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Meyer, V.H.

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Grave Matters: Ambiguity, Modernism, and the Quest for Moderate Islam in Indonesia

Verena Meyer*

ABSTRACT

Although graves of famous figures are often important sites of commemoration where religious communities invoke a normative past, the very act of commemoration can coexist uneasily with a religious community's values and self-understanding. This is the case with Muhammadiyah, an Indonesian modernist Islamic mass organization focused on the purification of Islam from what they consider heretical innovations, including memory practices at graves. Yet, to differentiate themselves from radical Islamist organizations they find objectionable, Muhammadiyah's leadership has begun to draw on their organizational history and its physical remnants, including graves, to articulate a "moderate" identity. Drawing on ethnographic research in Yogyakarta, I show how Muhammadiyah's conflicting desires produce an ambiguity that is productive for articulating the organization's complex ideological positionings. In so doing, I argue against the pervasive claim that with modernity, Islam lost its tolerance and appreciation of ambiguity.

"Have you heard of the grave that disappeared?" I was sitting in the office of the Council for Libraries and Information on the top floor of the old headquarters of Muhammadiyah, an Indonesian Islamic mass organization, on Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan Road, a major thoroughfare in downtown Yogyakarta. Founded in 1912 by the namesake of the road, Ahmad Dahlan (1868–1923), Muhammadiyah self-identifies as modernist (I. *modernis*) and progressive (I. *berkemajuan*).[1] The comfortable office was one of my favorite places during my field research in Yogyakarta, with books and magazines stacked everywhere, on shelves, in boxes, and on the floor, and a large square table in the middle for people to work, chat, and drink tea. I spent many

* Verena Meyer, Leiden Institute for Area Studies, Leiden University, Hertha Moor Building, 2300 RA Leiden, The Netherlands. Email: v.h.meyer@hum.leidenuniv.nl. Research for this article was generously funded by the Mellon Humanities International Travel Fellowship and the Global Religion Research Initiative. I accomplished much of the writing during a postdoctoral fellowship at the MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society. Many people have provided valuable feedback on this article. I would especially like to thank Quinn Clark, Matthew Engelke, Katherine Ewing, Najam Haider, James Hoesterey, Carla Jones, Kyle Rader, Martin Slama, and the two anonymous reviewers at the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* for their comments. I am also grateful to MF CASR, the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, the Lund University Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, and the Comparative Religion Network at Leiden University for inviting me to present a version of this article and to the audiences at these events for their valuable feedback. Finally, my most sincere thanks to my Muhammadiyah interlocutors in Yogyakarta for their trust, friendship, and tireless help in answering all my questions.

[1] The following key applies for non-English terms: I. for Indonesian and J. for Javanese. For Arabic words that have entered the vocabulary of languages throughout the Islamic world, no language of origin will be given.

hours in that office, browsing the archives, waiting for another meeting in the building to start, or talking to whoever happened to be around, especially one of the Council's secretaries. He was the one who had asked me whether I had heard about the disappeared grave.[2] "Yes," I said: indeed, I had heard. Most conversation I held with Muhammadiyah members about the status of graves in the organization sooner or later turned to the affair of Ki Bagus Hadikusuma's final resting place. Ki Bagus was part of the first generation of young Muhammadiyah activists in the early years of the organization and would later be Muhammadiyah's general chairperson (1944–1953) during the turbulent years of the Japanese occupation, the war of independence against the Dutch, and the first years of the Republic. Because of Ki Bagus's significant contributions to Indonesian independence,[3] he was declared a national hero by the Joko "Jokowi" Widodo administration in 2015. But when the government tried to locate his grave to put up a sign and hold a ceremony to properly commemorate him, there was no grave to be found. People knew that it had to be somewhere in Pakuncen, a cemetery near Yogyakarta's city center and one of the city's largest. But where in the sprawling cemetery it was that Ki Bagus had been buried upon his death in 1954, no one could or wanted to say.

The mysterious disappearance of Ki Bagus's grave, and the reasons for its disappearance, became a hotly debated topic within Muhammadiyah in the aftermath of this affair. When I asked my modernist interlocutors how they felt about the disappearance, they often seemed quite pleased that the grave's location had come to be forgotten. After all, they opined, what was important about a person's legacy was not their material remains. Building and visiting fancy graves was something done by traditionalist Muslims, from whom self-identified modernists often seek to distance themselves. Yet, their contentment was usually mixed with some concern. The grave, and its value as a historical site, was irretrievably gone. Prominent figures, including Muhammadiyah's General Chairperson Haedar Nashir (since 2015), commented that the disappearance of Ki Bagus's grave was a warning sign that graves should not be forgotten and that the material remains of the organization's history needed to be maintained to keep the memory alive (Sugiharto 2015).

The distinction between "traditionalists" and "modernists" has pervaded identity politics throughout the Muslim world—and beyond—for the last one hundred or so years.[4] In this binary, traditionalists are normally understood to grant great weight to the classical disciplines of Islamic knowledge and to the institutions, lineages, and individuals through which these have been developed and transmitted. This entails deference to prior scholars' established rulings and opinions (A. *taqlīd*) as well as an attitude of respect and reverence in relation to Muslim saints and scholars who have interpreted and transmitted the Prophetic Sunna throughout history.[5] Modernists, on the other hand, are taken to be self-consciously influenced by the epistemic norms of Western modernity. With their high value on the independent use of rational reasoning, they prefer to refer directly to scripture, unmediated by classical scholarship, and therefore regard the institutional and material heritage of Islam with a great deal of suspicion.

Over the last decade, this binary between traditionalists and modernists in Islam has taken on an additional dimension, occasioned by a debate where "tradition" and "modernity" are

[2] All interviews were conducted between December 2018 and July 2019 among people from the Muhammadiyah milieu in Yogyakarta, Central Java. Except for well-known public figures in the organization, to whom I refer by their full names, I have anonymized all of my interlocutors. Some have received a pseudonym, others are referenced by their function within the community.

[3] For more on Ki Bagus and his political views in the context of Indonesian independence, see Elson (2009, 111).

[4] This binary first emerged in the narrow context of Islamic legal thought but gradually came to signify a broader divide between two different camps or Islamic orientations whose legal methodologies corresponded to particular views of and approaches to Islamic life more generally.

[5] Rather than a bounded group, the world of so-called traditionalist Islam is highly diverse and fragmented. For studies representing a breadth of traditionalism in different historical and geographic contexts, see Abu Samra (2009); Dhofier (1999); Pouwels (1987); Sedgwick (2020); Zaman (2002); Zeghal (2007).

correlated with what the German Islamic studies scholar Thomas Bauer (2021) has called tolerance of ambiguity. According to this model, premodern and especially non-Western societies, including Muslim societies, have always been open to ambiguity and paradox as meaningful and productive ways to make sense of God and the world and themselves in it. Cultural ambiguity, according to Bauer, occurs when a group accepts different and even competing interpretations of one phenomenon (Bauer 2021, 10). In fact, more than just accepting ambiguity, premodern Muslims celebrated it as a means to baffle and fascinate and to offer a range of equally valid interpretations that gave expression to the irreducible complexity of the world.[6] As Shahab Ahmed famously said, until about 1850, Muslims primarily communicated in a language of paradox (Ahmed 2016, 389). In contrast, mainstream Western philosophical and religious traditions, beginning with Aristotle, have mostly been disinterested in or inimical toward ambiguity (Bauer 2021, 13). This intolerance of ambiguity peaked with the onset of Enlightenment, which assumed a correlation between the use of unequivocal and clear language and the expression of ultimate truth (Bauer 2021, 14). Globalized through colonialism and its normative civilizing project, the modern West's intolerance of ambiguity powerfully impacted other religions and cultures, instigating an epistemic shift and a series of reforms. In Islam, a movement that has become known as Islamic modernism, set in motion in the mid-nineteenth century by figures such as Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897) and Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1898), embarked on a campaign to do away with this centuries-long embrace of ambiguity and to enforce consistent ideologies, unequivocal positions, and rational coherence. Islam's tolerance of ambiguity thus came to be limited to and a characteristic of self-identified traditionalist Muslim communities, who self-consciously reject the epistemic norms of Western modernity (Bauer 2021, 32–33). Bauer's portrayal also resonates with long-standing biases in both scholarly and public debates, where these modern transitions are often linked with value judgments, positing reformist Islam as inauthentic and theologically shallow while celebrating Sufism and traditionalism as the locus of true Islamic thought (for critiques, see Maqsood 2017; Osella and Osella 2008; Soares 2007).

I conducted ethnographic research in the central Javanese city of Yogyakarta, a stronghold for both of Indonesia's two largest Islamic mass organizations: Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which self-identifies as traditionalist, and Ahmad Dahlan's organization Muhammadiyah, which understands itself as modernist. In the process, I found that the capacity to handle ambiguity and paradox does not actually map quite so neatly onto this binary. I encountered NU traditionalists who were quite invested in enforcing unequivocal coherence, disavowing ambiguity and all things deemed irrational; and I experienced instances where modernists were quite capable of making generative use of ambiguity and paradox. The coexistence of very different views among my modernist interlocutors regarding the disappearance of Ki Bagus's grave is a case in point: few of my interlocutors seemed interested in giving an unequivocal answer about whether the affair was good or bad. It was both. And even if one of my interlocutors seemed more inclined toward one interpretation, it was usually in the context of an awareness and even embrace of the polyvalence of views within the organization. If a tolerance of ambiguity entails accepting divergent attributions of meaning at the same time, my Muhammadiyah interlocutors seemed to be doing just that. Taking these different engagements with polyvalence as points of entry into my interlocutors' complex positionalities, I build on the work of other anthropologists of Islam shifting the focal point from *Islam* as a universalizing category to the diversity and seeming incommensurability of Muslims' lives and everyday theologizing (see for instance Alatas 2021; Husein and Slama 2018; Khan 2012; Kloos 2018; Schielke 2015). Moreover, I build

[6] For studies showing how Sufism has made use of paradoxes as vehicles of articulating complex theological or hagiological points too subtle or elusive for discursive representation, see for instance Ewing (2021); Meyer (2019); Moosa (2005).

on other voices in Islamic studies who have questioned Bauer's claims (Abbasi 2023; Chubb-Confer 2023; Coppens 2021) to invite us to rethink the distinction between traditionalism and modernism as it has been framed by modern identity politics.

Over the last decades, scholarship on Indonesian Islam has emphasized that the conventional boundaries between modernist and traditionalist Islam, and hence between Muhammadiyah and NU, have become increasingly porous (Feener 1999; Howell 2010; Sila 2020) or that the two organizations are no longer as important in the identity politics of Indonesian Islam as new movements have emerged.[7] This body of scholarship has been important, showing us that in the context of an ever increasing variety of competition from new Islamic movements and forms of authority (C. Hefner 2022; Ibrahim 2018; Nisa 2018), many of the prototypical contrasts in the thought and practice of the two organizations and the ideological orientations they represent have indeed softened. Yet, I found that these dynamics have entailed less of a convergence than a shift in how *traditionalism* and *modernism* are understood, as moments of rapprochement have coincided with equally strong countercurrents and efforts to construct new boundaries between the two Islamic identities. Similarly, Megan Abbas has recently argued in her work on encounters between Islamic and Western intellectual traditions that neither of the two identities, nor the relationship between them, is stable. They are the contingent outcome of processes of construction, maintenance, and contestation and therefore always in flux (Abbas 2021, 6–7). Yet, although the categories of *traditionalism* and *modernism* and the boundaries between them have been equally unstable, they are nonetheless doing productive work on the ground when they are deployed by people on either side as markers of fundamentally different identities. As such processes are neither unique to Islam nor to Indonesia, my findings can cast light on the meaning of tradition and modernity in postcolonial societies, where modern subjects navigate the conflicting demands of local, national, and global interests.

In this article, I draw on my field research among Yogyakarta's Muhammadiyah community to examine what it means for Muhammadiyah that the gravesite of the organization's founder, Ahmad Dahlan, has become an object of some religious interest and even a site of devotional practices normally associated with NU's brand of traditionalist Islam, in particular the practice of grave visitations (*ziarah*). Although modernists are typically hostile toward the visitation of graves, this change in attitude has been encouraged by Muhammadiyah's leadership because of a desire to promote practices of memory in order to distinguish themselves from the global Islamist movements they find objectionable. I approach graves as a semiotic space (Keane 2022) where the tensions between Muhammadiyah's conflicting desires and anxieties become apparent and that is therefore always in flux (see Jones 2023). More than just a limitation, I argue that although practices such as grave visitations coexist somewhat uneasily with Muhammadiyah's identity and self-understanding as a modernist organization, they are not incompatible but rather exist in an ambiguous relationship where seemingly contradictory views are held at the same time. Furthermore, I will argue that this ambiguity is productive, allowing Muhammadiyah to inhabit a positionality where opposing virtues normally associated with other Islamic identities balance and legitimate each other in a paradoxical relationship where contestation and validation go hand in hand.

FEARING MATTER

Not all graves of important Muhammadiyah figures have shared the fate that befell Ki Bagus's and disappeared. But their presence poses problems of its own. The grave of Ahmad Dahlan,

[7] See Edmonds (2019); Feillard and Madinier (2011); Hamayotsu (2011). An important exception is Robin Bush's study of Nahdlatul Ulama, where she argues that "the modernist-traditionalist divide... remains the primary division in Indonesian Islam" (Bush 2009, 9).

Muhammadiyah's founder, is a small plot enclosed by flat white stone slabs, no higher than a hand span,[8] and is marked by a simple headstone inscribed with only his name (Figure 1). It is located in Karangkajen, a historical Muhammadiyah stronghold in the south of Yogyakarta. There is also a sign from the government behind the grave that marks it as the final resting place of a *pahlawan nasional*, a national hero, a status bestowed on Ahmad Dahlan by the government in 1961. The government, it is said in Muhammadiyah circles, would have liked to build a larger monument to commemorate Ahmad Dahlan's memory, but the community would not have it: it was not advisable to act as though the grave was a special place. All the graves around Ahmad Dahlan's look just like his (Figure 2). With its neat simplicity and strict conformity, it is completely unlike most other Javanese graveyards, where gravestones of different sizes and in various stages of disrepair are arranged in no particular order. When Muhammadiyah modernists have described the cemetery to me, they often called it "clean,"[9] with some pride in this simplicity, the proof that Muhammadiyah has other financial priorities, especially the social empowerment of the marginalized while discouraging what they imagine traditionalists would like to do at a comfortable graveyard, namely pray. Praying at graves, according to many modernists, is dangerous business because it harbors the risk that the grave, which is just an object, could be mistaken for something more, something that has some sort of transcendent power or significance. And that, according to modernists, would amount to *shirk*, or idolatry.

Figure 1. The Grave of Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan. Photo courtesy by Diah Puspita, used with permission.

[8] Many Modernist and Salafi groups understand the maximum height of a hand span to be mandated by a Prophetic Hadith transmitted by Bukhārī, according to which the Prophet's grave was "humped" (Bukhārī 1976, 5:168). For a Muhammadiyah fatwa on this matter, see Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Muhammadiyah (2020).

[9] The language of cleanliness is situated in a broader semiotic field where it signals religious virtue. See for instance Hoesterey (2019) on public figures constructing religious virtue by performing the literal act of cleaning.

With their skepticism of and even hostility toward the materiality of the spiritual, Muhammadiyah modernists are modern in a familiar sense, one characterized by self-conscious efforts to separate religion from matter. While this project is often associated with Western modernity and especially Protestantism, the separation of the material from the spiritual has always been fraught with contradictions and limitations, both in the Protestant West and in the colonized world. Nonetheless, the normative understanding of religion as immaterial appeared in the colonies with the promise of a uniquely privileged epistemic status and quintessentially modern quality (Keane 1996; 2007; see also Wiener 2007). Only backward societies continued to hold superstitions that attributed agency to dead matter and confused scientific rules of cause and effect with magic or witchcraft. Progress required human self-mastery and emancipation from such views. These ideals were naturalized by social scientific scholars such as the Victorian anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor, who posited an inverse relationship between a group's level of civilization and the extent to which their notion of the transcendent relied on material form (Keane 2007, 93–97; Pels 2008; Houtman and Meyer 2012). Truthful propositions and sincerity of belief were the true locus of authenticity, whereas ritual activity or bodily disciplines were at best incidental or epiphenomenal and more likely distracting and harmful. Social scientific discourse discredited the recognition of spiritual presence in the material as a logical error, a moral vice (Engelke 2011), or an anachronism (Chakrabarty 2000). Consequently, Protestantism's alleged fear of matter and its demand for immateriality became inseparable from both secular and religious narratives of modernity.

Engagements with graves among Muhammadiyah members are linked to broader debates in the Islamic world that proceeded from the colonial project and its normative understandings of modernity. Beginning in the nineteenth century, both colonial officials or Orientalist scholars and Muslim reformers came to target traditional practices that recognized God's power and presence in material objects, such as charms, inscriptions, or relics, as well as ritual practices

Figure 2. The Karangkajen Cemetery. Photo courtesy of Diah Puspita, used with permission.

like chanting litanies and visiting shrines, denouncing them as backward and incompatible with both ideals of progress and the true teachings of Islam (Hatina 2007b; Moaddel 2005; Sirriyeh 1999). In Egypt, the epicenter of late nineteenth-century modernist discourse, reformers such as Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā insisted that Islam was a rational religion that was relevant to contemporary times (Haj 2009; Halevi 2019). The antithesis to and enemy of this modern Islam was found in popular Sufism, which allegedly coupled superstition with corrupt power structures and promoted ignorance and a blind acquiescence that led to the excessive veneration of *shaykhs* and ultimately to the cult of graves (Hatina 2007a; Knysh 1997). Reformist movements around the Islamic world have undertaken a variety of measures to mitigate the risk of such cults that would amount to idolatry and *shirk*. So-called Islamic fundamentalists, some of whom are ideological cousins of modernists, have at times even resorted to the destruction of graves.[10] Muhammadiyah's strategy has been a different one: instead of destroying graves, they have turned them into icons of modernist reform.

Ahmad Dahlan's grave, because and through its simplicity, has become an exceptionally saturated semiotic site indexing the values of the reformism that Muhammadiyah promoted since its beginnings. Ahmad Dahlan founded the organization in 1912 after he returned to Yogyakarta from studies in Mecca, where he had become familiar with the modernist views of these Egyptian reformers (Ali 2016; Salam 1963). Educational centers such as Mecca and Cairo were nodes where students from all over the world became acquainted with their teachings (Bang 2003; Laffan 2002). Upon their return home, they would spread the word of Islamic modernism in their respective communities, as Ahmad Dahlan did in Java. Although it is unclear to what extent Dahlan himself advanced this Islamic modernist critique of materiality during his life and leadership,[11] it gained momentum over time, as Muhammadiyah's signature agenda came to be known as the purification (I. p*urifikasi*, *pemurnian*) of Islam from practices deemed *shirk*,[12] the veneration or "cult" (I. *kultus*) of objects or people as though they partook in divine power; or in short, the fight against TBC: *Takhayyul* or fantasy, *bidʿah* or innovation, and *churafah* or superstition—and yes, the pun is intended. Just as dangerous as the lung disease, TBC needs to be eradicated through constant effort.

Muhammadiyah's language of *purification* brings to mind the work of the French philosopher Bruno Latour, for whom purification was a quintessential characteristic of modernity. In his conceptual vocabulary, *purification* is the ontological separation between humans who have agency and objects that do not (Latour 2002, 11). Where my Muhammadiyah interlocutors usually invoked the language of TBC and *shirk*, Western social scientific discourse of the nineteenth and early twentieth century adopted the similar category of *fetishism* to describe pathological or harmful confusions about ontological categories (Marx 1976, 163–77; Freud 1924–1950, 198–204). Victorian anthropologists and scholars of religious studies readily embraced the term, defining *fetishism* as a very early stage in evolutionary taxonomies of religion.[13] More recently, scholars have reclaimed the concept of the *fetish* as an analytic category describing a moment of a clash or "incommensurable difference" (Pietz 1985, 13) in understandings of materiality and its meaning, whereby normally unproblematic notions of *materiality* or *immateriality* are challenged in the moment of clash between different semiotic ideologies (Keane 2007), potentially

[10] At the state level, the demolition of holy tombs is pursued especially in Saudi Arabia (Beránek and Ťupek 2018). Examples that were especially prominent in public discourse include the destruction of holy tombs by ISIS (Isakhan 2018) and radical groups in Yemen (Ho 2006). For an Indonesian example, see Sawabi (2013).

[11] Dahlan himself, educated in his youth by Java's traditionalist scholars, seems to never have furthered the modernist critique to the extent that his successors did. He allegedly still participated in some ritual practices that are associated with traditionalism today, as is even acknowledged within Muhammadiyah (Bin Zahir Sarwono and al-ʿAydrus 2013; see also Shodiqin 2014).

[12] *Shirk*, polytheism or idolatry, is a Qur'anic term signifying the acceptance of other divinities or agentive entities at God's side.

[13] For more on understandings of *fetishism* and the term's role in religious taxonomies, see Masuzawa (2000) and Pietz (1985). The fetish was more primitive even than idolatry because of its inescapable material essence with no transcendent meaning.

resulting in uncertainty or ambivalence or the realization that some objects are "more material" than others (Rowlands 2005, 80). To give an example of the latter, in Muhammadiyah's history, there have often been moments where indigenous forms of expression were considered more material than Western ones, which were "modern" and "rational-scientific," and thus somehow immaterial. At Dahlan's time, the reform of the school curriculum entailed the introduction of new subjects, including gramophone, harmonica, checkers, and model boats (Peacock 1978, 53). And Ahmad Dahlan famously played the violin, displacing the Javanese *gamelan* orchestra. When an elderly resident of Kauman told me that everybody got it wrong and that Dahlan had in fact not played the violin but the accordion, it occurred to me that in spite of the now legendary status of the violin, its replacement with another Western instrument is conceivable, whereas Dahlan could have never played the *rebana*, a Javanese tambourine, or another "traditional" instrument.[14]

More than just an intellectual exercise, this ontological separation has a moral subtext for many who understand themselves as modern subjects, including many Muhammadiyah modernists, such that its accomplishment is, in Keane's words, a matter of "moral redemption" (Keane 2007, 24). With stakes so high, the struggle for purification is regularized and institutionalized in the organization, where it is often coupled with social empowerment. Muhammadiyah's modern hospitals, for instance, have long been a central site where this purification is continually cultivated, supplanting superstition with science and deference to traditional healers (I. *dukun*) with easy access and transparency and thus facilitating the emancipation of the self from material and social dependencies.

Muhammadiyah schools have been another important site for the labor of cultivating purification[15] and continue to be so today,[16] as I learned when I met up with a teacher and a senior student at the prestigious Madrasah Mu'allimin for middle and high school boys in Yogyakarta. The two were quite excited to tell me about an annual activity that was mandatory for all first-year students and that was designed with the specific intent to demonstrate that supernatural creatures were just a mental construct. The student—I will call him Erwin here—had completed the activity in his first year and had been so impressed by his experience that he chose to participate in the following years as an organizer. The activity entailed a nighttime trip to Pakuncen, the very cemetery where Ki Bagus's grave had gotten lost. There, students would walk a marked path across the sprawling graveyard that was very dark because all lamps had been turned off for the purpose of the exercise. They had to walk by themselves unless they felt really scared in which case they could walk in pairs. On their way, they would pass different stations where teachers or senior students would quiz them on central Islamic tenets, Muhammadiyah's position on certain issues, or the history of their school. The teacher—let us call him Ikhsan—told me that the questions really were not that difficult. The point was to train their mental strength, to make them focus on answering questions even if they were scared. "Perhaps you know," Erwin said, "that a lot of people in Indonesia still believe in ghosts."[17] Those who did were in for a rather unpleasant surprise. Erwin and his friend, dressed up in white shrouds, were waiting in the shadows to jump out as students approached and howled at them. Designated spooks, they were explicitly tasked with frightening the students. The two of them chuckled. Some students ran

[14] Similarly, Rashīd Riḍā ruled in a 1911 fatwa that, whereas gramophones were permissible for playing Qur'anic recitation, the drums or *bédug* used at Javanese mosques were haram (Halevi 2019, 150–54).

[15] For more on the history of Muhammadiyah schools, see Mu'arif (2012) and Steenbrink (1994).

[16] That said, Muhammadiyah schools and their curriculum cannot be reduced to this purificatory project. See C. Hefner (2019).

[17] Indeed, many Indonesians experience supernatural or at least assume their presence in their everyday lives and are aware of different categories of ghosts, as well as their typical behaviors and customary haunts. The most notorious ghost in graveyards is the shrouded corpse (J. *pocung*) Erwin and his friend were imitating, a corpse whose white shroud has not been untied before his burial. Ghosts have also played an important role in post-New Order cinema, where the genre of the horror movie has served both as entertainment and political idiom. For more on this, see Bubandt (2012) and van Heeren (2012).

away and a couple even started to cry. "I feel bad for them," Ikhsan said, his tone suddenly more somber. "But they are really shaped by this experience." Besides, he said, there was no shame in crying; there was even a team ready to talk to those who did, to show them that the ghost was just a senior student. Much like in an Indonesian horror movie where the spectators are asked, in Mary Steedly's words, "to look, again and again—look more deeply, in shadowy corners... for the dreadful secrets of power" (Steedly 2013, 284), it was likewise demanded of the students to look, so when they encountered the next fake ghost in the cemetery, they already knew that there was nothing to be afraid of. One less Indonesian who still believes in ghosts. One more Indonesian redeemed. Graves, no matter how spooky, have no agency. Only senior students posing as ghosts do.

MEMORY'S DILEMMAS

Ahmad Dahlan's grave, people have told me, has always been very simple. But the Karangkajen cemetery of which it is a part has not always looked as neat and standardized as it does today. As I learned from Muhammadiyah members who were residents of the area, the graveyard used to look a lot more like most others in Java, and it was back in 2003 when the leadership of the mosque adjacent to the cemetery decided to turn the site into what they call a properly Islamic graveyard. An elderly Karangkajen resident whom I will call Pak Jazir, one of the drivers of the initiative at the time, explained to me that according to the Qur'an and the Sunna, it was wrong to have large structures or gravestones built on top of graves. Only a small headstone was allowed. Some people, he remembered, objected, but that was just because they did not understand the relevant rulings. Once those rulings had been explained to them, they agreed. They put an announcement in Yogyakarta's daily newspaper, *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, to inform people that the cemetery of Karangkajen would be renovated according to Islamic law. If people had not come by the end of the month to tidy up the graves of their deceased family members, the people of Karangkajen would do it for them. But most of them came, he said. By making all graves look the same, like the grave of Ahmad Dahlan, they underlined that he is just like anyone else and that graves need to be simple, because money and energy should better be invested in the living than in the dead.

The renovation of the Karangkajen graveyard coincided with a phase of transition for Muhammadiyah that reflected the changing socio-political landscape of Islam in Indonesia. The collapse of Soeharto's New Order in May 1998 resulted in the opportunity for formerly marginalized religious or ideological groups to emerge in the public sphere, propagate their beliefs, and recruit members. In this context, the Indonesian Islamic landscape experienced what some have called a "conservative turn"[18] and the appearance of transnational Islamist groups promoting strict monotheism, the purification of Islam, and the cultivation of a pious subject.[19] These groups, which became Muhammadiyah's new competitors, covered a broad ideological spectrum, ranging from terrorist or vigilante groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah—the group responsible for the 2002 Bali bombings —to political parties, especially Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (or "Prosperous Justice Party," or PKS). The latter turned out to be among Muhammadiyah's most serious rivals. As a political party modeled after the Muslim Brotherhood (Machmudi 2008), PKS has come to occupy a position of at least partial social acceptability by using the democratic

[18] The term of the "conservative turn," coined by Martin van Bruinessen (2013), has been criticized by many scholars, who have shown that alongside these conservative trends, Indonesia has also seen a proliferation of countermovements (R. Hefner 2019; Burhanuddin and van Dijk 2013) and juxtapositions of Islamist with more moderate ideological orientations, especially with the rise of social media authorities (Jones 2021; Slama and Jones 2017).

[19] The rise of Islamic conservatism and radicalism in post-Soeharto Indonesia has been discussed by many, including Arifianto (2019); Hasan (2006, 2018); Menchik (2019); Sidel (2006); Smith-Hefner (2007).

process to advocate for the Islamization of state and government and the implementation of Islamic law.

The party became notorious for infiltrating established organizations, including Muhammadiyah, bringing serious damage and a significant loss of constituents to the organization (Hasan 2012). Several of my interlocutors admitted that it was not that difficult for the radical groups to poach members from Muhammadiyah because they did in fact share a great deal of ideological ground. With their common origins in the reform movements during colonial times, they are similar in their reluctance to accept the traditional institutions through which Islamic knowledge has been transmitted and their focus on reviving Islam through a direct return to Qur'an and Sunna (Euben and Zaman 2009; Moaddel and Talattof 2016). The Central Leadership of Muhammadiyah responded to these recruitment campaigns in 2006 by forbidding PKS infiltration in Muhammadiyah institutions (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah 2006; Munir 2006), but much damage had been done—and many members had already been lost. When PKS even began to compete with Muhammadiyah in the social sector, such as the operation of schools and hospitals, which had always been the traditional backbone of the organization (Fuad 2002), they not only took away opportunities for Muhammadiyah to socialize potential future constituents but also added insult to injury by threatening to outshine Muhammadiyah at what they had always done best.

Many of my more liberal Muhammadiyah interlocutors experienced these pressures from the right as a crisis. They especially resented their own vulnerability to these right-wing groups because, despite whatever similarities there were, they felt that Muhammadiyah was ultimately incompatible with right-wing Islam. They were a moderate organization. Their insistence on being moderate is not surprising: in the post-9/11 world, moderate Islam has become a highly coveted label. Muslims around the world have come under increasing pressure to prove that they are moderates, that they are completely unlike those terrorists that brought down the twin towers. In Indonesia, these pressures mounted after the Bali bombings of 2002 (Smith 2007), when Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs installed a Directorate of Information and Public Diplomacy that was tasked with showcasing Indonesia as the home of "moderate Islam" and to provide proof for the compatibility between Islam and democracy. To better implement this agenda, this directorate enlisted the Islamic mass organizations, especially Muhammadiyah and NU, as partners in their campaign (Hoesterey 2018). In response, and to show that they truly were unlike their new competition, Muhammadiyah's leadership has embarked on the endeavor to strengthen their profile as a moderate organization compatible with democracy and pluralism.

In times of crisis, Karl Marx famously wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, people "anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service" (Marx 1978, 595). His words aptly describe Muhammadiyah's recent trajectory. Faced with a crisis due to Islamist competition, Muhammadiyah discovered that in their own organizational history, they were able to find evidence of their moderate identity. This discovery resulted in a major shift in the organization's engagement with history and its role for their self-understanding. Like many other self-consciously modern groups, Muhammadiyah long harbored strong reservations about reminiscing about the past or about even considering it a source of norms and values.[20] During most of the New Order (1966–1998), historical stories were scarce, except for occasional references to the negative situations that Muhammadiyah had come to remedy. Accounts of moral decay, ignorance, and "the smell of incense and the smoke of opium" (Nakamura 2012, 13) performed a break with the past

[20] As Jürgen Habermas famously wrote, modernity has a specific temporal sense, whereby modern subjects, rather than drawing normativity from the past and tradition, always perform breaks with the past to focus on the ever-changing present (Habermas 1986). See also Meyer (1999).

but said little else about Muhammadiyah's own historical becoming. In the years surrounding the 1998 transition to the Reformation Era, this attitude of disinterest gradually began to be replaced by an openness to, and indeed a push for, increased historical awareness.[21] By remembering what they had been like in the past, they could show that Muhammadiyah had been around since long before the nation's independence, that Muhammadiyah had even been one of the engines that had created a democratic vision of Islam in Indonesia,[22] and that they were therefore completely unlike PKS and other organizations, who had only appeared after 1998 and whose goal was to destroy the Indonesian democracy to introduce an Islamic state.

Crucially, this new interest in history is more than just an elite discourse. The organization's leadership has also adopted a range of initiatives to cultivate this historical awareness among their constituents and to educate them about their organization's historical becoming. These have included the foundation of a historical museum in Yogyakarta, the Muhammadiyah Museum; the conception of Muhammadiyah Heritage Trip, an organization offering educational tourist packages for visitors to Yogyakarta; a series of historical articles in Muhammadiyah's biweekly journal; and even the production of films on historical Muhammadiyah figures by the organization's Committee for Art, Culture, and Sport. In all of these media, they have exegeted their past to the public as an ongoing struggle to promote social empowerment and to fight political oppression, a struggle that aimed not to introduce an Islamic state but to strengthen civil Islam within the Indonesian Republic. "We have realized, much too late," a senior Muhammadiyah member and professor at one of Yogyakarta's universities told me, "that the heritage of Indonesian Islam is under attack." That was why history had become so important: it was to strengthen Muhammadiyah's identity and reinvigorate the consciousness of being a moderate Islamic movement. She added: "If you just look at Muhammadiyah's liberal elite, everything seems to be just fine. But if you look at the umma, there is confusion. We have to bring our heritage back now or it will all be gone." Gone, like the grave of Ki Bagus Hadikusuma.

This shift toward greater historical awareness and pride in Muhammadiyah's heritage also coincided with a parallel trend in the organization of increasing openness toward cultural and material forms of expression for spreading the message of Islam, a practice that had previously been rejected.[23] At a Muhammadiyah Congress in 2003, a committee drafted a program titled *The Cultural Da'wa of Muhammadiyah* that emphasized the permissibility of using art and local customs to convey Islamic teachings, as long as they had been properly purified, rationalized, and demythologized (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah 2016, 39). Although the program was initially controversial, it came to be widely accepted among the liberal segments of the organization, to the point even that prominent spokespersons such as Hilman Latief have called the contemporary era a "Post-Puritanism" that cares more about progress (I. *kemajuan*) than purification (I. *purifikasi*), although the latter continued to be central to the organization's agenda (Latief 2017, 31). He and other scholars such as Mitsuo Nakamura have observed that in Java, since the mid-1990s, alongside the trend of purification, a parallel trend of Javanization has been developing within Muhammadiyah itself (Nakamura 2012, 308). As a result, Muhammadiyah has begun to carefully endorse certain practices that usually have been associated with traditionalism, including the visitation of graves. Among my interlocutors, some welcomed this increased openness toward local culture and tradition. But there were also critics who resisted the idea. The threat of fetishization through superstition and *shirk*, they argued, was still alive and needed to be contained rather than encouraged. At any rate, it was never advisable to engage in rituals that departed from the teachings in the Qur'an and the Sunna.

[21] Among the first to promote this historical awareness was Ahmad Syafii Maarif, Muhammadiyah's chairperson during this transition (1998–2005). For more on his thought, see Maarif (2005, 2018) and Latief (2017, 152).

[22] For some examples of members of the Muhammadiyah leadership advancing this narrative, see Ilham (2021); Nashir (2020).

[23] For a more comprehensive overview of this cultural turn, see Burhani (2016).

For many of my more skeptical interlocutors, as well as for many modernist and fundamentalist Muslims worldwide, graves posed a particularly serious risk of *shirk*. The dead human body constitutes a problem especially for communities who emphasize the finality of death or even deny the possibility of the transcendent (Engelke 2015; Verdery 1999; Vitebsky 2017), because it has the potential to challenge what is understood as the natural order of things separating the rational-scientific or "natural" from superstition. Once it is stripped of life, the body becomes an object without agency; but it also used to be a person whose life is still valued and remembered. This cognitive dissonance can lead to a breaking open of this closed world structure (Engelke 2015, 36). To manage this threat, discourses and practices around the dead body are carefully managed to ensure that they cannot open the door to irrational beliefs or superstition. Although the modernist Muslims in Muhammadiyah do believe in a transcendent reality and life after death, they carefully separate this transcendent reality from the material, phenomenal world of which dead bodies are a part. Modernists often cite a Prophetic tradition in support of their view that the dead are beyond the reach of those who are still alive: "When a man dies, his acts come to an end but three, recurring charity, or knowledge (by which people) benefit, or a pious son, who prays for him and (for the deceased)" (Muslim 1973, 1631). The souls of the dead may exist in another realm; but that realm is completely separate and inaccessible from the world of the living, and vice versa. What remains in this world, the dead bodies, is dead matter without any agency. Yet, dead bodies are powerful, because they harbor all of the dangers of confusing dead matter with agentive subjects. At the Karangkajen graveyard, a site that has been so carefully renovated, this awareness of a dangerous power of the dead is especially tangible. It is not enough to simply repudiate fetishization: it needs to be actively fought to re-actualize purification at all times.

This cautious adoption of memory practices involving material objects like graves has thus not always been smooth. Muhammadiyah members are navigating conflicting agendas and anxieties when working out how to deal with the graves of their famous historical figures when they become destinations of grave visitations (*ziarah*). Many of my interlocutors, especially the younger generation of Muhammadiyah activists who had been brought up in the organization in the years when the historical and cultural turn was already under way, found *ziarah* beneficial. Several had even participated in organized tours to the grave of Ahmad Dahlan through their Muhammadiyah groups. They found that their visit had really made their organization's history come to life for them. One of them referred to his tour as a kind of "ideological charging." They also told me that they had found the cemetery's simplicity inspiring. In Muhammadiyah discourse, simplicity is an essential virtue. A quintessential modern hero, Ahmad Dahlan is held up as an example of living a life of industriousness and frugality, evidence of his worldly asceticism or disciplined body and mind.[24] His grave sets an example of these virtues, of a devotionalism that prioritizes social engagement and personal initiative. But others I spoke with, especially people from the older generation of Muhammadiyah activists who had been socialized into the organization before these shifts, had reservations. They conceded that *ziarah* did not necessarily involve *shirk*, at least as long as the dead were not addressed in prayer—something that traditionalists supposedly do—and the ceremony was kept to a minimum. Still, they often found *ziarah* to be a temptation that could lead to accidental acts of *shirk*, or they simply found it unnecessary. "After all," one of them told me, "you can just pray at home." Graves are places like any other. The dead are gone.

[24] We know this understanding of worldly asceticism from the work of Max Weber, who argued that Protestantism promoted the virtue of hard work as a systematic lifestyle while censuring leisure and enjoyment (Weber 2001).

AMBIGUOUSLY MODERN

If in Latour's work purification is the separation of humans and things, and the relegation of metaphysics from the public sphere to the individual's heart (Latour 2002, 11, 34), it is just such a purification that has been performed in the renovation of the Karangkajen cemetery. The graves are just objects without metaphysical agency. The sterile simplicity of the graveyard makes it uninviting for traditionalist *ziarah*, and the standardization of all graves emphasizes that Ahmad Dahlan, and his grave, are no different from the others. Yet, Latour maintained that purification, one of modernity's most constitutive characteristics, is impossible to completely achieve, because some sort of material mediation is indispensable in any sort of discourse or practice (Latour 2002, 30). A carefully curated simplicity with low stone slabs and identical-looking graves are the material expressions of a detachment from materiality, an emphatic performance of a rejection. Although such paradoxes may point to the inherent limitations of modernist discourse, as Latour suggested, their specific configurations are not just epiphenomenal. They may be doing productive work.[25] Rather than an inherent failure, they may not be so unlike the kind of meaningful ambiguity Bauer and others found to have been so pervasive in premodern Islam and believed to have gotten lost with the emergence of Islamic modernism (Bauer 2021).

As outlined above, after 9/11 and the Bali bombings, successive Indonesian governments responded to the call of Western governments to enlist liberal Muslims in the fight against Islamic terror and become agents of Westernization to construct a global image of Indonesian Islam as inherently democratic and pluralistic. The leadership of Muhammadiyah and NU, as the country's largest Islamic mass organization, were especially targeted by the government as partners in the effort to promote a moderate, democratic Islam. Although both organizations are themselves fragmented into different factions, including conservative and anti-democratic ones (van Bruinessen 2013; Menchik 2019), they both eagerly embraced the opportunity to claim such a politically advantageous moderate identity. For their efforts, they were even nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize (Patria 2019).

Some of my interlocutors in each organization perceived Muhammadiyah and NU to be partners in the struggle for moderate Islam.[26] At the same time, as the two organizations compete for government patronage, positions, and resources, it has sometimes been opportune for them to craft specific understandings of moderate Islam (Hoesterey 2020) and lay claim to the label of Indonesia's true moderate Muslims at the expense of the other. At the time of my field research in 2019, the time of the presidential election when many Muhammadiyah members felt resentment that the incumbent candidate Joko "Jokowi" Widodo had chosen the senior NU cleric Ma'ruf Amin as a running mate, this competition was particularly acute. "It is difficult for us," one disgruntled Muhammadiyah activist complained to me, "because NU members will just vote for whoever their *kyai* tells them to vote for." The *kyai*, teachers and community leaders, have a powerful status in traditionalist communities (Dhofier 1999). Not entirely unreasonably, the activist assumed that they would all vote for Jokowi because of Ma'ruf Amin.[27] Others agreed with him. Muhammadiyah, I was often told, was a lot more democratic than NU. People thought for themselves and did not just do as they were told. Muhammadiyah's purificatory agenda, breaking up such dependencies and hierarchies, had empowered people to become democratic subjects[28] and had therefore lent critical support to the historical becoming and maintenance of the Indonesian Republic.

[25] Other historians and anthropologists of Indonesia have likewise addressed the productive semiotic space generated by tensions at the intersections of modernity, materiality, heritage, capitalism, magic, and religion. See for instance Hegarty (2023); Jones (2010, 2021); Spyer (2000; 2014).

[26] For more on the two organizations' contributions over time to civil Islam in Indonesia, see R. Hefner (2000).

[27] Indeed, when Jokowi won the election in April 2019, it was in part due to the strong support he received from NU members.

[28] Saba Mahmood likewise argued that this reasoning, and the exclusion of traditionalism from the fold of moderate Islam, has been part of a global discursive formation that emerged after 9/11 (Mahmood 2006).

When I asked my Muhammadiyah interlocutors what being moderate meant for them, they often explained to me that it meant "Not too far to the left and not too far to the right." An Islam that is moderate is an Islam that does not veer far from the middle. This particular image and branding of Muhammadiyah as being in the middle was popularized by Ahmad Syafii Maarif (1935–2022), Muhammadiyah's erstwhile chairperson (1998–2005) whom we encountered earlier as one of the voices in the organization responsible for the historical turn in the early 2000s. During my field research before his death in 2022, he could often be found in his office at the headquarters of Muhammadiyah's biweekly journal, *Suara Muhammadiyah.* He had long retired but still had an advisory function at the journal. On one occasion, when I talked to him at his office, he explained to me that moderate Islam is mandated by the Qur'an: "We have made you [believers] into a just community," or in Arabic, into an "*ummatan wasaṭan*," more literally a "middle community," "so that you may bear witness [to the truth] before others and so that the Messenger may bear witness [to it] before you."[29] If Islam becomes too extreme, it will decay. This had happened in the Middle East.[30] In Indonesia things were better; moderate Islam was still strong. Although Syafii Maarif explicitly named both Muhammadiyah and NU as partners in the struggle for moderate Islam, the image of the middle community to situate themselves ideologically proved productive even for those who disagreed with him regarding NU's status. By claiming a position in the middle, Muhammadiyah has to rely discursively on negative extremes that are all equally wrong to walk this middle path that Syafii Maarif was promoting. The tensions around Ahmad Dahlan's grave open up a semiotic space that makes it possible to stride such a middle path.

When Muhammadiyah activists today talk about Ahmad Dahlan's grave and the beginnings of its commemoration, they often emphasize that after his death in 1923, his grave was forgotten, and no one knew where it was until decades later. I was told the story of the grave's rediscovery by Pak Syukrianto, a Muhammadiyah activist and filmmaker who, in turn, had heard it years ago from his grandfather and erstwhile general chairperson of Muhammadiyah, A. R. Fakhruddin,[31] who had been involved in its rediscovery. In 1955, Indonesia hosted the Asia-Africa conference and welcomed representatives from twenty-nine countries, including Islamic scholars from North Africa. Those ulama, Pak Syukrianto explained, were amazed when they saw the schools, hospitals, and universities that had been built by Muhammadiyah. They wanted to know where the founder was buried to visit his grave and pay their respects. But, Pak Syukrianto said, it turned out that no one knew where Ahmad Dahlan was buried. The Indonesian government asked Muhammadiyah for help. Someone who had attended the funeral in 1923 was found, and he identified the spot. The grave had not been taken care of for decades and had to be made somewhat presentable. Finally the African ulama were invited to come. Apparently it had not been made presentable enough, because upon arriving at the cemetery, the guests were appalled: Why, they asked, is his grave so modest? Don't you respect your founder? Yes, we do, Pak Syukrianto explained to me. But Ahmad Dahlan himself would not have wanted a fancy grave. He would have said, if you have money, build schools or hospitals, not graves.

And for some, even the simple grave and the sign put up by the Indonesian government to mark the final resting place of a national hero is too much. Stories of the sign disappearing have

[29] Q 2:143 (Abdul Haleem 2010). The deployment of this verse to conceptualize moderate Islam is quite common in contemporary Islamic discourse. For other examples, see Afsaruddin (2009); Burhani (2012).

[30] See also Maarif (2019), where he expressed very similar views as in my interview with him but framed Islam's moderate position as a middle way between Judaism, which was secular and materialistic, and Christianity, which was spiritualistic. Assuming a middle position, it seems, is a good in itself.

[31] A. R. Fakhruddin (d. 1995), a Yogyakarta native, headed Muhammadiyah from 1971 to 1985.

wide currency in Yogyakarta Muhammadiyah circles. No one really knows who did it, or when, or how often; but this mysterious theft is the topic of lively speculation. Many of my interlocutors were sympathetic to the unknown thief: "In Muhammadiyah we don't like such signs," a young teacher told me, echoing a common sentiment. He mused that such a message could send a wrong sign, marking the location as though it was special. According to the Qur'an and the Sunna, such a sign was unnecessary, and indeed it was better if there was no such sign at all. But then a new sign is put up, and it does not seem that anybody seriously objects to that either.

At first glance, Muhammadiyah's two fundamental impulses, purification and commemoration, are in tension, if not fundamental opposition. But we see that they also depend on each other as different Muhammadiyah activists work out what it means for them to memorialize without fetishizing their past, a balancing act that is simultaneously folded into this construction of their organization's identity as moderate or in the middle. It is because people from their own midst contest the significance of their founder's grave by carefully curating its not-specialness and removing the grave marker that Muhammadiyah paradoxically derives the permission and legitimacy to keep the memory around the grave alive. In Islamic societies, visiting graves, Engseng Ho wrote, "is a common legal and ritual site," where "standard accusations and standard rebuttals" are deployed to construct boundaries between traditionalists (who visit graves) and fundamentalists (who reject and even destroy them) (Ho 2006, 10–11). In these scripted exchanges, Muhammadiyah's path, which avoids association or identification with either side, is much less well discursively charted. As they map out their own distinct positionalities between those two extremes and their well-established discourses, we see no coherent narrative but a strategy where rebuttals of two undesired options, idolatry and forgetting, seemingly work against each other, giving rise to tensions that are productive and, as a whole, facilitate the construction of Muhammadiyah's identity.

CONCLUSION

One final story around the rediscovery of the grave. According to some, it is uncertain whether the marked spot truly corresponds to the location where Dahlan was buried about a century ago. Pak Jazir, the Karangkajen resident who had overseen the cemetery's renovation, told me that many years ago, in his youth, he was standing at Ahmad Dahlan's grave behind a group of Muhammadiyah's most senior members, overhearing their conversation. One of them, as Pak Jazir recalled, pointed to the grave and asked, "Is it true that this is where he was buried?" And one of the others responded, "If you were to ask me, I would say that he is buried in that corner," pointing one way, "and if you were to ask one of the others, he would say that he was buried over there," pointing to a different corner. Neither of the two indicated spots corresponded to the place where the grave is marked today. Why, he asked, would the most senior members of Muhammadiyah say that they do not know where the grave is? In his opinion, it was because they did not want his grave to be venerated, which would amount to *shirk*. "When people come to do *ziarah*, they actually go to the wrong spot." He grinned, obviously quite amused at the thought.

Those familiar with Islamic discourse in contemporary Indonesia will recognize in Pak Jazir's amusement a common strategy of dealing with profound anxieties through humor (Hoesterey 2021). The image of people praying at the wrong spot suggests the hilarious absurdity of those praying at graves. Yet, this potential absurdity no longer deters people from coming. Ahmad Dahlan's grave is visited, yet it is a place like any other because graves have no special power associated with them. As extra insurance against unwitting sin, his body may not even be in his grave. Pak Jazir and others make use of the paradoxical tension between the two conflicting values of keeping the memory alive and avoiding fetishism in order to position the organization

in a middle or moderate position where either excess is avoided. The visits of Muhammadiyah groups or individual members to Ahmad Dahlan's grave are safe in an environment where purification has been accomplished and continues to be staged through a carefully crafted image of not attributing special significance to it. Here, memory is possible because it cannot be mistaken for the kind of thing that is done by traditionalists, something that is supposedly conducive to TBC and *shirk*.

If premodern Muslims were able to make use of ambiguity and paradox as a vehicle for meaningful communication to articulate insights about God and the world, and themselves in it, the epistemic ruptures that were precipitated by modernity and colonialism—albeit immense—did not obliterate Muslims' tolerance for paradox, as Bauer has claimed (Bauer 2021). Contemporary Muslims in Indonesia and beyond navigate the conflicting demands of a fragmented world in which it is impossible to achieve all ideals simultaneously—but their failure to do so opens up possibilities for articulating complex ideals and positionalities. What may be unique to Indonesia is the extent to which these ambiguous positionings have become a matter of institutional and political concern, with the result that the tensions among them are especially visible as an object of inquiry. The conflicting anxieties and desires around Ahmad Dahlan's grave mark a productive semiotic space where Muhammadiyah modernists are able to make use of the paradoxical tension between the two conflicting values of keeping the memory alive and avoiding TBC and shirk. The grave is indeed a place like any other, and you could in fact just pray at home. Making clear that what happens at the grave could happen anywhere is essential to authorizing doing something exceptional in this place, connecting their piety to a particular local and national history. What might be seen as two opposing factions of the organization working against each other could in fact be a successful performance of the mutual dependence of these two impulses as different currents within the organization position themselves vis-à-vis the other. Performances and memories of doubt, disagreement, and disinterest afford the privilege for Muhammadiyah to remember, and in doing so, to distinguish themselves from both fundamentalists and traditionalists by pushing back against totalizing tendencies of purification while at the same time paradoxically depending on and reproducing them.

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