On a Friday morning, from the loudspeaker of a nearby mosque, I could hear the voice of the *khateeb* (mosque leader). In the first time for perhaps many decades, he asked people not to go to the mosque for Friday prayer so as to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. A few days later, a car with loudspeakers attached passed by my house. Inside, a man from the district council used the loudspeaker to tell people to stay at home, wash their hands, and practice a “healthy and clean lifestyle.” I imagine similar messages being amplified across the city. This was the face of Yogyakarta—a court city in central Java, Indonesia, that is also known as the “city of education” and “city of tourism”—at least it was in the first months after the announcement of the state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike a few other Indonesian cities that have attempted to impose local lockdowns, the local government of Yogyakarta have maintained a position in favour of social distancing rather than a full lockdown.

**Responding to the Pandemic: Government and the Ordinary Citizens**

The first COVID-19 case in Yogyakarta was reported on March 15—almost two weeks after the first two national cases. Following this, the provincial government reported the first official death. The announcement of the first COVID-19 positive case and death followed a seemingly economy-
focused local response. The greater Yogyakarta area is well known as a hub of both education and tourism. In recent decades, there has been a shift in the local economy, from agricultural work to industry and the service sector—much of which are linked to the education and tourism sectors. In 2019, the service industry absorbed 71 percent of the labor force and contributed significantly to the local economy.¹ On March 10, the head of Tourism Department said that considering no positive cases had been reported from Yogyakarta, the city was safe and ready for tourists.² Such a response was not unique in Indonesia, as seen in the initial response from the central government when it announced at the end of February plans for a financial stimulus package to support the tourism sector, including a conspicuously large budget for social media influencers—to urge them to create content that promoted Indonesian tourism³.

Five days after the announcement of the first COVID-19 case, the local Yogyakarta government declared a state of emergency (masa tanggap darurat bencana), which was to be observed until the end of May—and then extended until the end of June—revising its earlier stance. Before this announcement, several universities already restricted on-campus activities. In the first month after the announcement of a local state of emergency, Malioboro Street—a popular tourist destination—was abnormally quiet. Only a few souvenir shops remained open. Street food vendors closed their stalls. The benches on Malioboro Street were mostly deserted, except for a few local residents and pedicab drivers. Several shopping malls and hotels also chose to close. Another iconic city landscape, 0 kilometre, was also unusually quiet. Local law enforcement officers (satpol PP) patrol commonly crowded places such as Malioboro Street and 0 Kilometre. A few times when I passed these areas on my motorbike I witnessed people being reprimanded and asked to go home.
Figure 1. Malioboro street with empty benches. Image provided by Elan Lazuardi.
As events surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, panic and fear became common reactions. Several products soon became must-have items—hand-sanitizer and other handwashing products were suddenly rare. Citizens shared information instructing how to make DIY hand sanitizer and all-purpose disinfectant products. All-purpose bleach and floor cleaning liquids became a staple as a result. Facemask wearing has taken on a new meaning after being made compulsory on public transport and in other public places, including traditional markets, in early April; by mid-May, it was compulsory everywhere.\(^4\) In recent years, the use of facemasks has become more common in various contexts in urban Indonesia. People often use them on public transportation or when they are walking in the street to reduce the negative effects of air pollution.
In Yogyakarta in particular, in the aftermath of Mount Merapi eruption in 2010, people used facemasks to protect themselves from the ash in the air. Motorbike riders also commonly use surgical or cloth facemask as other method of protecting themselves from air pollution and the sun. Supplies of facemasks began diminishing quickly after the initial COVID-19 pandemic-induced panic in March and early April. In my local pharmacy, facemasks are limited to one pack (ten masks) per household per day. Customers are asked to show ID cards before they are able to make a purchase. And once again, citizens began sharing instructions on how to make DIY cloth facemasks.
While the focus on the stay-at-home message has been widely criticised for neglecting the multidimensional nature of COVID-19 risks, Yogyakarta residents have contributed in the spirit of mutuality. Ordinary citizens, including university students, social activists, teachers, and many others, started public kitchens to support informal workers and those relying on service sector
employment—a large proportion of Yogyakarta residents (BPS 2019)—who experienced a significant loss of income. Others have taken to making DIY hazmat suits and other personal protective equipment to assist healthcare workers. Others have started taking public donations to pay a traditional street food stall (angkringan) to provide meals for free for people struggling to make ends meet.

**Saving Neighbourhoods**

Amidst growing public anxiety over the lacking government response, President Jokowi finally declared COVID-19 as a public health emergency on 31 March 2020. Nonetheless, he warned against local government imposing lockdowns, stating that such decisions could only be made under authority of the central government. Instead, the president announced that Indonesia would apply large-scale social restrictions (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar*, or PSBB). Local governments are required to present evidence that considers not only epidemiological but also socioeconomic factors in order to demonstrate the need to impose PSBB. As of May 25, four provinces and twenty-three districts (*kota/kabupaten*) have implemented this policy, including Jakarta and West Java, where the majority of COVID-19 cases occurred. When asked if Yogyakarta ever considered implementing PSBB, the governor—who is also the King of Yogyakarta Sultanate, one of the few remaining royal courts in Indonesia—said social distancing measures were enough to respond to COVID-19 so long as “people are self-disciplined.” Such sentiment is shared not only by many government officials at both the national and local level but also by Indonesian citizens. A message about a recent “supermarket cluster” in Yogyakarta made its round in various WhatsApp groups, including those based on neighbourhood, kin, and alma
mater networks. In this message, one of the supermarket workers who had recently tested positive for COVID-19 allegedly ignored public health instructions regarding self-isolation and went out to visit his neighbors. People quickly dismissed him as an example of an irresponsible citizen who ignored the greater good for his selfish needs. Terms like “ngeyel” (stubborn) or “nekat” (reckless) are used to describe such citizens. This is aligned with the government’s public campaign that any attempt to curb the pandemic depends on whether or not citizens can behave in a disciplined manner. Since the New Order (Orde Baru) (1965-1998), Indonesians have not been strangers to attempts by the state to make them “discipline subjects”—for instance, through the National Discipline Movement (Gerakan Disiplin Nasional) launched in 1995.

Under normal circumstances, what the supermarket worker did (to visit one’s neighbors/relatives/friends) was a common means of sociality in Javanese urban neighbourhoods, such as in Yogyakarta. Front doors, for instance, are commonly left open, highlighting the close-knit character and mutual trust of urban neighborhood life (Newberry 2006); however, during the pandemic situation, residents have been made to change their social practices. Social visits are now considered a threat to other’s safety and well-being. When the local government seemed reluctant to impose PSBB, urban neighborhoods in Yogyakarta acted by limiting the flow of people in their space. For modern housing complexes, this was not a problem as the physical infrastructure in such communities allows them to do so. Such residential areas usually only have one entry point and employ security guards stationed near the entrance.
Urban neighborhoods (kampung), in contrast, usually have multiple entry points that are connected by several passageways. During the pandemic, a number of urban neighborhoods have started to take matters into their own hands by regulating who is allowed in. Modest self-made barricades are put in front of the multiple entry points with signs offering variations on “residents only.” Near the main entryway, other signs are posted—usually different kinds of public health messages related to COVID-19. A few residents sit near the main entryway, equipped with bottles of disinfectant and hand sanitizer. A water container and hand soap are also kept ready for use and disposal. The message implies that only residents are allowed in, while others like food-delivery people or even vegetable sellers are turned away or allowed in only after questioning. When residents pass this COVID-19 task force post, they are subjected to a few cleaning rituals. A member of the task force sprays disinfectant on any visible surface, such as motorbike handles, and also provides hand sanitizer to be applied before residents can enter. Those coming in cars may need to open their windows slightly to give the guards a better view as to the passengers. Some neighborhoods have also started implementing a facemask policy following the provincial government’s move to make the use of facemasks mandatory. Altogether these locally made and implemented policies have often been referred to as “local lockdown.”
Figure 4. Makeshift barricades on kampung entryway. Photo credit: Elan Lazuardi.

The deployment of neighborhood surveillance is reminiscent of the urban neighborhood life that Newberry (2006) described as not only characterized by mutual cooperation (gotong royong) but also heightened surveillance and suspicions. Under normal circumstances, residents in urban neighborhoods participate in night watch (ronda) to maintain security (Barker 1999). Commonly,
each neighborhood owns a *pos ronda* used by residents on night-watch duties when not out on patrol (Barker 1999; Kusno 2006). These posts can be located anywhere in a neighborhood’s territory and are also used by residents (usually adult men) to socialize during the day. After the announcement of the first COVID-19 cases, citizens were asked to remain vigilant. In the neighborhoods that decided to impose some measure of lockdown, not only were residents asked to participate in ronda during the nights, they also now kept watch during the day. Nonetheless, this state of vigilance is often not evident in spaces deemed familiar. In such spaces, like urban neighborhoods, social distancing has been observed less due to the high density of said spaces.

The pandemic in Indonesia is also occurring during the holy month of Ramadan. While the start of Ramadan was only a few weeks after the beginning of the nation-wide social distancing policy, it was difficult to see the difference between this year’s Ramadan and previous years. Every day near the time to break the fast, in my neighborhood (and many others across the city), residents flock to the street food vendors selling snacks for the occasion. Normally, near the end of this fasting month, people working in metropolitan cities such as Jakarta travel to their hometowns (a tradition called *mudik* or *pulang kampung*) to celebrate Eid with families and relatives; however, the COVID-19 situation has called for domestic travel limitations in many countries across the world. In Indonesia, at the national level, the policy regarding this was confusing at best. Initially, President Jokowi told people that it was okay to return home. He then clarified his use of the term “*pulang kampung*” and “*mudik,*” saying one can go to their hometown as long as the intention is to return for good (which he refers as *pulang kampung*) and not for circular migration during Eid-
al-Fitr (mudik), which has been prohibited since 24 April 2020. With this ban, all modes of transportation are also not permitted to operate.

Before the ban, however, many neighborhoods in Yogyakarta had already received a number of returning migrants. According to data from the Provincial Transportation Office, as of 31 March, 70,000 people have traveled to Yogyakarta. Upon arrival, they are asked to self-isolate for fourteen days. Neighbours and local leaders are asked to “monitor” the compliance of this regulation and provide support if needed. Some neighborhoods have added signs at main entries telling incoming travelers and their families to report to neighborhood leaders and to self-isolate for fourteen days after arrival. Ironically, this stands in contrast with the previous letter from the Yogyakarta government, which states the importance of staying at home, including suspending traveling plans and not receiving “outside guests” (luar daerah). Twenty-one days after the ban, the provincial government claimed to have blocked over five hundred automobiles from entering Yogyakarta. However, nearly every day the media has reported different strategies that people do to be able to mudik. Again, these people are characterized as ngeyel. Some of my friends who were not able to mudik, or even deliberately chose not to, discussed their “small sacrifices” in contrast with others who were selfish and “difficult to comply to rules.”
The Safe Neighbors, the Unknown Strangers in the Era of Pandemic

In late April, President Jokowi admitted that some of the government responses were driven by a motivation to keep the public from panicking. Withholding (partial or not) information from the public has resulted in public distrust toward the government’s ability to handle the pandemic response. Yogyakarta citizens share a collective memory about crises, two of which—the 2006 earthquake and the 2010 Mount Merapi eruption—happened in the span of two decades. In the
aftermath of both, many local initiatives emerged, and many residents joined voluntary actions to help various recovery efforts.

Nevertheless, witnessing how the response to COVID-19 has played out at the local neighborhood level, it is striking how the practices of guarding one’s place against coronavirus rely on the distinction between “us” (the safe neighbors) and “others” (the unknown outsiders). Outsiders are treated with suspicion, fearing that they might bring the virus to one’s neighborhood; insiders are almost always considered safe, or at least easier subjects to police. The example of the supermarket worker case described previously exemplifies this. In this case, a “safe insider” turned out to be not safe. If social distancing is to be applied universally, then social visits should be considered a “risk practice.” Yet while people were quickly to condemn what the supermarket worker did as reckless, they often do not bat an eyelid when a neighbor comes to their house for a visit or when they make a visit themselves. The assumption that neighbors (or anyone familiar) are automatically safe is problematic in the context of public health but not uncommon in the context of an infectious disease.

In the absence of trusted, actionable ways of managing the threat to one’s community, Yogyakarta residents have responded in ways that highlight collective action and solidarity. At the same time, their response has been problematic in terms of how they evaluate threats via the often too-sharp distinction between safe neighbors and unknown outsiders. Nearly ninety days after the announcement of a state of emergency, a number of public spaces in Yogyakarta have started to re-open. Last Sunday (June 7), 0 Kilometre was flocked by Yogyakartans seeking refuge from their homes to bike, jog, or just take a walk and meet friends. Like how President Jokowi is telling
Indonesians to live with COVID-19 (*berdamai dengan COVID-19*), many are looking forward to the New Normal, whatever that may be, despite the fact that the numbers of infection continue to rise every day.

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3 Office of Assistant to Deputy Cabinet Secretary for State Documents & Translation. “Gov’t to Provide Stimulus to Boost Tourism.” (Accessed 1 June 2020 from [https://setkab.go.id/en/govt-to-provide-stimulus-to-boost-tourism/](https://setkab.go.id/en/govt-to-provide-stimulus-to-boost-tourism/))

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