overlooking the risks of internal transmission, positioning the gardu more as a symbol of defense against outsiders rather than a comprehensive health measure.

Our research employed qualitative methods, including informal interviews and participant observation, to capture these community dynamics. Additionally, we conducted a literature review to analyze historical and policy data, situating the gardu's role within a broader pandemic response framework. Through our fieldwork in Pradi and Ondok, we shift our analysis toward reflective ethnographic narratives, exploring how Yogyakarta residents navigated daily life during the pandemic. Drawing on Elliott and Wolf-Meyer (2023), this approach highlights the subjective experiences of the ethnographer, revealing how traditional surveillance practices, such as the gardu, reemerged amidst moral panic. Ultimately, this study exposes the complexities and contradictions in how local communities

balanced traditional security measures with national health directives during the pandemic.

## Results and Discussion

### Gardu as a Form of Reaction to Panicness

For the people of Yogyakarta, COVID-19 was as terrifying as it was imagined to be—an external threat, a societal enemy embodied by strangers (De Rosa & Mannarini, 2021). The assumption that the virus could be transmitted by anyone, anywhere, compelled the community to adopt a new, disciplined approach to managing the outbreak. These attitudes and behaviors intensified over time, fueling persistent daily fears that ultimately materialized in the form of gardu. This phenomenon reflects the mechanization of fear as a tool for social control and regulation in urban settings (Barker, 2018).

These characteristics align with urban neighborhood life, as described by Newberry (2006), where communities are shaped not only by mutual cooperation—known as gotong royong—but also by heightened surveillance and suspicion (Lazuardi, 2020). While comparable, though not identical, to traditional night watch practices (ronda), these localized security efforts mirrored historical precedents. Ronda, a longstanding tradition ensuring local safety, typically revolves around pos ronda—designated posts where residents take turns conducting night patrols and socializing during the day (Barker, 2018; Kusno, 2010). Strategically positioned throughout neighborhoods, these posts serve both as security hubs and communal gathering spaces.

From a closer perspective, Semedi (2021) argues that local communities primarily responded to the pandemic through individual and collective policies, such as establishing village lockdowns to restrict outsider access. This reaction emerged before direct encounters with the virus occurred, fueled by a moral panic that preceded actual infection cases (Semedi, 2021: 14). Our study in Yogyakarta goes beyond examining immediate pandem-

ic responses; instead, it explores how gardu represents a deeper, longstanding element of Javanese culture. As Abidin Kusno (2010) highlights, the gardu is not merely a product of contemporary crises but an artifact with deep historical roots in urban Java. It has long functioned as a vital mechanism for community defense, policing, and surveillance, filling the gaps left by state security failures.

The emergence of gardu surveillance and moral panic provides insight into how an anomalous situation challenged the Javanese social order, particularly in risk management. This extends beyond moralized politics, as identified by Hier (2008), and disrupts previously established social equilibria. Historically, gardu has played a crucial role in organizing community life, ranging from simple bamboo structures in rural areas to permanent brick buildings in cities. These structures were not just functional outposts but also repositories of collective memory and territorial identity. Kusno's analysis of gardu as a symbol of urban memory and political power reveals its role in regulating public narratives and reinforcing territorial defense across different historical periods.

In Yogyakarta's pandemic response, the re-establishment of gardu at hamlet entrances mirrored this historical continuity. Initially, gardu were exclusive to noble housing complexes, serving as fortified boundaries against external threats. However, following the VOC and Dutch East Indies era, gardu evolved into tools of governance, used by the *Kraton* (Sultanate) to impose rigid village administrative boundaries. Over time, they were strategically positioned across urban landscapes—spanning ditches, sidewalks, street junctions, kampung entrances, and even the gates of commercial buildings and private residences (Kusno, 2010: 224).

Following the May 1998 riots, gardu also resurfaced as symbols of chaos, insecurity, and ethnic tensions, particularly among Chinese-Indonesian communities (Kusno, 2006: 225). During the New Order era, these structures became monuments of public trust in localized security measures, with residents relying on gardu and portals as safeguards against unwanted intrusions. However, the rise of modern policing technologies, such as CCTV surveillance, gradually replaced traditional portal surveillance. Nonetheless, ronda (night patrols)—the foundational practice of gardu—persisted, carried out by groups of adult men dedicated to alerting the neighborhood about security threats.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, as modern media amplified fears—leading to panic-buying and deserted streets—the gardu stood as a physical manifestation of long-standing communal resilience. The local implementation of these structures illustrates a form of grassroots governance, deeply rooted in cultural traditions of order and protection. Far from being a new invention, the gardu resurfaced not only as a territorial defense mechanism but also as a way to safeguard the social fabric of the community. This reflects the persistent modality of Javanese urban life, bridging both historical practices and contemporary crises.

In the following sections, we examine two distinct yet comparable cases from Pradi and Ondok, two hamlets in Yogyakarta. Both exhibited peculiar and asynchronous relationships with the virus, revealing how local communities negotiated traditional security measures alongside modern public health directives.

## From Spreading Rumours to Institutionalising *Gardu*

Geographically, Pradi is located near Ring Road Street, a major highway in Yogyakarta. The area of Pradi consists of housing complexes with approximately 80 families and is divided into three Neighborhood Associations (Rukun Tetangga or RT). The residents work in various occupations, including civil servants, private-sector employees, landlords, lecturers, domestic workers, small-medium entrepreneurs, students, and informal workers in construction, tourism, and the service sector (mostly drivers). However, when the pandemic spread in Yogyakarta around mid-April

2020, many Pradi residents lost their jobs. In response to this economic hardship, discussions began on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within the community. To address these concerns, the Head of the Neighborhood Association convened a community meeting to seek solutions. This meeting resulted in the formation of the COVID-19 Task Force (Satgas COVID-19).

The task force was composed of the Head of RT, mosque caretakers, and men under 50 who voluntarily participated in the meeting. Although its name was similar to the official Indonesian COVID-19 Task Force, it had no formal connection to the national initiative. The community task force implemented three key prevention measures: 1) The establishment of a gardu (security post) and enforcement of surveillance rules; 2) Mandatory body temperature checks for anyone entering the complex; and 3) Posting official COVID-19 health protocols from the Ministry of Health. While these measures were largely secular in nature, the mosque caretakers also decided to suspend Friday prayers, a significant religious obligation for Muslim men, as an additional precaution.

Despite these efforts, some residents felt the task force had been formed too late. One villager remarked, *"Wes telat sesasi ngurus pageblug"*—which translates to "We are already a month late in addressing the pandemic." Residents noted that social media and online news portals showed that other villages and housing complexes had already established similar initiatives a month earlier.

The meeting also led to an agreement that only one gate would remain open for 24-hour guarded access, with shifts assigned among residents. This decision revived the concept of "ronda" (night patrols)—a traditional security practice that had disappeared over the past 15 years. In recent years, the number of wealthy homeowners working in Jakarta but owning property in the complex had increased, leading to the decline of ronda traditions. However, during the COVID-19 era, "*ronda*" was

revived in the form of portal surveillance, with strict rules aimed at preventing the rise in active cases.



*Figure 1. A portal in the entrance to kampung in Yogyakarta. Source: Pujo Semedi (the picture above is only an illustration).*

The implementation of portal surveillance inevitably led to rumors and gossip among local residents, circulating through WhatsApp groups and casual conversations. These concerns were further amplified by a controversial decision from the Minister of Law and Human Rights, Yasonna Laoly, on April 20, 2020, to release 38,822 prisoners under an assimilation program in accordance with Menkumham Regulation No. 10 of 2020. The release of convicts, including robbers, murderers, and political prisoners, heightened public anxiety, reinforcing suspicion towards strangers and outsiders.

One widespread rumor concerned maling drop-dropan—a belief that outsiders, particularly incoming migrants, were not only potential thieves but also carriers of the virus. The rumor spread through social media and casual discussions, with claims such as:

> *"Di tengah pandemi, ada maling yang sengaja dikirim menggunakan bus-bus ke kampung-kampung dan komplek-komplek di Jogja." ("During the pandemic, thieves were intentionally sent by buses to villages and housing complexes in Jogja.")*

This gossip gained traction and became a common topic of conversation. Many Pradi residents believed that organized criminal groups

were being sent to villages to steal valuables, particularly during unguarded moments at the portal. However, in reality, these rumors only exacerbated moral panic, fostering unfounded suspicion and fear of outsiders.

Over time, entry restrictions tightened, and outsiders were outright barred from accessing the complex. However, some local residents opposed this policy, as outsiders contributed to the local economy by working in fish ponds and rice fields. They feared that strict prohibitions could escalate into long-term village conflicts, which they sought to avoid.

For many Pradi residents, outsiders were perceived as potential virus carriers, which led to mandatory health protocols for non-residents. These included handwashing before entering the gate, wearing a mask at all times; and disinfectant spraying for motorcycles and cars upon entry. Ironically, local residents were not subject to the same rules. Many dismissed the need for immediate handwashing upon entry, saying:

> *"Rasah, wong tekan omah yo do langsung wisuh." ("No need to wash here; I'll wash up as soon as I get home.")*

Despite the strict surveillance measures, discussions about COVID-19 were rarely heard at the portal post. Instead, guards—often young men—passed the time by chatting, sharing meals, playing cards, and even drinking alcohol from the same glass, raising concerns about their own adherence to health protocols.

The residents guarding the portal were predominantly from the lower-complex area in the south of the village, near the river. Economically, they were less affluent than those from the upper-complex area in the north. Most of these guards were freelancers, daily laborers, online motorcycle drivers, or vehicle brokers, whose incomes had been significantly affected by the pandemic.

Interestingly, rather than expressing frustra-

tion, they often joked sarcastically about their financial struggles, using humor to cope with their reduced income.

Meanwhile, online motorcycle drivers delivering food to the complex were subject to intense scrutiny by the portal guards, who would ask:

> *"Whose house are you visiting? Are you delivering food or picking someone up?"*

Such questioning, which did not exist before the pandemic, reflected a growing distrust toward outsiders, despite their essential role in food delivery and transportation.

## Fear of the "Phantom" Outsider

One unique aspect of Ondok Village was the way outsiders were imagined as phantoms or ghosts capable of spreading the virus. This perception was rooted in assumptions and prejudice, rather than scientific evidence.

Over time, these fears intensified. By late April, restrictions became even stricter, prohibiting online motorcycle drivers from entering the village. Customers were required to pick up their orders at the portal, reinforcing the belief that delivery workers posed a higher risk than local laborers—despite both interacting with strangers daily.

The fear of outsiders was a socially constructed moral panic, fueled by the invisible nature of the virus. Residents struggled to define the real enemy—was it the virus itself or the people perceived to carry it? This othering of outsiders as "infected" or "dangerous" mirrors past public fears, such as the HIV/AIDS panic in Indonesia.

As Kroeger (2003) noted, HIV/AIDS-related fears led people to stigmatize certain individuals as "vectors of disease", rather than confronting the virus itself. Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, suspicion fell on outsiders, rather than addressing broader public

health challenges. This process of stigmatization and control created a division between the "infected" and "uninfected", even when there was no clear evidence of actual transmission.

Much like Pradi, the residents of Ondok Village—which consisted of 75-85 families across two Neighborhood Associations (RTs)—faced similar issues. Although the village was densely populated, pandemic-related meetings were held online rather than in person.

The community's awareness of COVID-19 was triggered by news on Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. Their decision to implement portal surveillance was influenced by military patrols in the area, reinforcing the necessity of physical barriers to control movement.

The surveillance plan included three portals, with two completely closed and only one remaining open for restricted access. However, as in Pradi, many of the portal guards—mostly construction workers, students, and daily laborers—did not fully adhere to health protocols.

One informant described the portal as a place of amusement, saying:

> "Because our earnings have decreased due to the pandemic, people started to find amusement. So, guarding the portal became a form of entertainment."

As a result, it was common to see guards removing masks, laughing together, and engaging in social activities, rather than enforcing strict health measures.

At the same time, village officials took the pandemic seriously. They urged migrants from Ondok living outside Yogyakarta not to return home during Eid Al-Fitr. Additionally, Friday prayers were limited to local residents only, reinforcing the perception that COVID-19 transmission came from outsiders.

**The End of Portal Surveillance**

The portal surveillance measures in Pradi and Ondok remained in place until July 2020, when President Joko Widodo declared the transition to a "new normal". As people returned to work, the strict village surveillance practices gradually faded, marking the end of a period of heightened fear, restriction, and moral panic.

**Navigating New Normal: Moral Panic, *Ronda*, and Folk Devils**

If the previous discussion suggests that folk devils can be culturally constructed as either individuals or invisible forces personifying the virus, then it is evident that society felt compelled to act—and to be seen acting—to prevent the spread of the virus. This response arose primarily from moral panic, which, as Brown & Hanlon (2014) argue, leads to the creation of rules that communicate and reinforce perceived risks. In this context, the implementation of portal surveillance served as a theatrical performance of risk management, ultimately obscuring the real threats faced by the community.

In our article, we examine moral panic as a form of "risk management," wherein actions are often assumed to be effective simply because the existence of perceived deviants or folk devils justifies them. The enforcement of portal surveillance in Pradi, for example, was intended to limit the virus's spread but can also be seen as an example of moral panic in action. Despite its widespread implementation, there were no formal regulations governing portal surveillance in Yogyakarta. As Monod (2017) emphasizes, studies of panic should begin by analyzing concrete, on-the-ground reactions. In this case, the establishment of portal surveillance reflects how collective anxiety materialized into physical and social restrictions during the pandemic.

Beyond subjective fears, mass media played a significant role in amplifying paranoia and panic surrounding COVID-19. Rather than providing balanced, science-based information about the virus and its mitigation, digital

media often sensationalized incidents, fueling misinformation and excessive control measures (Petric, 2020). The Indonesian Cyber Media Association (AMSI) recognized this issue, with Chairman Wenseslaus Manggut cautioning media outlets against spreading content that incites public panic, as such coverage does little to prevent transmission or assist those affected.

However, these concerns did not prevent the public from readily accepting and internalizing exaggerated narratives. WhatsApp, in particular, became a breeding ground for misinformation, reinforcing the legitimacy of portal surveillance as a necessary measure. As seen in Pradi and Ondok, these localized restrictions both territorialized social mobility and attempted to contain the virus within rigidly controlled entry and exit points. Yet, the construction of folk devils—those perceived as virus carriers—ultimately served more to manage fear than to prevent infection.

Still, rules are rules. They emerge whenever risks and benefits are weighed, particularly when government measures prove insufficient, leaving local communities to implement their own adaptive strategies for pandemic control.



*Figure 2. "Foreigners are prohibited to pass to kampung (translated from Javanese)" stated in the banner. Source: Pujo Semedi (the picture above is only an illustration)*

The process of portal surveillance in the creation of portal villages temporarily legitimized an episode of panic, justifying the invisible threat of the coronavirus. We argue that this phenomenon aligns with Cohen's (2011)

concept of "folk devils," in which societal fears are personified. The concept of *maling drop-dropan* (foreign-incomer thief) and the portrayal of the virus as "stranger people" or unwelcome guests who posed an immediate threat to locals further amplified the anxieties surrounding COVID-19. This crisis can be analyzed through Cohen's five-stage model of moral panic (Petric, 2020).

In the first stage, perceptions were constructed to define a person (a stranger) or an entity (the virus) as a threat to social norms and communal well-being. In the second stage, as previously discussed, the media simplified and symbolized this threat in a recognizable form. Indonesian cyber media, for example, employed moral panic rhetoric from the early days of the pandemic. The third stage involved community responses—specifically, the establishment of portal villages in places like Pradi and Ondok—as a direct manifestation of the moral panic, reinforcing the portrayal of folk devils. Despite these efforts, the fourth stage highlights the lack of intervention by the Special Region of Yogyakarta government, leading local communities to take matters into their own hands. Finally, in the fifth stage, we argue that the moral panic surrounding the pandemic was ultimately redefined through social changes within the community, as seen in the shift from strict portal surveillance to other adaptive measures. Cohen's framework thus provides a valuable lens for understanding these developments in Pradi and Ondok.

Historically, *ronda*—community night patrols—were institutionalized during colonial rule and later reinforced under Soeharto's government, becoming part of everyday life. These structures, including *gardu* (guard posts) and portals, were originally intended for security against crime and external threats. Over time, they became a routine aspect of local governance.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the *ronda* tradition took on new significance, as the virus itself was personified as a foreign threat. Lacking tangible evidence of virus's pres-

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ence, residents sought more comprehensible explanations, linking its spread to outsiders and reinforcing the need for visible preventive measures. This discussion underscores that the pandemic was not only a health crisis but also a driver of broader social change, reshaping community structures and responses to perceived threats.

## What Remained After the Pandemic?

The portals, however, did not last long. Within two and a half to four months, residents of Pradi and Ondok began contracting COVID-19 despite their strict surveillance efforts. As a result, the *gardu* and portals were gradually abandoned. However, handwashing stations, consisting of large barrels with soap, remained in place, accompanied by signs instructing both locals and visitors to wash their hands upon entry. According to internal community discussions and government explanations, residents believed handwashing could effectively eliminate the virus.

As vaccination campaigns gained momentum in early 2021, these stations also disappeared, marking a shift from physical surveillance to biomedical prevention. With the pandemic receding, the role of *gardu* also diminished. While some residents continue to see them as valuable for community solidarity and security, many regard them as relics of an urgent but temporary response. We argue that *gardu* were primarily a crisis-driven adaptation rather than a lasting public health measure. In some areas, they have reverted to their original function as neighborhood security posts rather than tools of pandemic management.

As perceptions of the virus evolved—shifting from an uncontrollable, invisible threat to a more manageable risk, particularly with vaccination—so too did attitudes toward *gardu*. Early in the pandemic, these structures played a central role in communal defense, but as scientific understanding improved, their importance declined. Today, *gardu* serve as historical artifacts of a past crisis, prompting reflection on the effectiveness of local, collec-

tive action versus the need for more structured governmental responses in future pandemics.

## Conclusion

The responsibility for managing the pandemic, largely assumed by village communities, led to a revival of the *gardu*, an institution that had been fading into obscurity. This response aligns with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) argument that humans develop coping strategies when supported by their environment. The panic-induced response, which Semedi (2014) attributes to social inequality and a sense of loss, emerged in the absence of adequate government intervention. Consequently, local communities developed their own preventive strategies, framed within Javanese cultural concepts of harmony (Anderson, 2006). The practice of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), particularly through *gardu* and *pos ronda* in residential areas, was an effort to maintain social cohesion in the face of crisis (Suwignyo, 2019). However, this traditional cosmology was challenged by the pandemic, as social interactions were disrupted and collective anxiety intensified.

The *gardu* or *pos ronda* has long served as a protective boundary, historically safeguarding villages from tangible threats such as theft. During the pandemic, however, the community adapted to an invisible danger by personifying outsiders as virus carriers, akin to Cohen's (2011) concept of folk devils. This resulted in heightened visual surveillance and psychological reassurance mechanisms at *gardu*, reflecting the materialization of collective panic.

While portal surveillance represented an attempt to control pandemic-related fears, it also reinforced social divisions by portraying outsiders as threats. Barker's analysis of surveillance suggests that such measures serve to demarcate territorial boundaries in response to perceived dangers. However, further research is needed to assess the actual effectiveness of *gardu* in mitigating the pandemic's health impacts. What is clear, though, is that the institutionalization of *ronda* played a crucial role in

fostering psychological resilience, providing a communal space where residents could discuss economic hardships and social struggles without fear of stigma.

Given the male-dominated nature of *pos ronda*, future research should explore the impact of pandemic-induced moral panic on gender relations in Yogyakarta. Judith Butler's (2004) theory of gender performativity suggests that gender is not an innate identity but rather a set of socially constructed behaviors. The traditional role of men as guardians and enforcers of surveillance at *gardu* reflects these societal expectations, reinforcing masculine authority over external threats. Meanwhile, women's roles—often confined to domestic spaces—remained less visible during the crisis. This dynamic illustrates how *gardu* served as a site for the performance and institutionalization of masculinity in times of uncertainty.

While this research has examined the immediate effects of the pandemic, questions remain about how communities are reassessing the relevance of practices like *gardu* now that the crisis has subsided. Moving forward, it is crucial to investigate how gendered roles, collective responses, and local governance strategies are evolving in the post-pandemic landscape.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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