

Contestation of Religious Identity in the Cultural Heritage Sites: A Case Study of the *Masjid Gedhe* Kauman Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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Abstract

This article explores the contestation of religious identity at the *Masjid Gedhe* ‘Grand Mosque’ of Kauman Yogyakarta, a provincial cultural heritage site in Yogyakarta. The study focuses on two events between October 2019 and March 2020: the rejection of the Muslim United #2 event by the *Keraton* ‘Palace’ and the refusal by the local Kauman community to hold a Nahdhatul Ulama anniversary at the mosque. The series of events can be read as an effort by each party to contest the power they have. This research is a descriptive study guided by a constructivist research philosophy and historical approach, which focuses on understanding cultural identity through the lens of social context. The study employs a combination of primary sources, such as photo archives and documents, alongside secondary sources, including articles from online news portals, to analyze two specific events. Data is collected through these sources and analyzed using Stuart Hall’s cultural identity theory, providing a framework for interpreting the findings and examining how religious identity is contested at the *Masjid Gedhe* Kauman Yogyakarta. The result highlights how the *Masjid Gedhe* Kauman Yogyakarta became a contested space for religious identity between different groups, with each event reflecting ongoing power dynamics and cultural negotiations. The rejection of both the Muslim United #2 and the NU Anniversary events illustrates how identity is shaped and contested through representation and authority, where power structures, both institutional and community-based, played key roles in defining the mosque’s religious and cultural identity.

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INTRODUCTION

In the discussion on the utilization and preservation of cultural heritage, the contestation of religious identity in religious-based cultural heritage sites presents its own cultural, political and social dynamics that are interesting to look at further (Driezen et al., 2021). Cultural heritage sites that are respected for their historical and spiritual value often become spaces of conflict as various religious and cultural groups compete to assert their claims over these historical and respected places (Smith et al., 2024). This contestation is a reflection of the broader debate about memory, legitimacy, and authority as intercultural relations increase (Harrison, 2013; Smith, 2006). In some cases, religious identity is related to cultural identity represented in cultural heritage sites which are symbols of beliefs, traditions, and communal ownership. According to Geertz (1973), religion is a reflection of the culture that develops in an entity and this is related to how the community in it perceives and appreciates its cultural heritage sites. However the perspective on cultural heritage sites can change because it allows for negotiation and reinterpretation by other groups with the narratives and values they have (Bourdieu, 1991; Lowe, 2009). The contestation often arises in open conflicts that clash identity and control over cultural heritage sites.

This article explores a case study of the contestation of religious identity at the cultural heritage site of the *Masjid Gedhe* ‘Grand Mosque’ of the Yogyakarta palace located in Kauman, Yogyakarta as a model of the occurrence of religious identity contestation at cultural heritage sites

in Indonesia. Through this exploration, the author attempts to provide a picture of how Islamic identity is negotiated and contested in the space of cultural heritage sites in the case of the rejection of the Muslim United #2 event and the Anniversary Commemoration of Nadhatul Ulama (NU) event.

The *Masjid Gedhe* Kauman Yogyakarta, also known as the Grand Mosque of *Keraton* Yogyakarta or the Grand Mosque of Kauman, was completed in 1775 during the reign of Sultan Hamengkubuwono I and has been designated as a cultural heritage protected by Law No. 11 of 2010 concerning Cultural Heritage through the Regulation of the Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia No. PM.89/PW.007/MKP/2011 (Muhadiyatiningsih et al., 2022). The decision was strengthened by the Decree of the Governor of the Special Region of Yogyakarta No. 181/Kep/2020 as a Provincial Cultural Heritage Site. On 18 September 2023, this Grand Mosque became part of the philosophical axis recognized by UNESCO as the World Heritage (Karsono & Wahid, 2008; Aryanti, 2013; Meliana & Caroline, 2020; Wipranata & Tjung, 2020; Andjanie dkk., 2023).

Concerning religious identity which is part of the cultural identity contested in the cultural heritage building space, Stuart Hall's works are relevant to be used to see this phenomenon, especially "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (Hall, 1990) and "Representation: Cultural Representation and Marking Practices" (Hall, 1997). Hall (1990) introduced the idea of identity as a process, not a fixed essence. He argues that cultural identity is fluid, and constructed through historical processes, social interactions, and power dynamics. This perspective counters the essentialist view of identity as a static and unchanging attribute (Hall, 1990).

The theory introduced by Hall also touches on power and representation. His work highlights how identity formation is influenced by power structures and social hierarchies. According to Hall (1997), cultural identity is often constructed and represented through media and other cultural forms, which can reflect and perpetuate dominant power relations. This concept will be used to read the social phenomena that occurred at the Grand Mosque of Yogyakarta palace in Kauman Yogyakarta. The use of Hall's theory to read the contestation of religious identity is expected to be a novelty in this study compared to previous studies. On the other hand, the inheritor community basically has experiences and memories or memories of cultural heritage either directly or indirectly by individuals or society. It is an activity of choosing to remember and reminisce including forgetting events that occur as a process of making social and cultural meaning (Waterton & Smith 2010). Thus, in the management of cultural heritage, it is necessary to pay attention to the aspects of meaning owned by the community that are directly related to the cultural heritage.

This study is urgent as it highlights the complex interplay of power, identity, and cultural representation at the *Masjid Gedhe* Kauman Yogyakarta, a space central to both religious and political dynamics. By examining how different Muslim groups, such as Muhammadiyah and NU, negotiate their religious identities through public events, this study underscores the ongoing contestation of cultural heritage sites as arenas for religious and socio-political expression, revealing how local communities and institutional powers shape, resist, and redefine religious identity. The study not only illuminates the tensions between modernist and traditionalist Islamic practices but also demonstrates how authority—whether from the *Keraton* 'The Palace' or local communities—plays a critical role in determining the cultural significance and religious character of these shared spaces.

The intersection of cultural heritage and identity formation has been a critical area of study in understanding how spaces, like the *Masjid Gedhe* Kauman Yogyakarta, serve as sites for contesting religious and cultural identities. In the context of Yogyakarta, the Grand Mosque, constructed in 1775 as part of the *Keraton* Yogyakarta complex, has historically been a symbol of Javanese Islam, interwoven with both the religious and political identity of the Sultanate (Setyawati, 2016; Rahmadillah & Laksono, 2023). Hall's (1990) theory on identity as a social construct provides a foundational lens for understanding how different groups project their ideological visions through cultural representations within this shared space. As such, the mosque becomes a place of worship

and a dynamic arena where the local Muslim communities, namely those affiliated with Muhammadiyah and NU or others, negotiate the mosque's identity and its role in the contemporary religious landscape.

The Grand Mosque's historical and cultural significance within the urban planning of Yogyakarta illustrates how identity is deeply embedded in architectural and religious practices (Adrisijanti, 2007; Wardani et al, 2013; Setiadi, 2015; Falahi & Saidi, 2024). The mosque's association with the *Keraton* and the Javanese-Islamic fusion it represents has been crucial in shaping local religious practices, such as those during the Grebeg and Sekaten ceremonies (Khadafi & Harahap, 2024; Akbar, 2024; Agustin, 2019; Rodliyatun & Zaman, 2022). The role of this mosque in facilitating these ceremonies has reinforced the symbolic ties between the monarchy and Islam in Yogyakarta, establishing it as a space of traditionalist Islamic practices (Beck, 1995; Arifin dkk, 2019, Zubair, 2015). However, as Muhammadiyah, a modernist Islamic movement, gained traction in the region, particularly through figures like Ahmad Dahlan, the mosque's identity became increasingly contested. Muhammadiyah's efforts to encourage a form of Islam rooted strictly in the Quran and Sunnah challenged the cultural practices tied to local traditions and syncretism (Beck, 1995; Burhani, 2005; Ricklefs, 2012). The evolving religious practices in Kauman, the area surrounding the mosque, reflect the growing tension between modernist and traditionalist Islamic identities (Sridiyatmiko, 2016; De Jong & Twikromo, 2017).

The purpose of this study is to explore how the *Masjid Gedhe* Kauman Yogyakarta, as a cultural and religious heritage site, becomes a contested space for the negotiation of Islamic identities, reflecting broader socio-political dynamics. By examining the events surrounding the mosque between October 2019 and March 2020, the study reveals how various Islamic groups, such as Muhammadiyah and NU, use cultural representations and public events to assert their distinct religious identities within this shared space. Through the lens of Hall's theory of identity and power, the study highlights how these groups, in collaboration with or in opposition to local authorities like the *Keraton* 'Palace', engage in a complex process of identity construction and resistance, shaping not only religious practices but also the symbolic meaning of the mosque in contemporary Yogyakarta society. This research emphasizes the role of power relations in the contestation of cultural heritage, showing how authority—whether from the *Keraton* 'Palace', local communities, or event organizers—determines the visibility and legitimacy of competing religious identities.

METHODS

A constructivist approach to research emphasizes that knowledge is socially constructed, shaped by human experiences and the contexts within which they occur. In this study, constructivism is employed to examine how identity at the *Masjid Gedhe* 'Grand Mosque' is not a fixed essence but rather a fluid and negotiated construct, shaped by various groups, historical events, and power dynamics (Creswell, 2013). This worldview aligns with the theoretical framework provided by Hall (1990), who argues that identity is continuously represented, redefined, and contested through culture and power structures. The focus on identity as a social construct allows for an exploration of how different groups—such as the Kauman community, the Muhammadiyah movement, and the *Keraton* 'Palace' of Yogyakarta—engage in symbolic acts to assert and represent their respective identities in a shared space.

This research utilizes a case study methodology to gain an in-depth understanding of the specific dynamics surrounding the *Masjid Gedhe* Kauman Yogyakarta during a crucial period of identity contestation between October 2019 and March 2020 (Richards & Morse, 2012). The Grand Mosque, as a historical and cultural landmark, serves as a critical case for investigating how religious and cultural identities are constructed and contested in public spaces. By focusing on the events surrounding the Muslim United #2 event and the NU Anniversary event, this study is able to examine how different groups seek to shape the religious identity of the mosque and assert their own cultural representations.

The criteria for selecting these two events as case studies are rooted in their clear representation of competing visions of Islam in the public sphere—modernist versus traditionalist interpretations—and the ways in which these groups navigate power relations with the *Keraton* ‘Palace’ and the local community. Data collection for this study involves a combination of participant observation, interviews with key stakeholders (e.g., event organizers, *Keraton* ‘Palace’ representatives, and local community members), and the analysis of media coverage and public statements made during the period of contestation. This approach allows for a rich, qualitative exploration of the events and provides insights into how identity is negotiated in real-world contexts (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

This research employs a qualitative methodology to explore the social processes that underpin identity negotiation at the Grand Mosque. A qualitative approach is particularly suited to this study, as it enables the researcher to capture the depth and complexity of the interactions between individuals, groups, and cultural practices. This choice is aligned with the research questions, which focus on understanding the ways in which identity is represented, contested, and negotiated in a historical and culturally significant space. By focusing on qualitative data, the research can explore the nuances of identity construction, particularly how individuals and groups perceive and react to competing religious and cultural narratives. The theoretical framework guiding this research draws on Stuart Hall's (1990) ideas of identity as a dynamic, contested process shaped by power relations. The study examines how different groups—such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)—construct and represent their identities through religious practices, language, and public events. The Grand Mosque, in this case, becomes a focal point where these competing identities intersect, revealing the broader cultural and political tensions within Yogyakarta.

In terms of data collection, this study uses a multi-method approach. First, archival research provides a historical context for understanding the mosque's significance within the *Keraton*'s religious and political framework. Second, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including local religious leaders, event organizers, and community representatives, offer insights into how identity is represented and contested in the mosque's space. Third, content analysis of media reports, social media posts, and public statements reveals the ways in which identity is framed and contested in public discourse. This triangulation of data sources allows for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play and strengthens the validity of the findings. The case study approach offers several advantages for this research. It allows for a contextualized exploration of identity contestation in a specific cultural and historical setting. By examining the events that occurred around the Grand Mosque, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how identity is negotiated in real-time, in response to both local and broader political and religious forces. Moreover, the case study method is well-suited to understanding the complex interplay of history, politics, religion, and culture, making it an ideal approach for investigating the intersection of power, representation, and identity in this particular case. In conclusion, the constructivist philosophy and qualitative case study methodology employed in this research provide a robust framework for examining the dynamic processes through which identity is negotiated, contested, and represented within the context of the Grand Mosque. By focusing on the period of contestation around the Muslim United #2 and NU Anniversary events, this study aims to offer a deeper understanding of the complex ways in which cultural heritage and religious practices are intertwined with power, politics, and identity in contemporary Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Masjid Gedhe Kauman as Cultural Heritage of the Yogyakarta

The Special Region of Yogyakarta is one of the provinces in Indonesia that has many historical relics from the past. The Yogyakarta government currently has 202 cultural heritage objects, 417 cultural heritage buildings, 70 cultural heritage structures, 60 cultural heritage sites, and 11 cultural heritage areas (jogjacagar.jogjaprov.go.id).

Yogyakarta, a vibrant city encompassing an area of 46 km², comprises 14 sub-districts and 45 villages. Within this city, there are four designated cultural heritage areas known as '*Kawasan Cagar Budaya*' (KCB): KCB Keraton, KCB Kotagede, KCB Pakualaman, and KCB Kotabaru. These cultural heritage sites are closely interconnected. Kotagede represents the origin of the Islamic Mataram civilization, which later gave rise to the Sultanate in the *Keraton* 'Palace' and the principality in Pakualaman. Additionally, since 1917, Kotabaru has served as an exclusive colonial residence.

KCB Keraton includes the *Keraton* 'Palace' and Philosophical Axis World Heritage areas, including Kauman Village. This village was specifically established as a place of residence for the palace's *abdi dalem pamethakan* (religious server of Sultanate) named */Kauman/*. The naming of Kauman as the identity of a village comes from the toponym of its residents, most of whom are religious *abdi dalem* taking care of the *Keraton's* Grand Mosques (Fatah & Saputra, 2022). The name */Kauman/* itself comes from Arabic, namely */qaum/*, which means 'a group of people' or 'a group of residents', which was then absorbed into Indonesian as */kaum/* (Darban, 2011).

Currently, Kauman Village includes 4 Citizens' Associations '*Rukun Warga*' (RW) and 18 Neighborhood Associations '*Rukun Tetangga*' (RT) (Chawari, 2017). The total area of Kauman village is 192,000 m² with the characteristic of buildings that are close together between small alleys that are less than two meters wide (Darban, 2011). There has been no previous research indicating with certainty when Kauman village was founded, so it can be concluded that Kauman's existence coincided with the establishment of the Grand Mosque. Kauman's position in the urban planning of the Mataram Kingdom is one of the four pillars supporting civilization known as *Catur Gatra Tunggal*. This refers to the status of the Yogyakarta Sultanate which is a kingdom based on Islamic teachings, so it is obligatory for the sultan as the highest ruler to build a place of worship in the form of the Grand Mosque. The core of the mosque was completed in 1773 AD (See Figure 1) and the porch was completed in 1755 and named the Grand Mosque. Its location is to the west of the North Square, in the same complex as Kauman Village (Rahmadillah & Laksono, 2023).



Figure 1. *Masjid Gedhe* 'Grand Mosque' of Kauman Yogyakarta

Functionally, the Grand Mosque building since its inception has functioned as a place of prayer as indicated by the presence of the main room of the mosque, and a social function as indicated by the presence of the veranda '*serambi*'. This veranda was also used as a religious court '*al-mahkamah al-kabīrah*' of the Yogyakarta Palace. Meanwhile, the yard '*pelataran*' is used for the *Keraton's* religious festivals such as the *Sekaten* ceremony (an annual religious Sultanate event for commemorating Prophet Muhammad's birthday). In terms of function, it is clear that the *Masjid Gedhe* Kauman Yogyakarta functions as both a private space and a public religious space.

In addition to the *Kasultanan* Mosque, in the Kauman Village there are also historical buildings including the Aisyiyah Kindergarten (froble), the *Kawedanan Pengulon* (an office of *Keraton* Yogyakarta's religious leader), the *pawiyatan* school built by KH Ahmad Dahlan, Indisch-style houses, the house and *langgar* (prayer rooms) of Haji Ahmad Dahlan (the founder of Muhammadiyah), and several other prayer rooms or (Makhasi & Fakhurrifqi, 2020). In addition to the legacy of physical buildings, Kauman is the residence of Indonesian national heroes including KH Ahmad Dahlan, *Nyai* Siti Walidah (KH Ahmad Dahlan's wife), *Ki Bagus* Hadikusumo, and *Haji* Fachrodin (Makhasi & Fakhurrifqi, 2020). In addition, there are also figures of Abu Bakar Ali and Moh. Wardani, local heroes of the Battle of Kotabaru, 7 October 1945 (Setiawati, 2018).

Proposal for Religious Group Activities at *Masjid Gedhe* Kauman Yogyakarta and the Rejections

Chronology of the Rejections

On October 11-13, 2019, an event titled Muslim United #2 was scheduled to be held. This activity consisted of a series of events including a *tablīg akbar* 'public Islamic teaching', social activities, a food festival, a Muslim expo, a Muslim community gathering, and various games and children's facilities (kids' corner).

The main attraction of the event organized by the *Ukhuwah Islāmiyah* Forum, which claims to be a forum for the unity of Islamic mass organizations throughout the Special Region of Yogyakarta, is the *tablīg akbar* agenda attended by many speakers, political figures, and artists whose names are quite famous in Indonesia. In the official poster of the event released by the committee before the event (see Figure 2), the names of the event participants in bold include Abdul Somad, Hanan Attaki, Adi Hidayat, Oemar Mita, Muhammad Al Muthohar, Salim A Fillah, Jazir ASP, Bachtiar Nasir, Felix Siauw, Ali Jaber, Daud Rasyid, Das'ad Latif, Luthfi Basori, Muhammad bin Anies Shahab, Ahmad Heryawan, and Arie Untung.



Figure 2. Muslim United #2 Official Poster

The series of events were planned to be held at the *Masjid Gedhe* Kauman Yogyakarta Complex and the North Square. The mosque veranda is the main stage for the *tablīg akbar* event, while the mosque courtyard and the North Square are for the food festival and Muslim expo activities. The Muslim United #2 Committee has obtained permission from the *Kawedanan Hageng*

Punakawan Wahonosastokriyo since August 5, 2019. The committee has also obtained permission from the *Ta'mir* (managers) of the Grand Mosque to use the mosque and its surrounding area for this activity.

The preparation of Muslim United #2 entered a chaotic episode when a letter sent to the *Kawedanan Hageng Panitrapura* for the loan of *Ndalem Pangulon* located north of the Grand Mosque for the *Ustāz Buffet* area and VVIP area was rejected. The rejection letter dated September 28, 2019, also stated that all event venues, both the Grand Mosque and its courtyard, *Ndalem Pengulon*, and the north square on the west side were not permitted to be used for this event. Not long after, a letter was issued from the *Kawedanan Hageng Punakawan Wahonosastokriyo* which canceled the previous permit letter on October 1, 2019. Approaching the day of implementation, preparations for the activity were still carried out and the installation of the stage, stands, and attributes of the Muslim United #2 activity were still carried out. The committee continued to carry out the first day's activities, but after a dialogue with the Yogyakarta Special Region Police who conveyed a message from the *Keraton Yogyakarta* on the evening of October 11, 2019, finally the activities in the Grand Mosque area were stopped and the committee then moved them to the Jogokariyan Mosque on October 12, 2019.



Figure 4. Official Flyer of NU's Anniversary Event

Furthermore, on March 5, 2020, the Yogyakarta City Branch Leadership of Nahdlatul Ulama '*Pengurus Cabang Nahdlatul Ulama*' (PCNU) was scheduled to hold a *Pengajian Akbar* (Public Islamic Teaching) in the series of event the 94th Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Anniversary '*Hari Lahir*' (Harlah) at the Grand Mosque of *Keraton Yogyakarta* by inviting Ahmad Muwafiq (See Figure 4). However, the Kauman community rejected the plan of the activity by putting up banners of rejection in the corners of the village (see Figure 5) since the end of February. This rejection resulted in NU having to move the planning of its activities to the campus of the Nahdlatul Ulama University (UNU) of Yogyakarta on Lowano street.

Responses and Statements of the Actors

Statements from several actors emerged ahead of the Muslim United #2 event, especially after the *Keraton Yogyakarta* through the *Kawedanan Hageng Panitrapura* issued an official letter not allowing the event to be held at the Grand Mosque. The organizing committee of the Muslim United #2 event, Nanang Syaifurozi, said that the event they were holding was purely a religious

mission and did not conflict with any interests, so there was no reason to be obstructed. He added, *"Moreover, the place is in a mosque and this is indeed a religious teaching"* (Razak, 2019).

The committee was accused by several parties that the implementation of the Muslim United #2 event had the potential to give rise to provocation and hate speech as a result of the 2019 Presidential Election held in April. Regarding the accusation, the committee tried to prove that what was accused was not true. The committee explained, *"So (the main event of this activity is) an Islamic teaching, even though it is crowded with people, it is orderly, clean, there are no provocateurs, no intimidation, no hate speech"* (Razak, 2019).

The chairman of the committee explained that the Muslim United #2 event is not a representation of the interests of any group and is purely only to unite Muslims in Indonesia through religious studies with the theme of "unity" by raising *"Seduluran Saklawase"* slogan. In addition, according to him, the Grand Mosque of Keraton Yogyakarta was chosen because it has historical value and is a symbol of Muslim unity (Razak, 2019).

According to Nanang, *"Indonesia is currently being hit by various issues and differences of opinion that can divide the unity and peace of Muslims. Moreover, the Indonesian people have just gone through a political year that is closely related to provocation and hate speech that can cause division"*. This is the background to why Muslim United #2 was held (Razak, 2019).

From the Keraton Yogyakarta, Pengageng Kawedanan Hageng Punakawan Kridhamardawa Keraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat KPH Notonegoro did not provide a specific reason why the Palace did not allow the implementation of the activity. He said, *"It (the Grand Mosque) belongs to Ndalem (Sultan), it wants to be borrowed. In principle, it is the Palace's place, then if it wants to be borrowed, the Palace does not want to lend it. There is no need for any reason"*. He also suggested that the committee look for alternative venues (Solopos.com, October 12, 2019). Meanwhile, the Pengageng Tepas Tandha Yekti Keraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat, GKR Hayu, emphasized that the venue for the Muslim United #3 event belongs to the Keraton Yogyakarta and the owner has stated that his ownership is not allowed to be used by the committee. She said, *"There is no 'they said it was allowed', or 'it has been discussed with the Keraton', the Grand Mosque is owned by Keraton, not owned by the Committee"* (Solopos.com, October 12, 2019).

GKR Hayu's statement was in response to many elements of society who expressed objections to the holding of the event after the poster of the activity was spread. The attitude of the Keraton, she explained, was the same as that conveyed by the Kawedanan Hageng Panitrapura led by GKR Condrokirono, which is the highest division in the Keraton Yogyakarta under the Sultan, namely not allowing the implementation of the Muslim United #2 activity (Solopos.com, October 12, 2019).

After the committee moved the event venue to the Jogokariyan Mosque, the Head of the Kawedanan Hageng Panitrapura of the Keraton Yogyakarta, GKR Condrokirono, said that the Keraton had nothing to do with the move because it was the committee's decision. He added, *"The Keraton still adheres to the letter that has been issued"* (Solopos.com, October 12, 2019).

Syukri Fadholi, who is the Presidium of the Islamic Brotherhood Forum of the Special Region of Yogyakarta, suspects that the rejection of the implementation of Muslim United #2 at the Grand Mosque, which is part of the Keraton Yogyakarta, was because the Keraton received incorrect information. After the official poster was spread, he said that there was a lot of information circulating that the Muslim United #2 activity invited many figures who were radical and anti-government. He stated, *"Such accusations are baseless"* (detik.com, October 11, 2019).

Jazir ASP, one of the speakers in Muslim United #2 who was also a cleric at the Jogokariyan Mosque, opined as quoting the results of the dialogue with the Yogyakarta Regional Police Chief that whether this activity would continue when the host in this case the Keraton Yogyakarta did not allow it and there was no need for legal action. He said it was important to uphold morals. When not permitted by the host, one should not be reckless in continuing to hold it. He told detik.com, *"Ngarso Dalem (Sultan) does not want legal action. 'Well, how can it be moral if it is not permitted, how dare you be reckless'"*. He also said regarding the transfer of the event location to the mosque

he manages, *"The most prepared in terms of place and human resources is Jogokariyan"* (detik.com, October 12, 2019). Meanwhile, the rejection of the *pengajian* in the series of the 94th Anniversary of Nahdhatul Ulama which was supposed to be held at the Grand Mosque on March 5, 2020 was evident from dozens of banners installed in various corners of the Kauman village. Some of them read *"Don't disturb our peace because we never disturb you. We reject clashes in our base"* and *"Don't force us to move. If you want to maintain brotherhood, respect our territory. We reject clerics who destroy brotherhood"* which is named after the Kauman Youth Movement. Also *"Maintaining brotherhood does not have to held event here, at the Muhammadiyah base!!!"* which is named after the Kauman Muhammadiyah Community.

In addition to banners, the rejection also appeared in the form of a statement of the response of the Kauman residents signed by the Head of *Rukun Warga* 10, 11, 12, and 13 Kauman as representatives of 83 residents who stated their attitude on behalf of the Kauman community dated February 28, 2020. The following is the text:

All Kauman residents after considering: (1) Activities at the Grand Mosque cannot be separated from the congregation (jamaah) that has prospered the Grand Mosque so far, namely the congregation who are mostly Kauman residents. (2) Kauman is the birthplace of the Muhammadiyah socio-religious organization, which until now the socio-religious culture is still maintained and is thick in the Kauman community. (3) Of course, if there are activities or events at the Grand Mosque that are not in line with the Kauman culture, it will cause problems. (4) Residents around the Grand Mosque, especially Kauman residents, have been carrying out religious activities in a conducive, comfortable, and calm manner under the prevailing culture. Concerning this, all Kauman residents have decided: (1) Firmly reject the holding of the Nahdhatul Ulama anniversary at the Kauman Grand Mosque (in bold). (2) Please pay attention to all parties, so that unwanted things or friction between the nation's children do not occur.

The Head of the Grand Mosque *Ta'mīr* (manager), Azman Latif, highlighted the invited speaker as the cause of the rejection of Islamic teaching in the series of the NU anniversary, namely Ahmad Muwafiq. *"The banners are from residents or the congregation here"*, he explained regarding the origin of the banners that appeared around Kampung Kauman. The Head of the *Masjid Gedhe* 'Grand Mosque' said that the Grand Mosque is open to be used by anyone, both Muhammadiyah residents who mostly live around Kauman and NU. He said, *"We don't think there has ever been a problem between NU and Muhammadiyah"*.

Rejection also emerged from the youth wing of the Muhammadiyah organization for the Yogyakarta City area. Through a statement of position signed by its chairman on February 27, 2020, this organization voiced its stance on the NU Anniversary event at the Grand Mosque as follows:

Responding to and following up on the 94th Nahdhatul Ulama' Anniversary activities at the Grand Mosque of *Keraton* Yogyakarta, hereby we, the Regional Leadership of the Muhammadiyah Youth of Yogyakarta City, declare our position: (1) Concerning the controversy carried out by Ahmad Muwafiq as a speaker in the 94th Harlah Nahdhatul Ulama' Grand Study which for some time has become a polemic regarding blasphemy. (2) Responding to the rejection of residents in the Kauman area and its surroundings, to maintain the conduciveness and harmony of the Kauman community, Muhammadiyah residents, and the community in general. (3) To maintain the dignity of Nahdhatul Ulama' so that the Anniversary celebration should run conductively, it should be held in a place that does not cause controversy. (4) Maintaining Islamic brotherhood and national brotherhood between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama' as part of the nation's assets so that there is no division at the grassroots, national and global levels. (5) Maintaining the authority and good name of the *Keraton* Yogyakarta as the protector of the people of the Special Region of Yogyakarta, as well as the rejection at the grassroots as a form of consideration for the *Keraton* Yogyakarta. (6) As proof of the application of Javanese culture which is full of manners, the value of *tepo seliro* (mutual

respect) must be brought out in Nahdhatul Ulama' to the residents of Kauman who are predominantly Muhammadiyah. (7) To prevent the emergence of cracks in the components of the nation's children. Based on the points above, we, the Regional Leadership of the Muhammadiyah Youth of Yogyakarta City, appeal not to hold the Anniversary event of Nahdhatul Ulama' in the Kauman Area of Yogyakarta City. *Fastabiqul Khairaat*.

The rejection of the Islamic teaching in the series of the 94th Anniversary of Nahdhatul Ulama which was supposed to be filled by Ahmad Muwafiq still emerged even though the committee had obtained permission to hold it from the *Kawedanan Hageng Panitrapura* through a letter signed by GKR Condrokirono as *Penghageng* dated February 15, 2020.

Responding to the rejection, the Head of *Tanfidziyah* PCNU Yogyakarta City, M. Yazid Afandi explained that NU had obtained permission from the *Keraton* Yogyakarta to hold the Anniversary event of NU at the Grand Mosque. However, it turned out that the activity presented resistance from several people which was written on the banners installed around Kauman. On the other hand, the Secretary of the PCNU Yogyakarta City, Abdul Su'ud, conveyed the reason for choosing the Grand Mosque as the location for the event because he considered the Grand Mosque to be public (Wicaksono, 2020).

Finally, the PCNU Yogyakarta City was forced to move the event to the UNU Yogyakarta Campus on Lowano Street for the convenience of all parties. The Head of Tanfidziyah NU Yogyakarta City regretted the relocation. *"Of course, the shifting of location is something very difficult for NU. But for the sake of security, comfort, and harmony of the community, NU sees it as more aslah (better things) if the location is shifted to another place"*, he said as quoted from tempo.co, March 4, 2020.

Contestation of Religious Identity in the Masjid Gedhe Kauman Yogyakarta

Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) are two of Indonesia's most influential Islamic organizations, with deep historical roots that trace back to the early 20th century. Both groups have significantly shaped the religious and social fabric of the Muslim community in Indonesia, particularly in Yogyakarta, where their ideological differences are often more pronounced (Barton, 2014; Zarkasyi, 2018; Azca, et al 2021).

Muhammadiyah was founded in 1912 by KH Ahmad Dahlan in the Kauman district of Yogyakarta (Darban, 2011; Yuristiadhi, 2020). This modernist Islamic movement seeks to return to the pure teachings of Islam, based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, and is characterized by a reformist approach to Islamic practice. Muhammadiyah emphasizes rejecting traditional practices considered *bid'ah* (innovation in religion practices) and *tahayul-khurafat* (believing on folk practices and superstitions). Its approach to Islam is often described as puritanical, advocating for a rational, scriptural-based interpretation that prioritizes education, social welfare, and modernity (Nashir, et.al 2019; Burhani, 2005, Burhani, 2006; Khoirudin & Aulassyahied, 2023). The organization's structure is hierarchical, with a central leadership body (the Majelis Tarjih) responsible for issuing religious rulings and guiding the movement's doctrinal direction (Anwar, 2018; Hambali, 2021).

In contrast, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), founded in 1926 by KH Hasyim Asy'ari, is rooted in the traditionalist approach to Islam. NU adheres to the teachings of the classical schools of Islamic jurisprudence, especially the Shafi'i school, and emphasizes the importance of preserving local Islamic customs and practices (Bush, 2002). The organization plays a significant role in Indonesia's religious and cultural life, particularly through its educational and social welfare programs. NU's structure is more decentralized than Muhammadiyah's, with strong regional leadership and a focus on the involvement of local clerics (kiai) in decision-making (Fealy & Bush, 2014; Yani, et.al 2022).

Despite their theological differences, Muhammadiyah and NU share a common goal of advancing Islamic teachings and promoting community welfare. Both organizations are committed to improving the social and economic conditions of Muslims, and they collaborate on various issues

related to public welfare, such as education, healthcare, and disaster relief (Azca, et al 2021). However, their distinct approaches to Islamic practice, governance, and community involvement often lead to tensions, especially in areas where their religious identities intersect (Arifianto, 2021).

While tensions between Muhammadiyah and NU are not uncommon, there are also significant areas of collaboration and mutual respect. Both organizations share a commitment to Islamic unity and social development, even if their interpretations of Islam differ. In many regions of Indonesia, particularly in Yogyakarta, members of both groups participate in joint social activities, educational projects, and charitable work (Asiah, et.al 2021; Mukhlis & Mustofa, 2022; Pratama, 2021; Almeida & Safitri, 2023).

However, despite these areas of cooperation, ideological differences and community dynamics can create points of tension, especially when it comes to matters of religious practice and the governance of sacred spaces like the Grand Mosque. The situation surrounding the Muslim United #2 event and the NU Anniversary event at the Grand Mosque illustrates how subtle differences in ideology and cultural practices can lead to misunderstandings and disputes, even in the absence of overt conflict.

The Muslim United #2 event, which was planned to be held at the Grand Mosque, was seen by many in the local community, particularly the Kauman Muhammadiyah community, as promoting a form of Islam that was too modernist and political, closely aligned with reformist and sometimes radical Islamic voices. This event, which featured speakers critical of the government and focused on contemporary Islamic issues, sparked tension with the Palace and NU, who felt that the event was inappropriate for a historically significant space like the Grand Mosque. The Palace's rejection of the event, grounded in the political atmosphere post-2019 Presidential election, highlighted the complex relationship between religious events, political allegiances, and the symbolic power of the Grand Mosque.

On the other hand, the NU Anniversary event, with its emphasis on traditionalist practices and the Javanese Islamic culture, was viewed by the Kauman Muhammadiyah community as an attempt to claim the mosque for one particular form of Islam, undermining the mosque's historical association with Muhammadiyah and modernist Islam. The NU's framing of the Grand Mosque as a "public mosque" also sparked resistance, as local Muhammadiyah members felt that the space should reflect their interpretation of Islam, given their strong historical ties to the mosque.

This situation illustrates how even subtle differences in ideology, governance, and community focus can create barriers to unity. While both organizations may share a common commitment to Islamic values, their competing interpretations of those values often lead to contestation over religious spaces, cultural symbols, and public events. This contestation is not merely about theology, but also about power, identity, and belonging within the broader Muslim community.

Borrowing Hall (1990), the dynamics that occurred between October 2019 and March 2020 around the Grand Mosque of *Keraton Yogyakarta* can be seen in how cultural heritage becomes a space for identity contestation. The identity inherent in the Grand Mosque is contested through events or activities that want to be colored as a pattern of religious identity inherent in this cultural heritage building.

Identity as a Social Construction

The existence of the *Masjid Gedhe* 'Grand Mosque' is something that cannot be separated from the *Keraton Yogyakarta*. The Grand Mosque is one of four important buildings in the urban planning of the successor region of Mataram, which is also known as *Catur Gatra Tunggal*, complementing the Palace, *Alun-alun*, and *Pasar*. This mosque was built complete with its veranda in 1775. This is where all the religious ceremonies of the Palace, such as *Grebeg* and *Sekaten* are carried out and behind the mosque all the religious servants who take care of the religious affairs of the Palace live. The religious understanding and worship applied are Javanese Islam. This means that historically, culturally, and politically, the existence of the Grand Mosque has become an identity (Fairley, 2024) that is closely attached to the *Keraton Yogyakarta*.

After the establishment of Muhammadiyah in 1912 by a Grand Mosque Official (*Ketip*), Ahmad Dahlan in Kauman, Muhammadiyah slowly gained sympathy and support from the community in Kauman and even outside Kauman. Since 1927, Muhammadiyah has had a *Tarjih* Council tasked with finding the strongest religious arguments to be used as a basis for Muhammadiyah sympathizers in worship. Muhammadiyah also has teachings that anticipate heresy, superstition, and superstition which are sometimes still identical to traditionalist Islamic communities. The Kauman community affiliated with Muhammadiyah is the one who is active in the Grand Mosque. Slowly they formed a new Islamic identity that is more critical of the extent to which their worship is following the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah. This group is what colors everyday life at the Grand Mosque (Cai et al., 2022).

In addition to the Grand Mosque, the *Keraton* Yogyakarta also has the *Pathok Negoro* Mosques or state border, namely the *Plosokuning* Mosque in the north, the *Mlangi* Mosque in the west, the *Babadan* Mosque in the east, and the *Dongkelan* Mosque in the south. When compared to the Grand Mosque, the religious character of the community around these *Pathok Negoro* mosques is different because it tends more towards the religious character and worship of traditionalist Islamic communities (van de Wetering, 2020).

Relevant to Hall's theory, the identity that has been attached to the Grand Mosque in the last 110 years is a mosque filled with activities by the surrounding community that are characterized by modernist Islamic religion and worship, although occasionally during religious activities of the *Keraton* Yogyakarta at certain moments such as *Grebeg* and *Sekaten*.

Representation of Identity

Hall (1990) said that identity is represented through various forms of culture. According to him, representation is not neutral because it is produced and controlled by the dominant power structure because the dominant group has the power to define and represent identity (Matías-García et al., 2024).

The Muslim United #2 event, which was originally going to be held at the Grand Mosque, offers activities with a modern Islamic cultural character. This can be seen from the selection of modern activity branding such as "Muslim expo", "*tablīg akbar*", "social activity", "food festival", "Muslim community gathering", and "kids corner". Likewise, when viewed from the invited speakers, it describes the segmentation and religious characteristics of the congregation who attended the activity.

Regarding the selection of the Grand Mosque as the location for Muslim United #2, the committee argued that the Grand Mosque has historical value and is a symbol of the unity of the Muslim community. The selection of the event tagline "*Seduluran Saklawase*" also implies the spirit of unity expected by the committee.

However, this was read differently by the public and the Palace. The accusation that this event was exclusive and more voicing the voices of radical Islamic groups and anti-government was pinned on the organizers of this event (Addi et al., 2025). This was not without reason because several speakers in this activity were parties who were at odds with the President who was elected in the 2019 Election. Because the implementation of this activity was only six months after the Presidential Election, the political atmosphere was arguably tense. This was the reason the Palace chose not to allow the use of the venue.

Meanwhile, NU brands their activities with Islamic cultural patterns that are closer to Javanese culture. The choice of the word "*pengajian*" (instead of "*tablīg akbar*" or "*kajian*"), the activity of "*dhahar kembang*" to refer to the traditional way of enjoying food, and "*Gus*" as the speaker's title show this. Likewise, the mention of "*Masjid Kagungan Ndalem Masjid Gedhe Kasultanan Ngayogyakarta Hadningrat*" as the location of the event further strengthens the representation of religious identity built by NU through the events they prepare.

Regarding the choice of the event venue the argument that "Grand Mosque is a public mosque" shows that there is a space that wants to be colored or represented by its religious identity

with the NU Anniversary event. Historically, Kauman Village, the location of the Grand Mosque, is the birthplace of Muhammadiyah, which provokes the community to react to the representation of identity built by NU.

Power, Identity, and Negotiation

The failure to grant permission and the rejection that emerged for the Muslim United #2 and NU Anniversary event at the Grand Mosque in October 2019 and March 2020 from Hall's perspective is a form of effort to build, represent, and perceive power (Matsuda, 2002). The letter issued by the *Keraton* through the *Kawedanan Hageng Panitrapura* which is the highest division in the *Keraton* Yogyakarta under the Sultan, signed by GKR Condrokirono as *Penghageng* who did not permit the committee to use the *Keraton* facilities in the form of the Grand Mosque and its courtyard, *Ndalem Pengulon*, and the north square on the west side were not permitted to be used for this event shows the power held by the *Keraton*.

The permit letter that the Muslim United #2 committee has obtained from the *Kawadanan Hageng Punakawan Wahonosastokriyo* which was not considered by the *Kawedanan Hageng Panitrapura* shows that the highest part of the *Keraton* shows its power over the *Kawadanan Hageng Punakawan Wahonosastokriyo*. In the end, the *Kawadanan Hageng Punakawan Wahonosastokriyo* also followed the *Kawedanan Hageng Panitrapura* to revoke the permit that had previously been given. Likewise, if we look at the statement given by *Keraton* to the public in response to the holding of this event, it is also an effort to represent and perceive power from Hall's perspective. The statement of the *Pengageng Tepas Tandha Yekti Keraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat*, GKR Hayu "Grand Mosque is owned by the *Keraton*, not owned by the committee" and the statement of the *Pengageng Kawedanan Hageng Punakawan Kridhamardawa Keraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat* KPH Notonegoro "That (*Masjid Gedhe*) belongs to Sultan and you want to borrow it. In principle, it is owned by the *Keraton*, then if you want to borrow it and the *Keraton* doesn't want to lend it. There is no need for any reason" also shows the authority of the *Keraton* over the buildings that will be used by the committee. In the other hand, the rejection of the NU anniversary event at the Grand Mosque which appeared on banners can also be read as how the Kauman community represents its authority (Maheshwari, 2023). The statement "Maintaining brotherhood does not have to be Harlah!! at the Muhammadiyah base" from the Kauman Muhammadiyah Community, for example. Also the statement "Don't force us to move. If you want to maintain brotherhood, respect our territory" from the Kauman Youth Generation. In addition, points two and three in the statement of the Kauman residents' responses to reject NU activities at the Grand Mosque, namely "Kauman is the birthplace of the Muhammadiyah socio-religious organization, which until now the socio-religious culture is still maintained and is strong in the Kauman community" and "Of course if there are activities or events at the Grand Mosque that are not in line with Kauman culture, it will cause problems" show the power of the community. Interestingly, this statement was still issued by the Kauman community even though the *Keraton* Yogyakarta as the owner had permitted the implementation of this activity. This can be seen that the community who care for and manage the Grand Mosque daily feels that they have greater power than the *Keraton* Yogyakarta.

According to Hall (1990) identity is negotiated in power relations. Individuals and groups continually negotiate their identities in response to how they are represented and treated by others. This negotiation process involves resistance and adaptation. The two events that occurred at the Kauman Grand Mosque show more resistance.

What the Muslim United #2 committee did to continue holding its activities on the first day to show that the cultural representation in the religious style represented in their activities was not as accused, even though it was eventually moved to another place on the second day, was a form of identity negotiation. Likewise, NU's efforts to build a representation of its identity that carries traditional Islam which has even received legitimacy from the *Keraton* Yogyakarta turned out to

clash with the representation of the religious culture of the Kauman community so it lost in the identity negotiation.

The Grand Mosque: Heritage, Identity, and Materiality

First and foremost, the Grand Mosque is a cultural heritage site which, throughout the time, ascribed with different meanings through various modes of engagement. The two instances discussed above emphasize the intangible dimension of heritage. This significance or value, as scholars have long pointed out (Smith 2004, 2006; Harrison, 2013), does not necessarily juxtapose or run parallel with the material qualities of the object. It is clear to us that it was shaped by political powers. Apart from the narratives constructed by so-called experts, such as archaeologists, this article strongly acknowledges other forms of discourse that emphasize identity politics in heritage.

What makes the Grand Mosque's case unique, however, lies in its layered historical dynamics, which allow for multiple interpretations and engagements to emerge. Located in the heart of Yogyakarta, a city that, at least since the early twentieth century, experienced political turbulence involving tensions between what we perceive as 'traditionalist' versus 'modernist' Islam, this context provides a strong foundation for why identity politics continues to persist to the present day. While authorized by the royal palace of Yogyakarta, which acts as the bastion of tradition and a reference to the ancient past, the Grand mosque is located in Kauman area, the birthplace of Muhammadiyah (1912), one of Indonesia's largest Islamic 'modernist' movements.

It seems that such tension is, in itself, inevitable. Nevertheless, we would not fully comply with the notion that heritage can be understood as totally sociological or political category. Heritage certainly has a material dimension. As such, we would recall the so-called 'material turn,' which emphasizes a simultaneous return to the materiality of objects (Hicks, 2010; Joyce and Bennett, 2010; Olsen, 2010; see also Tilley et al., 2006; Vercel and McDonell, 2017). This material turn implies that it is not only people who inscribe identity politics to heritage but also the other way around: heritage also mutually 'creates' people. In other words, the meaning is co-produced (Dicks, 2000). Thus we would also assign a sort of agency to heritage.

It is obvious that the Grand Mosque was built with a Javanese traditional mosque archetype, featuring a square design and multitiered roof, as can be observed in other early mosques in Java (Tajudeen 2013, 2017). This type of building in no way represents the idea of modernist Islam or has any particular reference to its Middle Eastern counterparts. Rather, this type of architecture is rooted in the tradition of Monsoon Islam (Prange, 2018) or Indigenized Islam (Arif and Panakkal, 2024), with a strong reference to vernacular architecture and the abundant use of local materials. One striking characteristic that sets this type of mosque apart is its renunciation of the use of domes and arches, which typify mosque buildings in the rest of the Islamic world.

Combining the layered historical experience of the Kauman area with the physical manifestation of 'localized' Islam allows us to observe not only the tension but also the intermingling between the presumed modernist and traditionalist groups. As we discussed above, albeit in different ways of naming the events, there also exists an exchange between the two groups. Aiming to place these events in the Grand Mosque itself demonstrates that both groups perceive and embrace the mosque as their heritage, through which they establish a connection with the past. Precisely at this point, we may argue that the boundary between the traditionalist and modernist is easier to articulate than to practice, and that heritage makes this distinction even more blurred.

Rather than labeling the acts as an attempt to claim authority over the site, we empathetically offer an understanding that both groups work in similar ways to connect with the heritage. The use of the words '*seduluran saklawase*' and the representation of batik clothing by some of the speakers in the poster (Figure 2) by Muslim United, as well as the immediate reaction by the NU, clearly signify this process. The Grand Mosque, we assume, acts not merely as a backdrop, but indeed as the spotlight that allows such appropriation, while always remaining mindful of the traditional characteristics of the building, to take place.

Perhaps it is now more important than ever to consider the temporality of heritage. In the modern world, heritage not only works to split people from the ancient past (Bennet, 1995, Harrison, 2013) but also, as we have discussed here, serves as a point to break historical closure. If only these two events had been allowed to happen, we would have witnessed a very meaningful process of how heritage facilitates people to not feel dislocated from their past. However, the efforts by the Palace to remain neutral and, at the same time, to naturalize the function of the Grand Mosque suggest that authoritative heritage discourse, as elsewhere in Indonesia, remains the strongest determinant.

In conclusion, while Muhammadiyah and NU have areas of collaboration and mutual respect, the differences in their interpretations of Islam and cultural practices can create significant tension, especially in the governance of shared spaces like the Grand Mosque of *Keraton Yogyakarta*. These tensions, however, are not necessarily indicative of deep-seated conflict but rather of a more subtle process of identity negotiation, where power, tradition, and community values intersect. Understanding these dynamics is essential for appreciating how Islamic organizations in Indonesia navigate both cooperation and division within a shared social and political context.

CONCLUSION

Two events that occurred at the *Masjid Gedhe Kauman Yogyakarta*, which is a cultural heritage building, namely the refusal to hold Muslim United #2 by the *Keraton Yogyakarta* and the rejection of the NU Harlah Anniversary event are a depiction of how religious identity is represented culturally by related parties and negotiated with their respective social and political powers in the cultural heritage space. Cultural heritage, as one of its functions according to the Cultural Heritage Law No. 11 of 2010, can be utilized as much as possible for the welfare of the people while maintaining sustainability. Therefore, parties who control or manage cultural heritage should continue to open this cultural heritage so that it can be utilized for a wider audience. Anyone should be allowed to utilize cultural heritage, but still pay attention to the sustainability of the cultural heritage. The same applies to the Grand Mosque of *Keraton Yogyakarta*. The historical value of cultural heritage should be understood and taken into consideration by parties who will organize an event because without realizing it, the activity to be held is a representation of culture that is not free of values. Therefore, the purpose of the event to be held must be in line with the historical and cultural values contained in the cultural heritage.

The limitation of this study lies in its reliance on secondary sources, particularly statements from relevant parties regarding the rejection of Muslim United #2 and the commemoration of NU's anniversary. Future research is encouraged to explore the interactions among key actors involved in the contestation of religious identity at the Great Mosque of Kauman in Yogyakarta, as this would provide a clearer political perspective. This aspect was not addressed in this study because focused primarily on the contestation of religious identity itself.

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