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Regulating Youth through High Culture: Cultural Violence and Symbolic Stigmatization in a Monarchical City in Indonesia

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Abstract

Klitih, a term originating from Javanese usage, has come to denote youth street violence involving weapons in Indonesia. This article examines how *klitih* is produced, amplified, and governed in Yogyakarta, a city that operates as a monarchical enclave within Indonesia's democratic state system. Drawing on the concept of cultural violence, the article analyses how symbolic authority and ideals of "high culture" shape media narratives, public anxieties, and institutional responses to youth violence. Based on interviews with young people in detention, educators, correctional officers, and community leaders, alongside media and policy analysis, the study shows how youth violence is framed not only as a legal problem but as a form of moral and cultural deviance. This framing legitimizes punitive and exclusionary interventions while displacing attention from structural inequalities. By situating *klitih* within wider international debates on youth criminalization, moral regulation, and symbolic power, the article demonstrates how cultural narratives operate as mechanisms of stigmatization and social control in contemporary societies.

Keywords

Youth; *klitih*; Stigma; Cultural Violence; Monarchy; Indonesia

Introduction

Globally, youth and street violence have been disproportionately amplified through media narratives, policy discourses, and public anxieties (Brotherton, 2015). In lieu of being addressed as outcomes of structural inequality, exclusion, and precarious urban conditions, violent practices among marginalized youth are frequently framed as moral and political crises. Young people involved in collective violence or street-based groups are repeatedly constructed as dangerous subjects whose presence threatens public safety and social cohesion (Rios, 2006). These representations legitimize criminal justice responses centered on surveillance, punitive regulation, and spatial containment, while obscuring structural drivers of violence and marginalizing preventive, rehabilitative, and redistributive approaches (see Hazen et al, 2014). The phenomenon of *klitih* in Yogyakarta, Indonesia should be understood within this broader global context.

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In recent years, the association between the term *klitih* and youth street crime developed not only through linguistic evolution, but also as a discursive response to growing public concern about juvenile violence in Yogyakarta. *Klitih*, a term increasingly associated with youth[1]-perpetrated street crimes involving bladed weapons, has become a central topic of public debate in Yogyakarta, Indonesia (Hartanto, 2022). Originally denoting "wandering aimlessly" in Javanese, the term has shifted into a label for deviant behaviour (Magfirah and Sari, 2024; Wicitra et al., 2023), reflecting broader anxieties about moral decline for street crime (Muna, 2024). Data from the Indonesian Police Watch (IPW) indicate that in 2020, 38 out of 52 reported *klitih* cases were successfully resolved. In 2021, while the number of resolved cases increased to 40, the total number of reported cases also rose to 58. Over and above that, in 2022, the violent murder of a parliamentarian's child linked to *klitih* intensified public scrutiny and prompted an immediate governmental response, culminating in a circular issued by the governor (LBH Yogyakarta, 2022; Tempo.co, 2022). This reaction exposed systemic shortcomings, particularly when the wrongful arrest and subsequent release of several youths in 2024 highlighted the dangers of cultural and institutional prejudice (Muhsin and Adikara, 2024).

The existing phenomenon of youth and street crime, including *klitih*, in the context of Yogyakarta has been studied by Indonesian scholars, particularly after the demise of the authoritarian New Order regime[2] in 1998 (Kadir, 2012). In some respects, this reflects the relative freedom of expression that enabled academic research to move beyond the hegemonic developmentalist discourse promoted by state ideological apparatuses (Althusser, 2014; Achwan, 2017). Nevertheless, many studies on youth and street crime remain framed by implicit assumptions of *defectology*/ what's wrong with the nation's youth, what needs to be 'fixed' (see Nilan, 2009; Naafs and White 2012; Sutopo, 2022) and, more recently, have tended to justify neoliberal forms of governmentality (see Sutopo et al., 2024). It can be argued that, notwithstanding the relatively democratic conditions of the *Reformasi* era, conservative constructions of Indonesian youth remain entrenched, reproduced through both policy regimes and everyday cultural practices. For example, in the Yogyakarta context, Hartanto (2022) and Jatmiko (2021) portray young people as the primary actors of street crime and *klitih*. Sarwono (2019) and Winarno (2020) interpret youth violence as an expression of unstable identity formation. Fuadi et al. (2019) argue that such violence reflects a failed attempt to sublimate an inherently aggressive character. Febriani (2018) views this group of young people as exhibiting poor relationships not only with parents and peers but

[1] Under Indonesia's National Youth Law No. 40 of 2009, youth are defined as individuals between the ages of 16 and 30.

[2] Indonesia's "New Order" (*Orde Baru*) was an authoritarian regime under President Suharto (1966–1998), marked by military dominance, anti-communism, developmentalism, and systematic repression. It collapsed following the 1997 Asian financial crisis and mass pro-democracy mobilization (Heryanto, 2006).

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also in their academic performance. Meanwhile, Casmini and Supardi (2020) emphasize the importance of the nuclear family in preventing youth street crime and *klitih* in Yogyakarta. Taken together, these accounts reproduce a defect-oriented understanding of youth violence that resonates with international critiques of risk-based approaches in youth justice. Such frameworks construct young people as problems to be managed and corrected, rather than situating violence within wider structural and political contexts (see Case and Haines, 2019).

Conjointly, these studies tend to reproduce deficit-based understandings of youth that individualize responsibility and obscure structural inequalities. What remains underexplored, however, is how such narratives are themselves sustained by cultural frameworks that naturalize youth stigmatization. Thus, in this article, we examine how the framing of *klitih* within Yogyakarta's cultural and political structures exemplifies what Johan Galtung (1990; 2004; 2013) terms "cultural violence." As an enclave monarchy, Yogyakarta operates under a special regional framework in which the Sultan functions simultaneously as a political authority and symbolic figurehead (Carey, 1986), embodying ideals of high culture. The term "monarchy enclave" has been used in scholarly work to describe Yogyakarta as a distinctive region within democratic Indonesia, one granted full autonomy to administer itself under a hereditary monarchical system led by the Sultan (Budi, 2023; Hakim et al., 2015). With this in mind, the monarchy's symbolic authority rooted in elevated cultural norms shapes societal perceptions of youth. The prosecution of young offenders thus reveals systemic stigmatization, privileging claims of moral superiority over considerations of social equity. In this article, we argue that the intertwining of cultural violence with Yogyakarta's high cultural standards demonstrates how the criminalization of youth through the *klitih* discourse reflects a deeper systemic issue that is the enforcement of cultural values which stigmatize and marginalize those who diverge from them.

This article is organized into three sections. The first examines the concept of cultural violence and the changing landscape of youth and street crime in Yogyakarta. The second explores the evolution of *klitih*, focusing on the reproduction of symbolism and sensationalism in the media and the ways in which cultural violence manifests implicitly in everyday life. The final section concludes by outlining the article's contributions to the fields of youth studies and criminology.

The Concept of Cultural Violence

To make sense of how media narratives, moral discourses, and institutional responses to *klitih* become normalized and legitimized, this article draws on Johan Galtung's framework of cultural violence which offer a useful lens for understanding the ways in which harm is legitimated through cultural processes. In his influential article, *Cultural Violence* (1990), Galtung expands on the earlier "violence triangle," which distinguishes between direct violence (physical acts such as killing or assault), structural violence (systemic harm embedded in

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institutions, such as poverty, exclusion, or inequality), and cultural violence (the symbolic sphere of culture that legitimizes or justifies both direct and structural violence). Cultural violence is defined as:

> "*Those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence*" (Galtung, 1990: pp. 291).

Its central function lies in "changing the moral colour of an act from red/wrong to green/right, or at least to yellow/acceptable" (p. 291). Through this process, acts of violence become reinterpreted as righteous, necessary, or inevitable, for example, killing in the name of God, or exclusion in the name of cultural purity.

An important dimension of cultural violence is its invisibility. Unlike direct violence, which leaves visible wounds, or structural violence, which manifests in measurable inequalities, cultural violence operates subtly by embedding legitimacy into symbols, norms, and discourses. Its capacity to disguise harm as moral necessity makes it particularly effective in sustaining systems of domination. This is why, as Galtung notes, cultural violence can endure across generations: it is transmitted through religion, ideology, language, art, and even education, becoming part of the taken-for-granted "common sense" of society (1990: pp. 294–296). Correspondingly, the durability of cultural violence is one of its most insidious features. While direct violence is episodic and structural violence fluctuates over time, cultural violence remains relatively stable, 'permanence', remaining essentially the same for long periods of time; thus, ensuring continuity of justification for exclusionary practices (Galtung, 1990; Paulson and Tikly, 2022). Building on Galtung's original formulation, more recent scholarship has emphasized how cultural violence operates through institutionalized norms and authoritative value systems that shape governance and everyday life. Paulson and Tikly (2022), for example, show how cultural violence is reproduced through moral frameworks embedded in education, policy, and social regulation, rendering inequality both legitimate and natural. Instead of appearing as coercion, cultural violence functions through taken-for-granted standards of worth, respectability, and belonging, thereby translating symbolic authority into concrete practices of exclusion. This perspective is particularly important for understanding youth and street crime, as it highlights how young people's actions are often judged not only against legal standards but also against dominant cultural ideals, with punitive responses justified as moral necessity rather than political choice.

Arguably, for scholars of youth and crime, this concept highlights how societies often displace the causes of delinquency away from systemic inequalities and instead reinterpret them as cultural or moral failings (see also Hall et al, 1978; Clarke, 2008). Cultural violence therefore functions not only to legitimize punitive responses but also to stigmatize those who fall outside dominant norms. While the monarchy does not directly

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administer criminal justice, its symbolic authority shapes dominant cultural norms through which youth behaviour is morally evaluated and publicly judged. In the context of Yogyakarta, this framework is particularly valuable for analysing how the symbolic authority of the monarchy and the ideals of high culture operate as legitimizing forces. When youth delinquency such as *klitih* is framed not only as a legal offense but also as a moral violation against cultural values, punitive responses are naturalized as both necessary and justified. Here, cultural violence provides the conceptual bridge between symbolic authority and the systemic exclusion of marginalized youth: by presenting cultural ideals as unquestionable, it masks structural inequalities and transforms social problems into individual or familial deficiencies. This allows the monarchy's moral order to remain intact, even as it reproduces cycles of stigma and marginalization.

Methods

The analysis presented in this article draws on fieldwork conducted by authors in 2022 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Our study employed qualitative methods, with a particular emphasis on a biographical approach, to trace the intersections between individual life histories and the broader socio-historical conditions in which they unfold (Nilsen and Brannen, 2013; Gane and Back, 2013). This aligns with ethnographic traditions that emphasize the embeddedness of youth experiences within specific structural, cultural, and institutional contexts (Henriksen and Schliehe, 2020; Atkinson, 2014; Madden, 2010). As a way to capture plurality of perspectives at both micro and macro levels, and beyond subjective and objective dimensions (Mouzelis, 2008), we relied primarily on in-depth interviews, complemented by previous scientific studies on youth street crimes and a systematic review of mainstream online news coverage relating to various forms of society's opinions on *klitih* in Yogyakarta from 2019-2022.

The ethnographic commitment to understanding juvenile subjectivities (Gooch, 2019) was fundamental to our methodological orientation, especially when investigating how social identity, marginalization, and institutional responses intertwine in the lives of young offenders. Overall, 28 individuals took part in interviews, conducted in a mix of Indonesian and local languages that reflected their everyday conversational patterns. Our young informants range in age from 16-30 years; all were male and predominantly from *Javanese* ethnicity. Each session, held inside a prison, lasted around an hour. In addition to interviewing young people involved in street crime, we also conducted interviews with social workers and high school teachers, as well as a focus group discussion with six community supervisors. These efforts were aimed at gathering diverse perspectives on the phenomenon of youth and *klitih*. Accordingly, biographical approach also sought to remain attentive to power asymmetries, the politics of representation, and structural/cultural constraints (Stanley, 2013). After completing data collection, the interviews were transcribed and translated into English, then coded thematically, with

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excerpts clustered around key themes. In the final stage, selected sections were subject to close analysis through the lens of the chosen conceptual framework.

Fieldwork within correctional institutions required navigating complex dynamics of access and authority, echoing similar challenges faced in ethnographies of confinement (Young-Alfaro, 2017). Our interviews with social workers, teachers, and community supervisors were relatively easy, as they believed that the researchers' fieldwork outcomes could help them address the unresolved problems of *klitih* in Yogyakarta. In contrast, gaining permission to speak with young informants meant navigating multiple levels of local and national bureaucracy; therefore, the process was administratively heavy, required extensive paperwork, and consumed valuable field time. Because informants were spread across different correctional facilities, each visit demanded separate approvals from prison authorities, who acted as gatekeepers to both individuals and spaces. Additionally, the interviews themselves allowed for little improvisation; the locations were chosen by prison staff, and a correctional officer was present throughout, closely monitoring the exchanges. Hence, the compressed time frame of our encounters, combined with the presence of authority figures, made building rapport relatively difficult.

Looking Back: Youth and Street Crime in Yogyakarta

Internationally, historical and ethnographic research has long shown that youth gangs and street violence are enduring features of urban life, shaped by peer-group formation, intergenerational relations, and wider political and cultural conditions (see Rios, 2009; Fraser, 2015). Genealogically, interpersonal and group-based youth violence has a long standing presence not only at national level (see Nordholt, 1991; Ryter, 1998; Colombijn and Lindblad, 2002) but also in Yogyakarta. Historical accounts trace enduring connections between youth cultural practices, peer group formation, and recurring cycles of violence that have transformed over time (see Kadir, 2012). Earlier iterations of gang culture were frequently shaped by shared affiliations like political networks, formal religion, and neighborhood solidarities that provided the initial basis for group identity and cohesion (Efianingrum, 2017; Marino, 2022). These extended affiliations were subsequently reinforced through school-based hierarchies and alumni–junior relationships, in which senior students often pressured younger peers to engage in retaliatory conflicts with rival gangs or schools both in the city centre and in its peripheries (Kadir, 2012; Nilan, 2006).

Consequently, such practices perpetuate a school-based culture of violence through intergenerational transmission, with alumni informally but decisively guiding and mobilizing younger members into cycles of retaliation (Stein, 2003). These relational dynamics are not driven solely by aggression but are sustained by emotional economies of belonging, protection, and recognition (see Sutopo et al, 2024). It may be argued that gang membership can provide young people with plural forms of capital (Sandberg and Pedersen, 2011; Fraser,

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2013) that often scarce in their domains of 'transition' and 'culture' (Furlong, 2012) such as physical security, strategic solidarity, and social validation (see Kadir, 2012; Nilan et al, 2014). This combination of affective rewards and collective identification enables gangs to endure, even as their forms and intensities shift across generations. For that reason, youth gangs in the city of Yogyakarta did not arise in isolation; rather, they are embedded in shifting collective rituals, social identities, and broader cultural frameworks in which violence is intertwined with ideas of honor, loyalty, and status (Nilan and Demartoto, 2012; Nilan, 2016).

Over and above that, as youth gang culture evolved, so too did the forms of violence it produced. Whereas earlier street fights typically involved large groups clashing in predetermined locations, more recent patterns have shifted toward acts that are quicker, more concealed, and often carried out by small groups. What was once primarily concentrated within urban, school-based rivalries has expanded into surrounding districts, with some cases of *klitih* increasingly targeting individuals at random (see Sutopo et al., 2024). Conceivably, the transition from large-scale, organized street fights to smaller, faster, and more unpredictable acts of violence did not occur in a vacuum. Theoretically, it reflects broader structural changes ranging from shifting urban geographies (see Low, 2016) and school dynamics (see White and Mason, 2006; Sernhede, 2011) to the growing influence of digital media (see Macek, 2006; Lane, 2019) in amplifying particular narratives about youth street crime. As incidents became less tied to identifiable rivalries and more associated with random victimization, public discourse sought a new vocabulary to describe and contain the perceived threat. In this specific context, *klitih* emerged as a catch-all label. These shifts not only redefined how youth violence was understood but also set the stage for its transformation into a powerful symbol that circulated, sensationalized, and politicized through mass and social media (Sutopo et al, 2024).

Results and Discussion

The Evolution of *Klitih*: Symbolism and Sensationalism

Over the past several years, *klitih* has increasingly come to function not only as a descriptor of youth violence but as a powerful symbolic category shaped by media circulation and moral discourse. The 2022 *klitih* case that resulted in the death of a parliamentarian's child marked a pivotal moment in shaping public perception (LBH Yogyakarta, 2022; Tempo.co, 2022). Social media amplified the tragedy, fuelling a wave of public outrage and pressuring authorities to act swiftly. Yet, the criminal justice response, driven by societal anxieties, prioritized rapid punishment over due process, as illustrated by the wrongful arrests of five youths in 2024. This underscores how sensationalism as opposed to evidence-based policy, frequently dominates institutional responses.

An interview conducted at the Yogyakarta Detention Center in 2022 reflects this dynamic. One young detainee recounted his experience of wrongful arrest:

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> "*This is a case of mistaken arrest, so there were five of us, eh four of us, fighting over sarongs in South Yogyakarta at dawn during the fasting month, then the police broke it up, we went home for early breakfast and it was like nothing happened... Well, one week later suddenly five people were arrested, not knowing why. We were sued by the police for this case. I tried to be honest and then I was beaten by the police, finally the five of us gave up*" (Youth Detainee, Yogyakarta Detention Center, 2022).

This example illustrates the intersection of media sensationalism and cultural expectations (see Moskovljevic and Lazovic, 2024). Headlines often portrayed young offenders as threats to Yogyakarta's moral fabric (Magfirah and Sari, 2024; Muhsin and Adikara, 2024; Wicitra et al., 2023), reinforcing public fears that youth delinquency was undermining the city's identity as a bastion of high culture. By framing *klitih* as a crisis of morality rather than situating it within broader structural inequalities, media narratives perpetuate symbolic stigmatization. In this process, structural factors such as educational exclusion, urban marginality, and limited youth opportunities are displaced by moralized explanations centred on culture and character. In this framing, the complexities of youth are reduced to symbols of cultural decline, stripped of individuality, and positioned as outsiders to the moral community. Such portrayals not only intensify public anxiety but also legitimize harsher institutional responses, ensuring that stigma becomes both a social label and a tool of exclusion (see also Hu and Dittman, 2016; Lee and Bubolz, 2020). This dynamic closely parallels what Rios (2011) describes as the hyper-criminalization of marginalized youth, whereby multiple institutions converge to construct young people as permanent suspects, legitimizing punitive intervention even in the absence of serious wrongdoing.

Media and Institutional Narratives: Tools of Symbolic Stigmatization

Media and institutional narratives play a central role in perpetuating cultural violence by shaping public perceptions of youth and crime. In the case of *klitih*, media outlets have consistently portrayed young offenders as moral failures, amplified societal fears and reinforced cultural biases. Sensationalized reporting frequently highlights the brutality of crimes while neglecting the systemic factors that contribute to youth delinquency. By framing *klitih* as evidence of moral decay, these narratives align with the high cultural expectations of the monarchy, positioning youth offenders as threats to social harmony.

This alignment is evident in an interview with one of the official leaders in the Yogyakarta local government conducted in 2022, who suggested that most *klitih* offenders came from broken homes:

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> "*But indeed, if they are the majority, one is indeed a broken home family, the second is whose parents are both busy, or the third is he lives with his grandparents while his parents are not in this city*" (Official Leader in Local Government , 2022).

Similarly, an employee at a district Children's Prison noted the difficulty of reintegrating young offenders into their families:

> "*Until we went back there, none of the family's parents wanted to accept them because their parents were divorced and all worked. The grandfather wanted the child to go back there but didn't want to, the uncle and aunt didn't want to, in the end because we had to*" (Employee of Children's Prison, 2022).

These accounts reinforce the perception that youth delinquency stems from individual moral failings rather than systemic inequalities. Such framing not only absolves social and institutional structures of responsibility but also further stigmatizes young people by dehumanizing them as irredeemable moral deviants (see also Hall et al, 1978).

Institutional responses reinforce this stigmatization. Schools, correctional facilities, and rehabilitation centres frequently adopt punitive approaches that emphasize moral education and character-building over systemic reform (see Paulson and Tikly, 2022). Interviews with prison officers and educators reveal a common belief that youth delinquency is rooted in broken families or the absence of cultural and moral guidance. This perspective shifts blame from structural conditions onto individuals and their households (see Sutopo et al, 2024). As a result, these narratives not only dehumanize young offenders but also reproduce cycles of exclusion and inequality. Media and institutional discourses thus operate in tandem: while headlines dramatize youth as cultural threats, institutional actors translate this imagery into policies and practices that treat delinquency as a moral pathology (see also Storrod and Dansley, 2017; Planells et al, 2021). The result is a powerful system of symbolic stigmatization in which youth are positioned not as citizens entitled to rights and opportunities, but as cultural outsiders whose very existence undermines social order.

The Monarchy Enclave: Cultural Standards as Structural Bias

Yogyakarta's *keistimewaan* (special autonomy) preserves hereditary rule under the Sultan while elevating courtly values such as *alus* (refinement), moral virtue, and harmony into public policy and collective identity (Carey, 1986; Hakim et al., 2015). From this perspective, high culture functions ideologically as a boundary of inclusion and exclusion, resonating with Galtung's (1990; 2004; 2013) concept of cultural violence, in which symbolic structures normalize unequal treatment. The sacral *Sumbu Filosofis* reinforces a moral

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geography that situates the *Kraton* Yogyakarta (Sultanate Palace of Yogyakarta) as both civic and cosmic centre (Haq, 2023). More broadly, inland Javanese political culture has long naturalized hierarchical relations through processes of othering, focusing the Sultan as cosmic axis while marginalizing those outside *Kraton* culture (Sulistiyono and Rochwulaningsih, 2013; Suyanto-Gunawan, 2015). Consequently, *keistimewaan* transforms heritage into a governing instrument that legitimizes hierarchy, enforces conformity, and sustains cultural boundaries.

Symbolic authority circulates through education, heritage, and public discourse, reproducing Yogyakarta as a "city of culture" that must be defended. Historically, the Sultanate legitimized itself by fusing aristocratic tradition with anticolonial nationalism (Carey, 1986). In the present, kingship is staged for citizens, elites, and tourists alike, reasserting the Kraton's moral authority as governance (Vetter, 2024). The social order within *Jeron Beteng* (the walled royal city) operates as a hierarchy of class relations, where residents are perceived as embodying the refinement and order that constitute the "cultural ideal standard" of Yogyakarta society (Marlina and Ronald, 2011). This bias is reinforced by the monarchy's dual position as both administrative authority and symbol of Javanese high culture.

Within this symbolic regime, youth misbehaviour, especially *klitih* is framed less as a product of inequality or fractured opportunity than as an act of cultural transgression. For young people, particularly those associated with *klitih*, these cultural standards operate simultaneously as moral and structural barriers. The Sultanate's cultural authority amplifies the stigmatization of youth by framing their actions not only as criminal but also as violations of cultural ideals. This perception generates a structural bias in which any deviation from these norms is met with disproportionate scrutiny and punishment.

An interview with a vocational school teacher in Yogyakarta echoed this sentiment, attributing youth delinquency to the erosion of family values:

> "*So, the problem is basically based on a problematic family. Only zero point something percent are intact families*" (Vocational Teacher, 2022).

Through this lens, youth delinquency is perceived not merely as a legal infraction but as a cultural deviance that threatens Yogyakarta's identity as a region of high culture. This perception sustains a structural bias that punishes deviation from cultural norms with heightened severity. The result is a cycle of stigmatization and marginalization, in which young people are regarded not as individuals with agency but as symbolic representations of moral and cultural failure (see also Cohen, 1972; Critcher, 2008). By elevating cultural ideals to the status of unquestioned moral benchmarks, the monarchy enclave transforms youth crime into a symbolic struggle over identity and order. The monarchy's manufacturing of cultural authority and national identity

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generates a moral overdose, rendering cultural order defence equivalent to national defence (Budi, 2023). In this regard, *klitih* youths are not only criminalized but also cast as symbolic threats to the Sultanate's sovereignty, barred from legitimate cultural participation. Such framing legitimizes harsher interventions while entrenching a hierarchy in which conformity is equated with citizenship, and deviation becomes grounds for exclusion. Punitive policy is thus privileged over structural solutions such as addressing poverty or educational inequalities reinforced by moralizing narratives that perpetuate hierarchies of worthiness.

Cultural Violence in the Context of High Culture

Johan Galtung's concept of cultural violence offers a critical lens for understanding how societal norms and cultural frameworks legitimize systemic harm (Galtung, 1990; 2013). Cultural violence operates by making structural and direct violence appear natural, acceptable, or even necessary (Galtung, 2004). In Yogyakarta, it manifests through the imposition of high cultural standards rooted in the monarchy's symbolic authority. The Sultanate functions both as a political institution and as a cultural touchstone (Carey, 1986; Hakim et al., 2015). The Sultan, who governs for life, embodies ideals of refinement, harmony, and moral virtue that serve as benchmarks for societal behaviour. While celebrated, these values create a cultural hierarchy that marginalizes those who do not conform. This framework is seen in Governor Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X's *Surat Edaran* (Circular Letter) No. 050/5082, which reacts to *klitih* by emphasizing moral and communal tactics such as family supervision, religious and community leaders' involvement, and neighbourhood patrols. Such policies view juvenile violence as a moral failing rather than a result of structural factors such as economic inequality, precarious urban living, or restricted educational chances.

A similar stance was expressed in discussions between Commission D of the Regional House of Representatives of the Special Region of Yogyakarta (*Komisi D DPRD DIY*) and the Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Population Control (*Dinas Pemberdayaan Perempuan, Perlindungan Anak dan Pengendalian Penduduk DIY)*, where *klitih* was described as endangering not only safety but also the cultural values that define Yogyakarta's unique status. Their ideas, which include prohibiting young people from bringing motorcycles to school, pushing pharmacies not to offer specific medicines freely, organizing night patrols, and implementing family-based counselling programs, reinforce the moralistic and disciplinary framing of juvenile deviance (DPRD DIY, 2022). While these approaches rely primarily on family control, community surveillance, and moral teaching, they fail to address underlying structural issues such as economic insecurity, educational disparity, and urban marginalization. As a result, young individuals linked with *klitih* are vilified not just as criminals, but also as violators of deeply rooted cultural values, furthering their exclusion as deviants damaging the region's symbolic identity.

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This cultural lens further shifts accountability from structural conditions to individual moral failings. The structural roots of youth delinquency like poverty, educational disparities, and family instability are overshadowed by narratives that blame offenders for failing to embody Yogyakarta's cultural ideals (see also De Jong and Twikromo, 2017). In doing so, cultural violence justifies the exclusion and devaluation of young people, reinforcing their marginalization. This perspective is evident in the words of a correctional officer who accompanied youth during a trial:

> "*Now the Neighbourhood Association and Citizens Association communities do not have strong activities, so that 'community culture is fading'*" (Bapas Officer, 2022).

A high school teacher similarly attributed responsibility to the family:

> "*Father has his own pleasure, mother has her own pleasure, so they forget to teach their children what manners are like*" (High School Teacher, 2022).

These perspectives illustrate how institutional and community actors reproduce the monarchy's moral discourse, framing youth behaviour as a symptom of familial and communal moral decline rather than as the outcome of structural inequalities. Such views naturalize the belief that cultural conformity is the primary route to social order, legitimizing punitive interventions while diverting attention from the socio-economic conditions that shape youth trajectories. In effect, cultural values are transformed into instruments of control, ensuring that the monarchy's moral authority remains unquestioned even as it perpetuates exclusionary practices. Thus, in Galtung's terms (1990; 2004; 2013), this is cultural violence in action; meaning the symbolic use of cultural ideals to change the moral colour of violence. In short, making exclusion and punishment appear natural, even necessary, while masking the structural inequalities that sustain youth marginalization.

Conclusion

The *klitih* phenomenon illustrates the profound impact of cultural violence on youth identity and justice in Yogyakarta. By framing young offenders as moral and cultural deviants, society perpetuates a cycle of exclusion that exacerbates systemic inequalities. This stigmatization not only distorts public understanding of youth delinquency but also hinders efforts to address its root causes. In conclusion, *klitih* in Yogyakarta exemplifies the intersection of cultural violence and high cultural standards, where youth delinquency is framed as a threat to the region's symbolic identity. As an enclave monarchy, Yogyakarta's unique cultural and political context amplifies the stigmatization of young offenders, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and inequality.

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Addressing this issue requires a paradigm shift that challenges the cultural and structural roots of youth delinquency, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. This means moving beyond punitive and moralizing narratives toward approaches that recognize youth as reflexive social agents embedded in and shaped by specific economic, political, and cultural conditions. Policies must focus on dismantling structural barriers, such as unequal access to education, limited employment opportunities, and social marginalization, while also reforming institutional practices that reproduce stigma. On top of that, public discourse needs to be reframed so that *klitih* is understood not simply as a moral crisis but as a symptom of deeper societal contradictions. Without such a shift in both narrative and practice, the legacy of cultural violence will remain entrenched, and the potential of Yogyakarta's youth will continue to be constrained by the very cultural ideals that claim to represent the city's moral greatness.

This article departs from dominant narratives that pathologise youth by reframing *klitih* through the lens of cultural violence. Whereas previous studies have largely explained youth street crime in terms of individual deficiencies, family dysfunction, or identity crises, this study demonstrates how Yogyakarta's cultural and political configuration as a monarchy enclave sustains symbolic hierarchies that stigmatize youth. By situating *klitih* within the interplay of media narratives, institutional practices, and the monarchy's ideals of high culture, the analysis shows that what is at stake is not merely delinquency, but the reproduction of cultural authority through the exclusion of marginalized young people. This focus on cultural violence provides a novel contribution to both youth studies and criminology, illustrating how symbolic structures naturalize inequality and justify punitive interventions.

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