Jurnal Sosiologi Agama
ISSN > 1978-4457 (print) | 2548-477X (online)

Collective Memory, Ritual and Symbols as Cultural Defense of Traditional Muslim Society in Semarang, Central Java

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Abstract
This paper examines how a community maintains its identity in the face of change. By using traditional Muslims in the city of Semarang as the study group, this study examines how this group constructs cultural defenses. The data in this sociological research were obtained through literature study, observation, and interviews. Once collected, the data were analyzed descriptively. By employing a cultural defense framework, traditional Muslim groups in Semarang construct a defense through three key aspects: collective memory, rituals, and symbols. All three are presented as an attempt to deal with modernity.

Keywords: Cultural Defense, Collective Memory, Traditional Muslim

Introduction

Geographically, the traditional Muslim community in Semarang city is predominantly located in the outskirts, bordering the districts of Demak, Kendal, and Semarang. The cultural practices of the Muslim community in these "periphery" areas reflect a distinct pattern of religious observance when compared to those in the "center". Residents of the "periphery" Semarang demonstrate a stronger sense of mechanical solidarity in their community interactions (Durkheim, 1984), which are highly characteristic of traditional societies. In this regard, society serves not only as a vessel for social integration that fosters solidarity but also as the foundation of collective consciousness and the primary objective of moral action. Morality can be understood as a rational desire. As such, moral actions are not simply "obligations" that arise from within; they also embody "goodness" when individuals engage with the social world. Anyone who deviates from collective values and norms is likely to experience feelings of guilt and inner tension. These values have become deeply ingrained in an individual's psyche, compelling them to conform, even if the pressure is not immediately evident due to the process of internalization.

The strength of this group lies in their collectivity, which is based on the transformation of religious and cultural values (Niebuhr, 1951). The Javanese Muslim character is strongly felt in their manifestations, despite Semarang being categorized as a metropolitan city. The existence of this traditional Muslim group is still well-preserved, as depicted above, with their concentration in the outskirts, such as in the districts of Tugu, Ngaliyan, Gunungpati, Tembalang, Pedurungan, Genuk, and some parts of Tembalang and North Semarang. In the center, the patterns of traditional Muslim religious practices persist, albeit in a less dominant form. There, economic ornaments are more commonly found than cultural power. Economic life is marked by rows of

shops along Kauman Street, as well as the presence of Johar Market and Yaik Market, which together illustrate this situation.

Historically, the traditional group's strength in the early development of Islam in Semarang was centered in Kauman, a known area. The basis of the traditional Muslim group, at least until the 1970s, was in this area. The Grand Mosque of Semarang, commonly known as Masjid Kauman, was the center of their activities. Next to it, the economic activities flourished with the traditional market as its support. Their trading activities in the traditional market also contributed to the development of the traditional Islamic community centered around the mosque. Social and political changes, as well as rapid economic growth, have shifted the center of gravity away from the central area. One of the political changes that affected the growth of traditional communities was the new policy on the expansion of Semarang City's administrative area in 1976, followed by further development in 1980. Although practices often associated with the characteristics of traditional Muslim society still exist, a shift has occurred. The preservation of this identity is certainly ongoing through various efforts.

The primary focus of this research is not to investigate why these groups find themselves in a peripheral position, but rather to understand how they sustain their cultural identity amidst the dynamics of urban society. This inquiry pertains to both those at the center and those at the periphery. Consequently, this paper aims to explore the strategies these groups employ, which are framed in this research as cultural defense, to preserve their status and identity as traditional Muslim communities, along with all the associated attributes.

Literature Review

The concept of cultural defense differs from *defending culture*: the former refers to a model or mechanism of survival through cultural approaches, while the latter emphasizes an act. Cultural defense can be understood as a means of protecting oneself through cultural practices, in contrast to *structural defense*. Studies on cultural defense are often found in sociology and anthropology of law, where it refers to using culture as a defense mechanism in cases involving illegal actions.

According to Renteln (2004), the purpose of cultural defense is to allow defendants to present cultural evidence relevant to their case. It helps reduce or eliminate charges by showing how cultural context shapes behavior. The philosophical foundation of this idea is enculturation—the notion that culture influences cognition and action. Because culture affects human motivation, legal systems should take it into account. In diverse societies, justice should consider cultural contexts rather than only judging actions after they occur. However, law enforcement often fails to understand cultural backgrounds, especially those of minorities or indigenous groups. Therefore, cultural defense also functions to protect minorities from majority bias within the legal system.

Kent Greenawalt (2009) expands this discussion in his article *"The Cultural Defense: Reflections in Light of the Model Penal Code and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act."* He defines cultural defense broadly as ways in which cultural evidence can influence legal judgments about guilt or responsibility. Cultural defense, he argues, may not always be a distinct legal defense but can operate through existing doctrines such as coercion or provocation, or through the expansion of traditional defenses.

Beyond law, cultural defense also appears in social and cultural studies. For instance, Paul Christopher Johnson (2002) explains in his discussion of *Candomblé* in Brazil how secrecy and syncretism served as forms of cultural defense among enslaved Africans under Portuguese rule.

Similarly, Chojnacki (2020) shows how the *cargo* tradition among the Maya functioned as an indigenous socio-cultural defense mechanism. In these contexts, cultural defense is often distinguished from cultural preservation. In law, it refers to using culture as a legal defense, while in sociology, it represents broader strategies of survival or resistance. Cultural defense may stem not only from culture but also from religion or shared social values.

One example in sociology is *taqiyyah*, a Shia Muslim practice of concealing one's faith to avoid persecution (Momen, 1987). Here, cultural defense functions as a religious survival strategy. Despite differences between legal and social understandings, both emphasize the importance of defense mechanisms when individuals or groups face external threats—whether from the law, dominant groups, or new traditions. Both individuals (Usman, 2009) and institutions can act as agents of defense. Historically, societies have employed narratives and doctrines to promote self-preservation. For example, Coote and Ord (1989; 1991) describe how the Israelites saw themselves as a blessed and holy nation, maintaining a collective identity across generations.

To address the operational limitations of what is known as traditional Muslims, some clarification of terminology is needed. It is intended to provide a conceptual framework in its application phase. Traditional Muslims here are described as a group of people who, in their paradigm and practice of Islam, are adaptive and open to dialogue with tradition (Woodward, 1999). Their character tends to be moderate and flexible. In this paper, the context of traditional Muslim society in the 20th century refers to the Nahdlatul Ulama organization (NU).

Meanwhile, the discussion of traditional Muslims in previous times is aimed at the social layer that practices religion and culture as exists within the NU framework of thinking. This traditional Muslim community has a very close relationship with *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and kiai (Islamic scholars). Although called traditional, this category does not refer to a community that is insensitive to the development of the times and dreams of an Islamic mode, such as the time of the Prophet. According to Martin van Bruinessen, in the context of traditional Muslim society, tradition and transformation are not mutually exclusive (Bruinessen, 1994). Traditional Muslims who refer to the works of past scholars tend to be more "modern" than strict and "traditional" Islamic modernist groups. Meanwhile, Semarang, referred to here in its administrative sense, is the city of Semarang.

For analysis, this study uses collective memory (Halbwachs, 1980) as a framework for understanding cultural defense. Collective memory connects to symbols and rituals (Lattu, 2014), which may originate from religious traditions or from the dialogue between religion and culture. Following Victor Turner (1969), rituals involve three stages: separation, liminality, and reaggregation. These mark the transition of individuals or groups from one social or symbolic state to another. Symbols, according to Paul Ricoeur (2016), are expressions of double meaning—where a primary meaning points to a deeper, secondary one. Thus, symbols serve as the concretization of abstract ideas, playing a vital role in understanding how cultural defense operates within social and ritual contexts.

Previous themes on the Muslim community in Semarang have been discussed in several books and articles. One of them is the book "Semarang Riwayatmu Dulu" by Amen Budiman, which serves as a reference for all writings about the early development of Islam in Semarang (Budiman, 1978). Another work with a similar topic to this paper is "Semarang: Lintasan Sejarah dan Budaya" by Djawahir Muhammad. Although it does not explicitly discuss the social-religious perspective, certain parts of the book provide important initial information about the origin and uniqueness inherent in Semarang society (Muhammad, 2016).

Before writing "*Semarang: Lintasan Sejarah dan Budaya*," Djawahir was the editor and contributor to two books on Semarang, "Membela Semarang!" and "Semarang Sepanjang Jalan Kenangan" (Muhammad, 2011). However, compared to the latter two works, "Semarang: Lintasan Sejarah dan Budaya" is relatively more systematic in its discussion of Semarang.

Other books on Semarang mainly discuss issues of space and modernization. It is reflected, for example, in the book "Modernitas Dalam Kampung: Pengaruh Kompleks Perumahan Sompok terhadap Pemukiman Rakyat di Semarang abad ke-20" by Radjimo Sastro Wijono (2013). The author reveals the development of housing complexes in Sompok, which he believes played a significant role in altering the city's physical environment. Changes occurred in both rural and urban communities; rural areas became semi-urban, and semi-urban areas transitioned into urban areas. In the discussion of spatial politics in the research I conducted, Radjimo's study is relevant.

After reviewing the available literature, the authors have observed that there is still room for exploration on the Semarang community, particularly in the context of traditional Muslim society, which is then linked to the dynamics of political space and efforts to maintain its traditional identity. Data mining is carried out through participation, observation, and in-depth interviews. Interviews are conducted with individuals who possess the expertise to provide insights into Semarang from religious, cultural, and societal perspectives. Additionally, data tracing is also conducted through a literature review of works related to the research theme. Once the data is collected, it will then be analyzed using descriptive methods.

Results and Discussion

Islamic Growth and Kauman Village

The current spatial distribution of Muslim students (*Santri*) in Semarang indicates that the majority reside on the outskirts of the city, with fewer located in the central areas. However, this distribution contrasts with the early period of Islam's development in the region. Historian Amen Budiman (1978) notes that Islam originally flourished in the city center. In 1476, Ki Pandan Arang arrived at Mugas and Bergota—then known as a peninsula Pulau Tirang—to propagate Islam. After successfully converting residents, he moved to the coastal area of Pegisikan (present-day Semarang) and established a small settlement. In Bubakan and Jurnatan, Islam began to take shape as a social institution.

Amen also notes that a mosque was built in Bubakan, on the left side of the Semarang River, now in the Pedamaran area. This mosque was destroyed during the 1741 Chinese rebellion against the VOC, and the current mosque in Kauman was built afterward (Musahadi et al., 2008). Ki Ageng Pandan Arang's followers likely inhabited the Kauman area before this reconstruction.

Kauman represents a distinct cultural space in Javanese urban society. Historically, it embodies values passed down from the Demak to Mataram kingdoms (Darban, 2000). Typically, Kauman refers to a Muslim village located at the city center, serving as the spiritual and educational hub for the *Santri* community. In Javanese understanding, the word derives from "*nggonne wong kaum*" (the place of the religious community) or "*kaum sing aman*" (the safe community) (Wijanarka, 2007).

According to Wijanarka (2007), Semarang's Kauman comprised smaller villages such as Banguharjo, Patihan, Kepatihan, Jonegaran, Mustaram, and others, each named after its local characteristics. As Supriyati (1997) explains, Kauman is more than a physical space—it holds internal strength in three dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, and religious. These dimensions create three interconnected "production spaces." Economically, Kauman's proximity to Pasar Johar, Semarang's largest traditional market, sustains local livelihoods. Socially, it thrives through

networks of kinship and religious education. Religiously, institutions like pesantren and pengajian strengthen communal faith.

Kauman's identity as a *Santri* area persists despite urban density. This endurance rests on two pillars: the economic vitality of Pasar Johar and continuous cultural rituals. One such ritual is Dugderan, a folk festival marking the beginning of Ramadan. Another is the cultural parade organized by Pondok Pesantren Raudlatul Qur'an in 2018, which framed Kauman as the "Village of the Qur'an." This initiative serves as a cultural defense of Kauman's identity—affirming its heritage amid urban competition through Qur'an recitations, art performances, and community events. Beyond Kauman, Islam's historical traces remain visible in the Kampung Melayu area of Dadapsari. Notable landmarks include the Menara Mosque on Jalan Layur and the Soleh Darat Mosque on Jalan Kakap. Other important mosques, such as Pekojan, Beteng Kecil, and the tomb of Kiai Syeh Jumadil Qubro on Arteri Semarang, also played significant roles in the spread of Islam (Kholiludin et al., 2015).

While Kauman in both Yogyakarta and Semarang share architectural similarities, their social affiliations differ. Yogyakarta's Kauman is historically tied to Muhammadiyah, founded by KH. Ahmad Dahlan (born 1868), a native of that area. In contrast, Semarang's Kauman is predominantly affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). One key figure, KH. Ridwan Mujahid, a student of KH. Soleh Darat, who studied alongside KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, NU's founder, helped strengthen NU in Semarang. His role was crucial during the fourth NU Congress held on 17–20 September 1929 at Hotel Arabistan, Kampung Melayu, attended by 1,500 delegates and around 10,000 participants (Anam, 2010; Ulum, 2015).

The NU affiliation of Kauman residents can also be traced through their educational background. Madrasas under the NU Maarif Education Institution once served as learning places for Fahmi Ja'far Saifuddin and Farida Sholahudin Wahid, children of KH. Syaifuddin Zuhri, who lived in Kauman in 1951. According to Zuhri (2013), NU members were then a minority, as many had left Semarang during the Dutch occupation to join the Sabilillah Front in the struggle for independence. They returned gradually after 1951, marking a revival of NU's presence.

When viewed spatially, the development of Islam in Semarang reflects the broader trends of Islamization across Java, which initially began along the northern coast and then progressed inland. Semarang serves as a key gateway for Islam into the surrounding regions, including Surakarta. As a trading hub designed by the Dutch, the city cultivated as a sense of cosmopolitanism and entrepreneurship—characteristics that intertwined the *Santri* community with economic activities, particularly in the areas of Kauman and Pasar Johar.

In contemporary terms, Kauman remains the traditional Muslim stronghold in the city center. However, the peripheral areas now host more vibrant traditional Muslim communities, particularly in Mangkang (Tugu), Meteseh (Tembalang), Genuk, Pedurungan, Mijen, Ngaliyan, and Patemon (Gunung Pati). In these regions, pesantren serve as symbols of cultural defense, and community solidarity remains strong despite social changes.

The aim of this study is not to explain why traditional Muslims now dominate the outskirts but to highlight underlying social structures. During the 1970s, the traditional Muslim base primarily consisted of farmers and small traders, rather than civil servants. Even those working as religious teachers faced restrictions under the New Order's mono-loyalty policy. Moreover, *pesantren* on the outskirts differ from those in the city center: they are open and integrated within their communities, often without physical fences, allowing dynamic interaction with society.

In summary, the development of Islamic spatial patterns in Semarang reflects both historical continuity and adaptive strategies. From Kauman's symbolic role as a religious, economic, and cultural hub to the expanding networks of *pesantren* on the city's edges, these spaces demonstrate how the *Santri* community maintains its resilience through cultural defense, economic adaptability, and religious vitality.

Traditional Muslim Community and Its Culture

The city of Semarang represents a multicultural cultural formation. As a coastal area, cross-cultural interaction is inherent to its typology. The meeting of different cultures has greatly influenced Semarang. The relationship between the Muslim community and various cultures has become a strong anchor in the city. Arab, Chinese, Dutch, Malay, Javanese, Banjar, and other cultures are all part of the identity of Semarang's people. One of the theses that the researcher has held so far is that in this dynamic, no dominant culture becomes the "host culture" in Semarang. (Kholiludin, 2019). All cultures coexist on the same stage without being subordinate to one another. Such multicultural dynamics shape people's mindsets and behavior. This process of enculturation will be further discussed in the following subsection.

Djawahir Muhammad often elaborates on a cultural principle of Semarang, which in anthropology is referred to as hybrid culture or hybridity (Canclini, 2005). This hybrid character allows Islam to grow in an egalitarian environment, where religious and cultural interactions occur smoothly. In such a setting, Islamic culture in Semarang is not isolated but develops alongside other traditions, forming what Djawahir calls a truly egalitarian culture. However, within this fluid interaction, Muslim communities also feel the need to strengthen their identity, particularly amid the city's rapid social and economic changes. As the provincial capital and a center of trade, Semarang attracts people from diverse backgrounds, fostering cultural encounters that continually shape local Islamic practices. The coexistence of Muslim traders, scholars, and ordinary people with other ethnic and religious groups reflects the inclusive nature of Semarang's traditional Muslim society.

Historically, Islam in Semarang has grown alongside other influences, including those from the Chinese and Malay communities. When Raden Fatah ruled in Demak and developed Semarang as a port city and gateway to the Islamic kingdom, Islamic institutions and communities began to strengthen in the area (Mulyana, 2005). Leaders such as Raden Kusen (Kin San) and others symbolized the interaction between Islam and other cultural traditions in the formation of Semarang's identity. The presence of Kampung Melayu also illustrates the multicultural character of traditional Muslim life in Semarang. The area was inhabited by various ethnic Muslim groups, including the Acehnese, Banjar, Sumatran, and Bugis, who coexisted harmoniously with Chinese, Arab, and Gujarati communities. Religious life revolved around mosques such as Masjid Menara and Masjid Kiai Soleh Darat, which became symbols of Islamic endurance in a plural setting.

This dynamic coexistence reflects a distinct form of traditional Islam in Semarang—one that is open, adaptive, and dialogical. It shows how local Muslim communities internalized diversity as part of their faith and culture, shaping Semarang into a city where Islam and hybridity coexist naturally (Muhammad, 2016; Canclini, 2005; Mulyana, 2005; Daradjadi, 2013; Svarajati, 2016).

Javanese culture occupies a unique position at the crossroads of various cultural influences. The phenomenon of hybrid cultures is particularly evident in *Semarangan* culture, as demonstrated by events like Manten Kaji and Dugderan, as well as in Peranakan culture, such as Gambang Semarang. In this context, both Javanese culture and Islamic tradition significantly contribute to

the shaping of Semarang's societal identity. As a coastal group, the character of Semarang society is also reflected in its Islamic expressions. According to Djawahir, Semarang's local wisdom can be formulated as "coastal people with Javanese and Islamic cultures, independent, dynamic, and oriented towards a cosmopolitan lifestyle, rather than static or oriented towards conservatism." It is noteworthy to consider the elements that constitute the identity of Semarang's society, where Islam and Javanese culture play a fundamental role in shaping this identity. The community exhibits a dynamic nature and a willingness to adapt while simultaneously preserving its traditions. Their resilience as a Muslim-Javanese society reflects an openness to transformation while maintaining their cultural heritage.

In this context, the *traditional Muslim community* in Semarang can be understood as a group whose religiosity is deeply rooted in Javanese-Islamic traditions that developed along the northern coast of Java. Their Islamic expression is not rigid but dialogical, blending religious devotion with local customs. Rituals such as *tahlilan*, *manaqiban*, *slametan*, and *dugderan* serve both spiritual and social purposes, functioning as what Woodward (1999) describes as *piety with cultural embeddedness*. These practices preserve religious values while simultaneously reinforcing social cohesion and collective morality within the community. Although Semarang is a metropolitan city, these traditional Muslim groups, mostly affiliated with *Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)*, retain a close relationship with *pesantren*, *kiai*, and communal religious life, particularly in the peripheral areas such as Mangkang, Tembalang, Genuk, and Pedurungan.

According to Bruinessen (1994), within such traditional Muslim communities, tradition and transformation are not contradictory. Tradition becomes the moral framework that allows adaptation to modernity. It can be seen in how *pesantren* and local rituals function as agents of continuity amidst social change. In contrast, *modern Muslim* groups in Semarang—emerging from the urban middle class and university-educated circles—emphasize personal piety, rationality, and purification of religious practice, often aligned with reformist movements such as Muhammadiyah. Their religious expressions are formal and individualistic, centered around modern institutions, rather than the communal and ritualistic orientation typical of traditional Muslims.

The coexistence of these two orientations, traditional and modern, illustrates Semarang's hybrid Islamic landscape. The enduring presence of traditional Muslim culture in the city's outskirts can be seen as a form of cultural defense. In this context, collective memory, rituals, and symbols are harnessed to safeguard religious identity and foster social solidarity amidst the challenges of urban modernity. This delicate balance between adaptability and rootedness fuels the resilience and distinctive cultural vibrancy of Semarang's Muslim community. The enduring presence of traditional Muslim culture in the city's outskirts can be seen as a form of cultural defense. In this context, collective memory, rituals, and symbols are harnessed to safeguard religious identity and foster social solidarity amidst the challenges of urban modernity. This delicate balance between adaptability and rootedness fuels the resilience and distinctive cultural vibrancy of Semarang's Muslim community.

Cultural Defense Strategy: Collective Memory, Ritual, and Symbol

The social and political transformations that have taken place in Semarang over the past few decades have significantly altered its religious landscape. The rapid urban expansion of the 1970s and 1980s, followed by the government's regional development programs, reshaped the spatial distribution of Muslim communities. Areas that once represented the religious centers, such as Kauman and its surroundings, gradually lost their cultural role as commercial, bureaucratic, and

administrative activities dominated the urban core. Meanwhile, the *Santri* community, which was once central to the city's identity, was increasingly displaced to the outskirts—areas like Mangkang, Genuk, Tembalang, and Pedurungan. This relocation was not merely geographical but also social. It reflected a larger process of urban secularization and the growing divide between the cosmopolitan middle-class Muslims in the city center and the traditional Muslim communities whose lives remained intertwined with *pesantren*, *kiai*, and local religious rituals.

Politically, the New Order era introduced policies that further marginalized traditional Muslim groups. The state's mono-loyalty requirement for civil servants and the depoliticization of Islamic organizations limited the participation of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU)-affiliated teachers and scholars in formal political and bureaucratic structures. As a result, traditional Muslims turned to cultural and religious institutions—particularly *pesantren*—as alternative bases of power and identity. At the same time, economic modernization and the rise of the urban Muslim middle class in the 1990s gave rise to new expressions of Islam that were more individualistic, rationalized, and consumer oriented. This wave of modern religiosity indirectly threatened the communal and ritual-based traditions of the *Santri* community. Consequently, traditional Muslims in Semarang developed various forms of *cultural defense*—ways to preserve memory, rituals, and symbols that sustain their identity amid modernization, spatial marginalization, and changing political dynamics.

The categorization of cultural defense into three analytical bridges—memory, ritual, and symbols—is derived from the theoretical framework outlined earlier. Each bridge represents a specific dimension of how culture operates as a mechanism of defense. Drawing from Maurice Halbwachs (1980), *collective memory* is understood as the shared recollection that binds a community to its past and legitimizes its present identity. Victor Turner's (1969) analysis of *ritual process*—with its phases of separation, liminality, and reaggregation—offers a way to interpret how religious and social practices serve as sites of renewal and resilience. Meanwhile, Paul Ricoeur's (2016) conception of *symbols* as expressions of double meaning offers a hermeneutical lens for understanding how tangible and intangible cultural markers embody collective identity.

The three bridges serve not as arbitrary categories, but as conceptual tools grounded in solid theoretical foundations. In the context of Semarang, memory pertains to the way the traditional Muslim community recalls and conveys its historical role in the city's development. Ritual encompasses the embodied practices through which religious identity is affirmed in public life. Meanwhile, symbols include both material and spiritual representations—such as mosques, ceremonies, language, and architecture—that signify the persistence of traditional Islam within a hybrid urban environment. These three aspects together illustrate how cultural defense operates as both a cognitive and performative process within the lived experience of Semarang's Muslim community.

The author aims to illustrate how the cultural defense of traditional Muslim society in Semarang is built through three key elements: memory, ritual, and symbols. The first element can be seen as a strategy used by traditional Muslim communities in Semarang to preserve both collective and individual memories, acting as agents of cultural continuity. The second element involves activating rituals, which may originate from Islamic traditions or be hybridized, although their core remains rooted in Islam. Lastly, cultural preservation is achieved by maintaining and interpreting symbols that mark the presence of traditional Muslim society. The collective memory of the community's contribution to Semarang's culture remains consistently upheld. Nearly all informants connected Semarang's history to the roles of ulama (Islamic scholars) and *Santri* (Islamic students). Djawahir Muhammad is a prime example, frequently emphasizing this

connection through various media. His work highlights how the city's history is intertwined with the *Santri's* role in shaping Semarang.

In a conversation, it was stated that Semarang is like Kaliwungu (Kendal District) in terms of its community's cultural aspect as *Santri* Muslims. It was mentioned that until the 1960s, many children attended religious schools, and even during the kingdom era, the development of Islam was noticeable when Demak began to emerge and was later advanced by scholars such as Kyai Saleh Darat and Kyai Muhamad Nur Sepaton (Kholiludin, et.al., 2015). He continuously preserves the memory of Semarang's *Santri* culture. Djawahir can be seen as a personal representative of the traditional Muslim community, consistently maintaining the memory of their group's existence.

However, two moments in 2017 made Semarang feel like it was back in the 19th and 20th centuries, the period when Semarang was a city of *Santri* Muslims. It is unclear whether these two moments have become a bridge of memory for Semarang's current society regarding the *Santri* identity that existed during the Islamic development era. The first moment was the gathering of tens of thousands of *Santri* Muslims in Semarang on July 21 to reject the implementation of a five-day school policy, as one of the reasons was the potential closure of *Diniyyah* Madrasahs, which are usually held in the afternoon.

There was no special ceremony at the event. They initially gathered in front of the Baiturrahman Mosque at Simpang Lima, then walked together in a line and ended up in front of the governor's office. There, the orators took turns to ignite the participants' enthusiasm, mostly consisting of *Diniyyah* Madrasah teachers, *Santri* Muslims, and educational activists who critically examined the five-day school policy. It can be assured that the majority, if not all, of the participants were members of the Nahdliyyin community.

The second event was the celebration of National *Santri* Day, held in Semarang on October 21. National *Santri* Day was established by Presidential Decree Number 22 of 2015. October 22 was designated as *Santri* Day, referencing the fatwa of KH. Hasyim Asy'ari concerning the resolution of Jihad. In Semarang, the *Santri* Day celebration featured various activities, including visiting the graves of heroes, a *Santri* parade, a cultural parade showcasing the archipelago's diversity, and a national Taushiyah. Additionally, the celebration in Semarang included breaking the Indonesian Record Museum's record for the longest *Santri* comic book, which measured 300 meters. The highlight of the *Santri* Day celebration took place at Simpang Lima Square, where tens of thousands of *Santri* Muslims gathered in the heart of Semarang. They assembled, chanted, and sang the song "Syubbanul Wathon," creating a religious atmosphere amid malls and the busy city.

These two moments can genuinely serve as "memory bridges" to Semarang, known for its cultural contributions, including *Santri* community. In my view, these moments indirectly strengthen the *Santri* community. Interestingly, both are connected to the state. The first involves efforts to criticize state policies, while the state supports the second, however, as the Chairman of PBNU, KH. Aqil Siradj noted that whether the state officially designates a day for NU *Santri*, it will still be commemorated.

The second cultural defense is reflected in various cultural and religious rituals. Cultural defense here sometimes bears similarities to the anthropological legal concept of "cultural defense," which involves presenting a culture. First, I would like to discuss and analyze a very typical yet unique ritual of Semarang: *Dugderan*. For Muslim Javanese communities, no moment is passed without meaning. This includes the attachment of meaning to the month of Ramadan. Traditional Muslims in Java interpret it not only as a month for fasting, but also as a "religious and secular" moment in which unique Javanese popular rituals are created. It is considered religious

because Javanese Muslims view it as part of their worship. However, it is also secular as the rituals surrounding fasting are not solely religious, but also humanistic. In other words, fasting activities are deeply rooted in Javanese cultural traditions, as evident in the ritual of *Ruwahan*, which is just as significant as the month of Ramadan itself.

André Møller (2005), a Swede who completed his studies in Indonesia, wrote about his experience during Ramadan in Java in "Ramadan in Java: The Joy and Jihad of Ritual Fasting." Moller discusses the preparations leading up to the fasting month. Banners indicating the observance of fasting are already being put up. The religious month of fasting is also captured by mass media, particularly electronic media, through the preparation of a wide range of religious programs. In terms of economics, Muslim fashion stores are also quick to respond, offering new designs of clothing, prayer mats, and other items of worship. Typical iftar snacks, such as dates, are already available.

The ritualistic circle of life before fasting is embodied in the tradition of *nyekar*, which involves visiting the graves of ancestors. At public cemeteries or family burial sites, there is often a vibrant atmosphere filled with activity. For flower sellers, cleaners, and caretakers of graves, this occasion can be quite financially rewarding. The *nyekar* tradition is inherently linked to environmental stewardship, with some referring to it as "village cleaning." In some areas of Central Java, this custom remains remarkably vibrant. Additionally, we observe the *padusan* ritual, which involves bathing. The *padusan* ritual transcends mere personal hygiene; it follows specific procedures. Traditionally, this rite is conducted in open locations, such as rivers and waterfalls.

In Semarang, a significant moment leading up to fasting is the *dugderan* event. *Dugderan* is the "collective togetherness" of Semarang residents that is so historic. There is no other ritual leading up to fasting that is as monumental as *dugderan*. Although the meaning of *dugderan* continues to decrease year by year, *dugderan* as a "people's rite" still seems to be preserved. In addition to these rituals, there are also community groups that hold *slametan* and *bancakan* events closely tied to Javanese culture.

From a hybrid cultural perspective, this ritual undoubtedly marks the successful transformation of religion. Cultural activities such as *ruwahan*, *nyadran*, and *slametan*, complete with their accessories, are indeed unique to Javanese society. Even in Mecca or Medina, where Islam originated, such rituals cannot be found. For Muslims in Java, this represents the success of religion in providing meaning in the context of their lives. I refer to the traditions surrounding the month of Ramadan as the cultural formation of fasting.

Another meaning that can be gleaned from the cultural formation of Ramadan, as mentioned above, is that it serves as a kind of "liminal moment" when viewed within Victor Turner's framework of ritual operationalization. In my opinion, *ruwahan* and *dugderan* are highly liminal. This liminality needs to be developed as a cultural strategy for Javanese society. The Javanese people want to ensure that their family members are *slamet* (safe and well). Thus, the institution of *slametan* is needed to create this suggestion.

It is a moment that is both religious and secular, yet secular and spiritual, in which the liminal entity exists in the middle, neither here nor there. For example, consider the *dugderan* tradition once again. It is considered religious because people associate it with the month of Ramadan, and there is no other *dugderan* held besides the one in the month of Ruwah or Sha'ban. However, it is not entirely religious because what we can understand from this tradition is that it is a cultural procession and even an "economic class" transaction.

The cultural dynamics of Semarang City's society reflect Javanese mindsets. As modernity progresses rapidly, the challenge of consolidating Javanese cultural strategies also intensifies. Cultural formations need to be rejuvenated to maintain their significance. This is a shared responsibility that involves all stakeholders, such as the government, civil society, educational institutions, and cultural advocates.

Another ritual that remains a cultural stronghold is the religious ceremonies deeply ingrained in the NU community's traditions. In almost all areas where NU is still deeply rooted, this tradition is not only preserved but has also become an "identity marker." When this tradition is no longer observed, traditional Muslim society is considered extinct. *Manaqiban, Sholawatan, Tirakatan,* reading *Surat Yasin,* and *Tahlil* are ways of cultural preservation carried out through religious rituals.

The last way to build cultural defense is to maintain symbols. When, in recent years, Kauman was presented to the public as the "Kampung Qur'an," it not only reaffirmed the Qur'an as an Islamic identity but also extended the historical memory of the traditional Islamic colors and their symbolism. This process is essential because symbols are read within a framework of representation. "Kampung Qur'an" therefore refers not only to a physical entity but also to a way of maintaining cosmology.

Other symbolic markers are physical buildings. *Pesantrens* and mosques with historical value, such as Masjid Besar Kauman, Masjid Layur, Masjid Menyanan, and Pesantren Dondong in Mangkang, which is considered an old *pesantren*, are examples of this, referring to KH. Soleh Darat not only refers to the person but also holds a hidden meaning behind the personification of the 19th-century Muslim scholar. He represents the scholars whose works serve as a reference for the community, students, and traditional Muslims. Great scholars in Indonesia, including KH Hasyim Asy'ari (founder of NU), KH. Mahfuz Termas (Pacitan), KH. Ahmad Dahlan (founder of Muhammadiyah), KH. Idris (founder of Pesantren Jamsaren Solo), KH. Sya'ban, KH. Bisri Syamsuri, KH. Dalhar and others studied under him. KH. Soleh Darat was also where RA. Kartini learned about spirituality.

Conclusion

Two pairs of terms that are frequently juxtaposed in sociological studies of religion are modernity as the antithesis of traditionality and rural-urban. In practice, the distinctive features of rural communities, such as social solidarity and cohesion, are also sought after and maintained by urban communities. They employ unique cultural strategies to discourage individualistic behaviors, which can be described as a form of social engineering. Similarly, regarding traditionality versus modernity, utilizing the cultural defense framework allows for the recognition of tradition not as the antagonist of modernity, but rather as a means of transforming culture within the dynamics of modernity. Through memory, ritual, and symbolism, tradition is presented as a means to balance modernity. However, adaptability and moderate thinking must remain as anchors in this process. The social and cultural capital present in traditional societies may not suffice to create social integration that supports social solidarity. Instead, collective consciousness and moral action serve as the foundation of strong social integration. Therefore, collective consciousness and moral action must be maintained and enhanced as primary targets in social and cultural development.

In the context of traditional Muslim communities in Semarang, the sources of cultural defense differ somewhat from those examined in studies of legal anthropology. Inspiration is drawn not only from culture itself, but also from religion. What is interesting is the way in which

this defense is carried out. In addition to preserving rituals and symbols that serve as a defense of identity, the prolongation of the memory of Islam's development in Semarang, which is linked to traditional Muslim culture, is also undertaken.

In a broader sociological sense, the traditional Muslim community in Semarang demonstrates that cultural defense is not only a reaction to external pressures but also a creative strategy for negotiating modernity. Through collective memory, rituals, and symbols, they reinterpret the meaning of tradition in a changing urban landscape. Rather than opposing modern values, these practices enable coexistence and moral continuity within the city's plural and hybrid context. Cultural defense thus becomes a form of cultural resilience—an active process of rearticulation, not mere preservation.

This study also demonstrates that the transformation of Semarang's religious landscape is inextricably linked to political and spatial changes. Nevertheless, the persistence of traditional Muslim identity reveals that urban modernity does not necessarily erase religious and cultural life; it reshapes it. Therefore, the notion of *cultural defense* in Semarang extends beyond its legal origins, offering a sociological perspective on how communities sustain their values while navigating the dynamics of a modern city. It opens further discussions on how faith-based traditions in other urban settings across Indonesia continue to navigate the balance between rootedness and change.

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