



Kauman: A Contemporary Little Mecca in Indonesia

The concept of "Little Meccas" in Indonesia refers to settlements designed to foster a symbolic connection between local communities and Mecca, the holiest city in Islam. This paper delves into Kauman, a historic enclave in Yogyakarta that has served as a vibrant center of Islamic learning since the Sultanate era. By focusing on Kauman Yogyakarta, this study examines its transformation from a small residential area to a larger community that ultimately inspired the birth of Muhammadiyah, a prominent reformist Islamic movement. The paper explores the historical connections between Kauman and the Middle East, particularly the influence of pan-Islamism and reformist Islamic movements. This influence is further highlighted by the presence of architectural elements reflecting Middle Eastern styles. Notably, Kauman's pedestrianized zones prioritize tranquility for students pursuing Islamic studies in prayer halls (*suraus* or *langgars*). This emphasis on quietude underscores the importance placed on Arabic-style Islamic education within the enclave. In conclusion, this study investigates the ongoing influence of the Middle East on Islamic practices and education in Kauman. It sheds light on the concept of "Little Meccas" as a historical and cultural phenomenon in Indonesia.

Keywords: Little Mecca, Kauman, Islamic Enclave, Middle Eastern Influence, Reformist Islam.

Konsep "Mekkah Kecil" di Indonesia merujuk pada pemukiman yang dirancang untuk secara simbolis menghubungkan masyarakat lokal dengan Mekkah, kota tersuci dalam Islam. Artikel ini meneliti Kauman, tempat bersejarah di Yogyakarta yang berfungsi sebagai pusat pendidikan Islam sejak era Kesultanan. Penelitian ini berfokus pada transformasi Kauman dari daerah pemukiman kecil menjadi komunitas yang lebih besar yang menginspirasi kelahiran Muhammadiyah. Artikel ini membahas hubungan sejarah antara Kauman dan Timur Tengah, khususnya pengaruh pan-Islamisme dan gerakan pembaharuan Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, menggabungkan studi literatur, etnografi, dan analisis arsitektur. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dengan tokoh masyarakat Kauman, observasi lapangan, dan analisis dokumen sejarah. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Kauman telah mengalami transformasi signifikan selama berabad-abad. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi penting dalam memahami konsep "Mekkah Kecil" di Indonesia. Kauman Yogyakarta merupakan contoh yang jelas bagaimana pemukiman Islam dapat berfungsi sebagai pusat pendidikan dan komunitas yang menghubungkan masyarakat lokal dengan tradisi Islam global.

Kata Kunci: Miniatur Mekah, Kauman, Kantong Islam, Pengaruh Timur Tengah, Reformasi Islam.

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Introduction

This paper specifically focuses on the cultural influences of Mecca on Indonesian society. Mecca holds a central place in the hearts and minds of millions of Muslims worldwide, including Indonesians. Due to the distance and travel costs of performing the Hajj pilgrimage, Indonesian Muslims have developed alternative practices that recreate aspects of the Hajj experience within their local context. These practices can be understood as a way of bringing Mecca closer to their lives.

In line with the arguments presented above, the main purpose of this paper is to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the religious and spiritual connections between Mecca and Indonesian Muslims. While the case of Aceh, known for its geographical proximity to Mecca, has been extensively studied, this paper delves into the spiritual dimension by focusing on Kauman.

Indonesian Muslims have a long-standing relationship with the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, which hold immense significance in Islam as the birthplace of the religion and the sites of Prophet Muhammad's revelations. These cities annually host millions of pilgrims performing Hajj and Umrah. However, for Indonesian Muslims, Mecca's importance extends beyond the Hajj pilgrimage. Since the mid-15th to 18th centuries, many *santri* (students pursuing Islamic religious education in boarding schools) have travelled to Mecca to pursue Islamic studies for extended periods under the tutelage of renowned Islamic scholars residing there. This practice, pioneered by first-generation Indonesian ulama (scholars) like al-Bantani and al-Minangkabauwy, evolved into an established tradition for aspiring *santri* who aim to become Islamic scholars themselves. Upon returning home,

these *santri* establish *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and transmit the knowledge acquired in Mecca to the next generations. In essence, the connection with Mecca is primarily fostered through the *pesantren* education system. Aceh province stands as a primary example of the deep connection between Indonesia and Mecca. The moniker 'Serambi Makkah' (porch of Mecca) reflects the strong emphasis on religiosity that permeates Acehnese society. Historically, Aceh's geographical position as the westernmost province made it the main stopover for Indonesian pilgrims traveling to Mecca by ship.¹ This facilitated early and sustained engagement with Arab people through trade, religious preaching, and alliances. These factors significantly impacted Aceh's religious identity, contributing to the enduring nickname 'Serambi Makkah'.

While the implementation of Sharia law is another facet of Aceh's unique identity, this paper delves deeper, focusing on the memoirs and experiences of Mecca as the main foundation of society building in Aceh. This focus on memoirs and experiences offers a fresh perspective for understanding the long-standing connection between Indonesia and Mecca. The connection with Mecca highlights the ulama's desire to create religious experiences within their local environment. As mentioned earlier, the establishment of a religious society is the primary context. Before setting up such a society, the emergence of ulama and their students (*santri*) through *pesantren* education is a crucial factor. This ensures that both *santri* and their neighbors living around the *pesantren* can experience a taste of Mecca. One prominent example is Kauman, which originally comes from the word "pekauman," meaning "settlement/kampung for Muslims".² Historically, Kauman had close ties

¹ David Pinault, "On Mecca's Front Porch," *Commonweal* 144, no. 7 (2017): 8.

² R Kurniati and N Nurini, "Preservation 'Kauman Kampong Qur'an' as Religious Educational Tourism," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and*





with local rulers, with its leader often serving as the religious advisor (a position that granted privileges like tax exemption). This close relationship with rulers further encouraged Kauman to develop its distinct kampong identity. In an attempt to replicate Mecca within a local context, Kauman's development mirrored the social communities found near Mecca.³ This included a central mosque surrounded by madrasahs (religious schools) and residential neighborhoods. Additionally, some buildings within Kauman showcase Arabic calligraphy, further symbolizing the connection with Mecca. In essence, Kauman's development aimed to replicate the social context of Mecca.

Despite the passage of time, Kauman still exists in some urban areas of Indonesia. It retains its distinctive identity as a Muslim community shaped by the blend of Middle Eastern and local styles. This paper explores how Kauman nurtures its connection with Mecca. This question delves beyond a symbolic relationship, revealing a deep religious connection with Mecca.

Little Mecca and Religious Marketplace

The concept of a religious marketplace describes the intersection between religion,

consumption, and spiritual investments. This meeting point highlights the supply and demand dynamics that shape the relationships between these three entities. The emergence of the religious marketplace can be seen as a response to the perceived secularization and neoliberal environments of today's world.⁴ It fulfills a need for believers to access "sacred" spaces amidst these secularizing trends. This engagement with the religious marketplace reflects a recommitment of believers to their faith. Recent evidence suggests that religious participation can indeed reduce stress and promote well-being.⁵ In line with this, believers may engage in a cost-benefit analysis when it comes to religious consumption, seeking to maximize the returns on their spiritual investments⁶.

Building on the concept of the religious marketplace, it encompasses not only religious rituals but also sacred places. These spaces serve as facilitators for believers to cultivate a relationship with God through diverse practices. Once this relationship is established, believers seek to maintain their piety by incorporating elements of the sacred into their local contexts. Consequently, the religious marketplace also caters to religious

Environmental Science 123, no. 1 (February 1, 2018): 012041, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/123/1/012041>

Ahmad Rifai et al., "The Creativity of the Kampung," *Routledge Handbook of Urban Indonesia*, 2022;

Wiwik Setyaningsih et al., "Urban Heritage Towards Creative-Based Tourism in the Urban Settlement of Kauman - Surakarta," *CITIES 2015: Intelligent Planning Towards Smart Cities* 227 (July 14, 2016): 642–49, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.06.127>.

³ Ratih Budiarti, "The Facade House Pattern as The Philosophy of Life in Pekalongan City, Central Java-Object of Study: Kauman Village," 2016; Hidayati Hidayati and Rima Rahmaniah, "A Socio-Pragmatics Approach of Refusal Strategies on a Biopic Movie 'Sang Pencerah (The Enlightener),'"
Linguistics and ELT Journal 8, no. 1 (2021): 43–48; Ari Widyati et al., "Reading Activities in Kauman Area, Parakan, Indonesia, During the Colonial Era Using Mapping Analysis," *International Journal* 8, no. 2 (2019): 34–43.

⁴ Orlando Woods, "Forging Alternatively Sacred Spaces in Singapore's Integrated Religious Marketplace," *Cultural Geographies* 28, no. 1 (January 1, 2021): 109–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474020956396>.

⁵ PM Wandile, "Impact of Stress and Spiritual Solution, A Literature Review," *J Clin Med Res* 5, no. 2 (2023): 64–75; Hisham Abu-Raiya, Kenneth I Pargament, and Neal Krause, "Religion as Problem, Religion as Solution: Religious Buffers of the Links between Religious/Spiritual Struggles and Well-Being/Mental Health," *Quality of Life Research* 25 (2016): 1265–74.

⁶ Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Religious Markets and the Economics of Religion," *Social Compass* 39, no. 1 (March 1, 1992): 123–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/003776892039001012>; Pattana Kitiarsa, "Toward a Sociology of Religious Commodification," *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion* 25 (2010): 563–79.





tourism, enabling believers to undertake pilgrimages.

The term "Little Mecca" has garnered significant scholarly attention within Islamic studies. This concept stems from the centuries-long efforts of ulama (Islamic scholars) from Mecca and Medina who disseminated Islam globally. Their endeavors established a deep religious and emotional connection with Mecca among Muslim communities around the world⁷. Notably, the legacies left by these scholars, including sacred worship sites, became revered spaces for subsequent generations. Consequently, these communities sought to establish local replicas, often referred to as "Little Meccas."

Some scholars suggest that local myths can contribute to the creation of local versions of Mecca. The limited access to formal religious teachings may lead certain Muslim groups to develop their own interpretations and practices related to Mecca⁸. This phenomenon can be arguably influenced by the persistence of syncretic beliefs within these communities. Interestingly, these "Little Meccas" often attempt to replicate core pilgrimage rituals performed in Mecca and Medina, such as tawaf (circumambulation of the Kaaba), sa'ay (running between the hills of Safa and Marwa), and the symbolic stoning of the Jamarat. This replication likely serves to emphasize the connection between these local sites and the sacred practices of the Hajj pilgrimage.

⁷ Sophia Rose Arjana, *Pilgrimage in Islam: Traditional and Modern Practices* (Simon and Schuster, 2017)

Janice Hyeju Jeong, "Little Mecca in Canton: Representations and Resurgences of the Graveyard of Sa'd Ibn Abi Waqqas," *History and Anthropology*, 2022, 1–24

Goolam Vahed, "Islam and Muslims in South Asia in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Revolt, Revivalism, and Accommodation," in *Indentured Muslims in the Diaspora* (Routledge, 2016), 19–58.

⁸ Mirjam Lücking, "Working in Mecca: How Informal Pilgrimage-Migration from Madura, Indonesia, to Saudi Arabia Challenges State

These two perspectives on the origins of "Little Meccas" are reflected in numerous examples around the world. Many of these sites represent sacred sites or pilgrimage destinations with enduring significance for current generations. For instance, the tomb of Husayn ibn Ali in Karbala, Iraq, is revered as the "Second Mecca" by Shiite pilgrims. Similarly, Ponnani, a historic religious center in Kerala, India, holds the title of "Mecca of Malabar" among its Muslim population. These examples showcase the diverse manifestations of "Little Mecca," each one embodying a strong emotional connection with Mecca for its followers.

The Nuanced Differences between Mecca-inspired Sites based on Local

Interpretations and Syncretic Influences

The connection between Mecca and Indonesia has endured for centuries, fostered by activities like da'wa (Islamic propagation), trade, Hajj pilgrimage, and even political alliances⁹. These factors have positioned Mecca as a place of immense significance for Indonesia's Muslim middle class. Every year, there is a growing demand among Indonesian Muslims to undertake the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. Furthermore, Mecca is a favored destination for Indonesian Muslim scholars seeking to deepen their Islamic studies. These ongoing interactions have cultivated a deep and lasting in-

Sovereignty," *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 16, no. 2 (2017): 248–74; Nimrod Luz, "Pilgrimage and Religious Tourism in Islam," *Annals of Tourism Research* 82 (2020): 102915; Jahanzeeb Qurashi, "Commodification of Islamic Religious Tourism: From Spiritual to Touristic Experience," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* 5, no. 1 (2017): 89–104.

⁹ Wasisto Raharjo Jati, "Radikalisme Politik Kelas Menengah Muslim Indonesia Pasca Reformasi," *Miqot* 41, no. 1 (2017): 192–208

Wasisto Raharjo Jati, "Dari Umat Menuju Ummah: Melacak Akar Populisme Kelas Menengah Muslim Indonesia," *Maarif: Jurnal Arus Pemikiran Islam Dan Sosial* 12, no. 1 (2017): 22–36.





tellectual and spiritual bond between the two entities.

Mecca's significance for Indonesia has led to attempts to replicate the sacred experiences associated with the pilgrimage. A notable example is the designation of Aceh as the "porch of Mecca" (Serambi Makkah). This nickname stems from Aceh's historical role as the primary embarkation point for Indonesian Hajj pilgrims traveling by ship. Furthermore, Aceh's early engagement with the Arab world through trade, religious missions, and political alliances solidified its connection to Mecca. The enduring strength of this connection is reflected in the enduring nickname "porch of Mecca." This designation signifies not only the deep religiosity that permeates Acehese society but also the profound influence of Islam on all aspects of life, transcending its characterization as merely a religion. Perhaps the most striking symbol of this connection is the implementation of Sharia law in Aceh. Investigating the concept of Aceh as the "porch of Mecca" offers valuable insights into the longstanding and multifaceted relationship between Indonesia and Mecca.

Indonesia's geographical distance from the Middle East creates a significant barrier for many Muslims who aspire to perform the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. Furthermore, the high cost associated with Hajj, coupled with lengthy waitlists, can further restrict access for Indonesian Muslims. These factors (distance and cost) have motivated some Indonesian Muslims, particularly those residing in rural areas, to seek alternative pilgrimage sites. These alternative sites fulfill two key functions: geographically approximating the experience of Mecca and adapting it to local cultural contexts. Ultimately, these

localized "Little Meccas" serve as a way for Indonesian Muslims to connect with the sacredness of Mecca in a way that is both accessible and culturally resonant, challenging the notion of Mecca as solely an Arab experience. The core concept of "Little Meccas" in Indonesia centers on bringing the experience of Mecca to a local context. Crucially, these designated sites must possess a spiritual connection to Mecca to be considered legitimate alternatives for pilgrimage. Examples of such alternative sites include Tembayat and Mount Bawakaraeng¹⁰. While worshippers at these sites engage in practices similar to traditional Hajj rituals, a complete localization of the pilgrimage is not possible. However, devotees attempt to symbolically recreate key sacred spaces from Mecca within these local settings. As a result, many pilgrims perceive their experience at these "Little Meccas" to hold a level of spiritual significance comparable to the Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca. It is important to clarify that the purpose of these sites is not to encourage a shift in the qibla (direction of prayer) for Indonesian Muslims. More importantly, they provide an alternative path for Indonesian Muslims to fulfill the obligation of Hajj, one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

The concept of a "spiritual marketplace" emerges at the intersection of religion, spirituality, tourism, and economic practices. A crucial aspect of this concept is how pilgrims experience and negotiate the meaning of the site's sacredness, balancing their diverse interests within the limited space of a pilgrimage site.¹¹ "Little Meccas," established as smaller pilgrimage sites, also offer religious and spiritual experiences for pilgrims. These experiences can evoke a sense of being transported to Mecca itself. A

¹⁰ Pabbajah Mustaqim, "From the Indigenous to the Religious Practices: Islamic Construction of the Local Tradition in South Sulawesi, Indonesia," *Esensia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 22, no. 1 (2021): 91–102.

¹¹ M Rizal Abdi, "Flock with God, Ally with Money: Ziarah Wali as Generator of Local Economy," *Nizham Journal of Islamic Studies* 5, no. 2 (2017): 1–14.





key point to consider is how the perceived sacredness of these sites compels pilgrims to return for repeated visit.¹² This phenomenon suggests that pilgrims may perceive the holiness associated with a "Little Mecca" to be derived, at least in part, from its connection to Mecca.

Kauman and Memoirs of Little Mecca

Kauman villages (villages nearby mosques) share a historical connection to Mecca. These settlements emerged in various trade and government centers across Java, such as Pekalongan, Kudus, Semarang, Yogyakarta, and Surakarta. The development of Islam within these Kauman communities reflects the characteristics of urban Islam¹³. This parallels Mecca, which is itself a major urban center in the Arabian Peninsula. Despite their urban setting, Kauman villages retain a distinct village identity characterized by a strong religious identity¹⁴. Notably, these communities trace their origins to Arab settlements established by traders and missionaries. The frequent migration of Arabs to these locations fostered the growth of sizable settlements with unique characteristics. Furthermore, intermarriage between Arab settlers and local populations during trade and missionary activities influenced the development of Kauman villages. This legacy is evident in many Kauman communities today. One particularly significant characteristic inherited from the Arabs is a strong entrepreneurial spirit. Several Kauman villages across Java

are renowned for their batik businesses and industries¹⁵.

Beyond the entrepreneurial spirit fostered by the Mecca connection, another defining characteristic of Kauman villages is their unique architectural style. The presence of a central mosque, serving as the focal point of activity, distinguishes these settlements from other local villages. This pattern became a hallmark feature, not only for Kauman villages but for many Islamic villages throughout Indonesia. The central mosque, often referred to as the grand mosque, serves as the heart of the Kauman community. Beyond serving as a place of worship, the mosque in Kauman villages plays a central role in community life. Similar to the multifunctional role of mosques during the Prophet Muhammad's time and in contemporary Mecca, the Kauman mosque serves as a social hub. These mosques encompass various activities, including religious instruction, scholarly discourse, and even social problem-solving, fostering a sense of Islamic community. The ulama (religious scholars) traditionally played a crucial role in facilitating these activities within the mosque. The historical context of Mecca, a major pilgrimage center, naturally led to a higher intensity of activity within its Grand Mosque. In contrast, the pace of life in Kauman villages has differed. Today, the frenetic activity of Mecca may not be replicated in Kauman villages. However, the large mosque remains a defining architectural feature, positioned adjacent to

¹² Carole M Cusack, "A New Spiritual Marketplace: Comparing New Age and New Religious Movements in an Age of Spiritual and Religious Tourism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Religious and Spiritual Tourism* (Routledge, 2021), 79–89

Keri Davies and Paul Freathy, "Marketplace Spirituality: Challenges for the New Age Retailer," *The Service Industries Journal* 34, no. 15 (2014): 1185–98.

¹³ Ahmad Najib Burhani, *Muhammadiyah Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Al-Wasat, 2010); Wasisto Jati, *Politik Kelas Menengah Muslim Indonesia* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2017)

Ghifari Yuristiadhi, "Evolusionisme Dalam Adaptasi Sosial Masyarakat Ngindungan di Kampung Kauman Yogyakarta, 1900-AN-1970-AN," *Jurnal Widya Citra* 1, no. 2 (2020): 1–17.

¹⁴ Suastiwi Triatmodjo et al., "Religionisme Ruang Di Permukiman Kauman Yogyakarta," vol. 32, 2008.

¹⁵ Suastiwi Triatmodjo, "Dua Ragam Makna Pada 'Ruang Dari Masa Lalu' Di Permukiman Kauman Yogyakarta," *Tsaqafa: Jurnal Kajian Seni Budaya Islam*, 1-14, 1, no. 1 (2012): 4–5.





the village dwellings, serving as a constant symbol of the community's religious identity. While the context of Kauman today may not replicate the bustling activity of the Prophet's era or contemporary Mecca, the role of the mosque as a center for community life remains significant.

Beyond the central mosque, another key architectural feature of Kauman villages is the presence of madrasas (Islamic religious schools). Historically, these institutions played a vital role in the transmission of Islamic knowledge. Early madrasas were often led by Arab scholars, particularly those from Hadram. Initially, the curriculum focused solely on religious studies, with a particular emphasis on the transmission of knowledge from Arabic sources. Over time, some madrasas expanded their curriculum to encompass a wider range of general subjects. In addition to the mosque and madrasa, the presence of *langgar* (community halls) is another noteworthy aspect of Kauman villages. These *langgar* are often situated near the main mosque and serve as venues for communal meals and religious celebrations. The existence of these facilities, alongside the central mosque, reinforces the connection between Kauman villages and the concept of a "little Mecca."

The presence of the central mosque and the observance of Islamic rituals contribute significantly to the strong religious atmosphere in Kauman villages. These practices evoke the image of Mecca, the holiest city in Islam. While Kauman villages may not implement a formal Sharia legal system, village regulations often reflect Islamic principles. Examples include dress codes, such as the requirement for women to wear hijab, and the emphasis on regular prayer. These regulations contribute to the characterization of Kauman villages as "little Meccas."

Kauman as a Little Mecca: Past and Current Relationship

This paper explores Kauman, a Meccan surrogate settlement in Indonesia, as a manifestation of Indonesians' enduring connection with Mecca. Established as an Islamic settlement in the mid-16th century, Kauman has spanned the historical period until the present day. Initially founded by ulama (Islamic scholars) to facilitate da'wa activities (Islamic propagation), Kauman has evolved into a large Islamic kampong (village) within an urban area. This enduring connection with Mecca has historically manifested through intellectual networks formed through scholarly exchange and Hajj pilgrimages, which together solidified the Islamic identity within Kauman¹⁶. In the contemporary context, this connection continues as the current generation engages with ongoing Islamic discourses emanating from the Middle East. The emergence of Muhammadiyah, a reformist Islamic movement, within Kauman exemplifies this ongoing effort to nurture the spirit of Mecca in contemporary contexts. This brief section will be elaborated upon in the following sections.

The spread of Islam in Indonesia originated from multiple sources. Primarily through trade and da'wa activities, these methods significantly contributed to the development of Islam in the archipelago. According to scholarly works, the sources of Islamic influence extended beyond the Arab world, encompassing Indian and even Chinese influences. Additionally, scholars propose Chinese influences, such as Admiral Zheng He's voyages, while Indian Gujarati traders are credited with spreading Islam during their stopovers along the Sumatran and Javanese coastlines. In contrast, Arab ulama and traders, particularly Hadramis, had a more long-lasting influence on the

¹⁶ Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII* (Jakarta: Prenada Media Group, 2013).





spread of Islam in Indonesia. They not only brought Islam but also integrated aspects of their culture, leading to the first wave of Arabization within Indonesian Islam. This enduring influence will be further explored in the following sections.

The role of Islamic culture transmitted by the Hadhrami people was significant for the spread of Islam in Indonesia. Hadhrami ulama, some of whom claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad (sayyid lineage), enjoyed a favorable reception among Indonesian Muslims. These ulama settled in various parts of Indonesia, establishing small communities that eventually transformed into larger settlements. Local rulers, seeking to bolster their legitimacy, often provided support for these Islamic enclaves. Initially focused on trade, the Hadhrami community gradually shifted its emphasis towards religious instruction. This coincided with the decline of Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms, creating a receptive environment for Islam. Furthermore, the accommodative approach adopted by Islam, respectful of certain local customs, facilitated a peaceful cultural transition from the Hindu-Buddhist era. This emphasis on peaceful coexistence remains a hallmark of Indonesian Islam.

The emergence of Arab settlements in Indonesia reflects a historical connection with Mecca. These settlements, such as Kampong Arab, Kampong Keling, and Pekojan, were primarily located near economic centers like markets and ports, suggesting a focus on trade in their initial stages. Over time, some Arab migrants transitioned into roles as ulama (religious scholars) and habaib (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad). The presence of these figures, with their claimed lineage to Mecca, further solidified the symbolic link between these settlements and the Islamic holy city. In contemporary Indonesia, prominent figures like Habib Lutfi Yahya, Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf, and Habib Rizieq bin

Shihab (Alatas, 2021) continue to represent this historical connection. These respected ulama and habaib, with their unique preaching styles, hold significant influence on public religious understanding in both urban and rural areas and often have many followers. Their presence serves as a reminder of the enduring legacy of Mecca in shaping Indonesian Muslim society.

In contrast to other Arab settlements focused on trade, Kauman demonstrably prioritized religious objectives. This focus on religious scholarship likely facilitated the transmission of Islamic culture within Indonesian society. Kauman's unique character was further shaped by its location amidst traditional villages that retained their local customs. This proximity fostered a process of cultural exchange, where Islamic principles were adapted to existing social norms. The presence of numerous ulama who established madrasahs (Islamic schools) further enhanced Kauman's reputation as a center for Islamic studies. These institutions served as crucial sites for the dissemination of Islamic knowledge and the cultivation of a hybrid Muslim identity that embraced both local traditions and Islamic teachings.

The enduring connection with Mecca has been a defining characteristic of Islam in Indonesia. This connection is evident not only in the presence of Arab settlements but also in the emphasis placed on scholarly exchange and pilgrimage. The establishment of Kauman, a settlement founded by Javanese Muslims with close ties to Mecca, exemplifies this enduring link. The word "Kauman" itself is an abbreviation of the Javanese term "pakauman," meaning "residence for a kaum" (community). This "kaum," in turn, derives from the Arabic word "qawmuddin," which translates to "defenders of Islam." As a center for Islamic scholarship, Kauman attracted numerous





ulama who often dressed in white clothing¹⁷. This practice likely mirrored the attire of Arab ulama and served to distinguish them from the broader community. The adoption of white clothing by Kauman's residents further solidified its image as a center for religious learning and piety.

The spatial organization of Kauman, with its central grand mosque surrounded by residential quarters (kampongs) and Islamic schools (madrasahs), reflects a potential connection to the urban layout of Mecca. This resemblance, whether intentional or not, reinforces the symbolic link between Kauman and the holy city. Ulama (religious scholars) continue to act as cultural brokers, filtering external influences and ensuring the community's adherence to Islamic principles. This role mirrors the function of cultural brokers in Mecca, who navigate the complexities of a globalized world while safeguarding the core tenets of Islam. The grand mosque remains the central focus for public activities in Kauman. These activities are predominantly religious in nature, encompassing activities like Quran recitation classes for children, daily congregational prayers, and communal Quran reading sessions for adults. These practices echo those observed in the mosques of Mecca and serve to preserve Islamic identity within the community.

The emphasis on religious activities and the distinct settlement pattern likely contributed to the establishment of similar communities, also called Kauman, in other Javanese towns. These Kauman settlements generally served as Muslim neighborhood communities and may exhibit additional distinctive features, such as unique mosque tower designs, particularly in northern Java. The presence of ulama (religious scholars), madrasahs (Islamic schools), and a central

mosque served to solidify the connection between Kauman and Mecca, acting as key institutions for the transmission and practice of Islam. These institutions not only reflected the influence of Mecca but also fostered a social order that emphasized the importance of both one's relationship with God and social harmony within the community. In essence, Kauman aspired to embody a microcosm of the Islamic ideal, fostering a harmonious relationship between humanity and God (macrocosm) and promoting the blessings of Islam for the community (microcosm).

Kauman Yogyakarta occupies a unique position compared to other Kauman settlements. While other Kauman communities often adhered to traditional practices, Kauman Yogyakarta distinguished itself by engaging with contemporary Islamic reform movements, particularly those emerging from the Arab world. This openness to reformism led to the birth of Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's second-largest Islamic organization, founded by Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan. Dahlan, a Mecca-educated scholar, was deeply influenced by the reformist ideas of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, who advocated for a reinterpretation of Islamic teachings in light of modern challenges. Dahlan further drew inspiration from his teacher, Syech Ahmad Khatib Al Minangkabawi, a prominent Minangnese scholar who served as an imam at the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Al-Minangkabawi emphasized the importance of integrating Islamic studies with other fields of knowledge to ensure the continued relevance of Islam in a rapidly changing world. These combined influences motivated Dahlan to establish Muhammadiyah, aiming to "purify" Islamic teachings and modernize Islamic education in Indonesia.

¹⁷ Tutin Aryanti, "Branding the Islamic Village: Modesty and Identity in Yogyakarta Kauman Village, Indonesia," *Reflections on Creativity: Public Engagement*

and The Making of Place 184 (May 20, 2015): 128–29, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.05.070>.





Through its engagement with global Islamic discourse, Kauman Yogyakarta and Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan became instrumental in ushering in a wave of Islamic revival in Indonesia. Dahlan, inspired by reformist ideas from the Arab world, founded Muhammadiyah, which advocated for the purification of Islamic practices from syncretic elements and promoting modernization. Muhammadiyah envisioned Kauman as a model for a progressive Islamic community in Indonesia, emphasizing rationality and the integration of Islamic knowledge with modern sciences. Muhammadiyah's ideology was shaped by both the call for Islamic purification (*tajdid*) and the pan-Islamic movement, emphasizing the unity of the Muslim world. This engagement fostered a dynamic exchange between Kauman and reformist trends in the Arab world, ultimately shifting the focus of the Mecca connection from Sufi mysticism to a more modernist interpretation of Islam. The influence of Muhammadiyah's reformist ideals continues to be felt within Indonesian society to this day.

As demonstrated, Kauman's historical and contemporary connections to Mecca remain vibrant. This enduring connection has been nurtured through intellectual exchange, pilgrimage journeys, and the establishment of Muhammadiyah, a reformist Islamic organization. While ongoing modernization processes might present challenges to the preservation of traditional Islamic practices in Kauman, the presence of Muhammadiyah seems to act as a buffer against external influences that could significantly erode the community's distinctive Islamic character. Muhammadiyah's emphasis on Islamic purification and adaptation to modern realities allows the community to navigate the complexities of a changing world while remaining rooted in its

core Islamic values. This, in turn, helps ensure the continued salience of Islamic values within the Kauman community.

The Muhammadiyah's Approach to Maintain Kauman's Mecca Connection

The emergence of Muhammadiyah in Kauman reflected the influence of contemporary Islamic reform movements in the Middle East, particularly those emphasizing modernization and the purification of Islamic practices. This shift placed a greater emphasis on intellectual engagement with Islam, potentially transforming Kauman's image from a center of Sufism to a hub for Islamic reform. Muhammadiyah's emphasis on reinterpreting Islamic teachings in light of modern realities can be seen as a way of revising Islam through engagement with the modern values¹⁸. This approach differed from the ideology of the Saudi-backed Salafi/Wahhabi movement, which aimed for a stricter interpretation of Islamic law. However, both Muhammadiyah and the Salafi/Wahhabi movement shared a common goal of purifying Islamic practices. This shared emphasis on reform arguably strengthened the symbolic connection between Kauman and Mecca, the holiest city in Islam and the seat of the Saudi royal family, who hold the title of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. While Muhammadiyah did not strictly align itself with the Saudi-backed Salafi/Wahhabi movement, both movements contributed to a renewed focus on Islamic scholarship and reform within Kauman.

Some scholars argue that a perceived decline in Islam's global influence during the pre-modern era led to a greater emphasis on spiritual practices within Islamic communities. This focus began to shift in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the rise of Islamic modernist movements that sought to revitalize Islam and reassert its role in the

¹⁸ Adabi Darban, *Sejarah Kauman: Menguak Identitas Kampung Muhammadiyah* (Tarawang, 2000).





global political landscape. Mecca served as a symbolic focal point for these movements, with some advocating for the modernization of Islamic practices to suit the demands of the modern world. Reformist ideas emanating from Mecca and Medina, particularly those emphasizing a return to core Islamic texts and a critical re-evaluation of tradition, eventually influenced Islamic discourse within Kauman. While Sufism, exemplified by the Wali Songo (Nine Saints), played a significant role in the early spread of Islam in Indonesia, its mystical emphasis was challenged by these reformist movements. It is important to note that early Islamic teachers in Indonesia often incorporated local customs to facilitate the spread of Islam. This cultural adaptation can be seen, for example, in the adoption of white clothing, a practice observed in Mecca, which resonated with local cultural norms. Concerns emerged during this period that certain Islamic practices within Indonesia may have deviated from the core principles outlined in the Quran and Hadith. These concerns fueled calls for a return to the foundational Islamic texts and a critical re-evaluation of existing practices. This movement for Islamic reform, emphasizing a return to scripture and reinterpretation of Islamic teachings in light of contemporary realities, originated in Mecca and spread rapidly across the Muslim world. Through intellectual networks, the spirit of Islamic reform reached Kauman, influencing Islamic discourse within the community.

Fueled by the global Islamic reform movement emerging from Mecca in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Muhammadiyah was established in Kauman Yogyakarta. The movement aimed to propagate a similar spirit of Islamic enlightenment, emphasizing a return to core Islamic texts and a critical re-evaluation of existing

practices. Muhammadiyah's reformist agenda initially faced resistance from established religious authorities, particularly senior ulama, who feared it would disrupt the existing power structures and traditional interpretations of Islam. These authorities may have also felt threatened by a potential erosion of their influence if Muhammadiyah gained popularity. This resistance culminated in tensions and acts of opposition against Muhammadiyah in Kauman, including the burning of Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan's residence. Undeterred, Muhammadiyah persisted in its mission to propagate Islamic reform in Kauman. Over time, the reformist message championed by Dahlan and Muhammadiyah resonated with younger generations¹⁹ seeking a more modern and accessible understanding of Islam, particularly its relevance in the context of colonial limitations on education and healthcare. Muhammadiyah's growing influence had a significant impact on Kauman, reshaping its religious landscape. The emphasis on adapting Islamic teachings to address contemporary challenges, including the prevalence of syncretic practices and the influence of shamans during the colonial period, resonated with the Kauman community. In essence, Muhammadiyah served as a conduit for transmitting the spirit of Islamic reform emanating from Mecca to Kauman, challenging traditional interpretations and fostering a more progressive understanding of Islam within the community.

Muhammadiyah continues to play a significant role in shaping Kauman's connection to Mecca. This influence is evident in the organization's emphasis on Islamic reform, which aligns with the broader currents of Islamic discourse in the Arab world. One notable example of Muhammadiyah's reform efforts in Kauman

¹⁹ Baharuddin Rohim, "Pemikiran KH Ahmad Dahlan Dalam Moderasi Beragama Di Kauman Tahun

1912-1923 M," *Al-Manar: Jurnal Komunikasi Dan Pendidikan Islam* 11, no. 1 (2022): 1-11.





involved the realignment of the Qibla, the direction of prayer, to face the Kaaba in Mecca with greater precision. Previously, the Qibla in the Grand Mosque may not have been perfectly aligned, potentially weakening the symbolic connection to Mecca. Muhammadiyah also advocated for the reduction of certain socio-religious activities, such as *slametan*, in Kauman that were deemed to be inconsistent with the principles of Quran and Hadith. This emphasis on Islamic purification, a core tenet of Muhammadiyah's ideology, aimed to strengthen the connection between religious practice in Kauman and its scriptural foundation. These reforms have had a lasting impact, contributing to Kauman's reputation as a center for Islamic scholarship and practice that adheres to a more scriptural understanding of Islam.

Muhammadiyah's reform agenda in Kauman extended beyond theological concerns, encompassing a strong emphasis on social services. This focus stemmed from the belief that a lack of access to basic needs like education and healthcare contributed to limited social mobility and stagnation in development. At the time, educational opportunities in Kauman were limited to religious schools, neglecting other crucial subjects. Similarly, access to healthcare was largely restricted to the wealthy. This concern with social welfare resonated with the broader Islamic principle of Darussalam (the Abode of Peace), emphasizing social justice and welfare within Muslim communities. Muhammadiyah's focus on social services has left a lasting legacy in Kauman, contributing to the development of not only basic healthcare and education but also expanding to include institutions like universities.

Despite its outward resemblance to other kampungs in Yogyakarta, Kauman retains a

distinct character shaped by its rich Islamic heritage. This legacy is evident in the continued presence of madrasahs (Islamic schools) and *langgars* (prayer halls), which play a vital role in transmitting Islamic knowledge within the community. A particularly noteworthy institution is the Madrasah Muallimat Muhammadiyah, a Muhammadiyah cadre school specifically dedicated to female education²⁰. This school embodies the enduring spirit of 'Little Mecca' and Muhammadiyah's commitment to fostering female leadership within the organization. The presence of the Madrasah Muallimat Muhammadiyah signifies Muhammadiyah's dedication to the advancement of Islamic education for women, ensuring the transmission of knowledge and values to future generations. This focus on female education contributes to the ongoing vibrancy of Islamic life in Kauman.

Conclusion

In essence, this paper explores the enduring religious connection between Mecca and Kauman. It highlights the long-standing journey of transmitting Islamic teachings and legacies between these two places. The significance of 'Little Mecca' extends beyond a mere label; it shapes how Indonesian Muslims understand their faith, maintain their connection to Mecca, and preserve their religious heritage. The rise of Islamic settlements, culminating in Kauman, reflects this alignment with Mecca. As Islamic discourse constantly evolves in the Middle East, Mecca remains a source of inspiration. The recent wave of Islamic enlightenment significantly impacted the Muslim world, and Muhammadiyah, acting as a conduit, sought to bring this reform movement to Kauman, aiming for a renewed understanding of Islam.

²⁰ Agus Miswanto, "Eksistensi Pesantren Muhammadiyah Dalam Mencetak Kader Persyarikatan

(Studi Di Kabupaten Magelang)," *Jurnal Tarbiyatuna* 10, no. 1 (2019): 81–102.





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Wasisto Raharjo Jati compiled the data and drafted it into this paper.

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