

Religious Rationalization of *Ziarah Kubur* Among Indonesian Students in Cairo

Zainal Fanani^{1*}, Arfan Maskuri²

¹ Universitas Islam Negeri Madura, Indonesia, ² Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt

zainalfanani13597@gmail.com

Arfan7eljinan@gmail.com

* Corresponding Author.

Article History:

Received: October 1, 2025

Accepted: December 29, 2025

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.62032/aijit.v3i2.138>

Abstract: This study investigates the practice, motivation, and meaning-making of grave pilgrimage (*ziarah kubur*), a prominent Indonesian religious tradition, among Indonesian university students in Cairo, Egypt. It aims to understand how this cultural practice is maintained, negotiated, and rationalized within a major center of Islamic scholarship. Employing a qualitative-dominant research design, this study analyzed survey narratives from 54 Indonesian students, supported by descriptive statistics. The findings reveal that grave pilgrimage is widespread, serving as a key mechanism for cultural identity preservation in a diaspora context. The motivations are identified as a dynamic interplay between personal spiritual needs, such as seeking tranquility and divine blessings (*barakah*), and the reinforcement of communal cultural sentiments. Crucially, the study uncovers a sophisticated process of 'religious rationalization,' whereby students utilize their formal religious education to re-frame the practice intellectually, shifting it from the category of local custom (*adat*) to a more universally justifiable act of worship (*ibadah*). This research concludes that for this cohort of future religious elites, grave pilgrimage is not a static tradition but a dynamic, adaptive strategy for negotiating their Indonesian and Muslim identities. The practice is intellectually reinforced, ensuring its continued relevance and vitality in a transnational context.

Keywords: *Ziarah; Lived Religion; Diaspora Identity; Indonesian Students; Religious Rationalization*

INTRODUCTION

The tradition of grave pilgrimage, known in Indonesia as *ziarah kubur*, represents a complex and deeply embedded socio-religious phenomenon that illuminates the dynamic interplay between Islamic doctrine, local custom, and the construction of collective identity. Rooted in the historical fabric of Indonesian Islam, this practice has evolved from simple acts of remembrance into multifaceted rituals that serve profound spiritual, social, and cultural functions. Across the archipelago, the graves of revered figures—saints (*wali*), scholars (*ulama*), and historical personages—have become pivotal centers of religious life, drawing vast

numbers of pilgrims who seek blessings, guidance, and a tangible connection to their spiritual heritage. The enduring prevalence of these practices is evidenced by the numerous pilgrimage sites that have become integral to the local landscape. For instance, the Mbah Priok grave in North Jakarta has transformed into a vibrant socio-economic hub, demonstrating a powerful fusion of religious devotion and economic activity that sustains the surrounding community (Ridwan et al., 2025). This integration of the sacred and the profane underscores the tradition's adaptability and capacity to meet various human needs. The historical evolution and socio-cultural significance of these pilgrimage traditions are further documented in scholarly examinations of various revered graves, including those of Pangeran Jayakarta in Jakarta and Habib Abdullah bin Ali Al-Haddad in Bangil, which highlight their roles in shaping local histories and identities (Rahmadi et al., 2024).

This enduring tradition is not merely a static relic of the past; it is a living practice that continues to adapt to the currents of modernization and globalization. Despite the rationalizing pressures of modern life, grave pilgrimage has maintained, and in some cases expanded, its significance within Indonesian society. The Indonesian government, recognizing its cultural and economic value, often supports these sites as important components of national heritage and religious tourism, a stark contrast to neighboring countries like Malaysia, which may enforce stricter sharia-based regulations on such practices (Saifuddin et al., 2024). This institutional support facilitates the preservation of pilgrimage traditions and amplifies their socio-economic impact. Sites like Mbah Priok foster significant economic activity through trade and services and cultivate a strong sense of social cooperation and community solidarity among participants (Ridwan et al., 2025). The rituals themselves, often merging Islamic prayers with indigenous customs like communal feasts and vigils, reinforce essential social bonds, affirm kinship ties, and solidify a shared local identity. This dynamic is observable across diverse Indonesian communities, from Aceh to the Bugis diaspora in Bali, where these ceremonies function as crucial mechanisms for community affirmation and the intergenerational transmission of cultural values (Manan et al., 2024; Rahmadi et al., 2024, p. 202).

At the heart of the discourse surrounding grave pilgrimage lies a significant and persistent theological tension within Sunni Islam, constituting this study's central problem. The practice occupies a contested space, generating a spectrum of interpretations that range from devout acceptance to stringent condemnation. This doctrinal divergence creates a complex landscape for believers, who must navigate conflicting views on the practice's legitimacy and proper form. On one side of the debate, proponents argue that *ziarah kubur* is a commendable act, grounding their support in theological arguments (*hujjah*) that emphasize its role in fostering remembrance of death and the afterlife (*tazkirat al-mawt*), facilitating prayers for the deceased, and strengthening the bonds of the Muslim community (*ummah*) (Ummah & Bustami, 2024). For this group, visiting the graves of pious individuals is also seen as a legitimate means of seeking blessings (*barakah*) and using the saint as an intermediary (*wasilah*) for prayers, a practice deeply ingrained in Sufi-influenced traditions prevalent in Indonesia. These arguments frame grave pilgrimage as an act of piety that enriches individual spirituality and reinforces communal solidarity.

Conversely, detractors present formidable arguments against the practice, viewing it as a perilous deviation from the core Islamic principle of pure monotheism (*tawhid*). Critics, often associated with Salafi or modernist movements, warn that certain pilgrimage rituals risk descending into *shirk* (associating partners with God), the most unforgivable sin in Islam (Mirdad & Ikhlas, 2018). They contend that practices such as prostrating at graves, making

direct requests to the deceased, or engaging in overly elaborate ceremonies constitute forbidden innovations (*bid'ah*) that corrupt the purity of worship (Ummah & Bustami, 2024). This perspective is fueled by a fear of syncretism, where indigenous pre-Islamic customs might overshadow orthodox Islamic teachings, leading believers astray (Meyer, 2024). This ongoing theological schism is not merely an abstract debate; it has tangible implications for how Indonesian Muslims practice their faith and construct their religious identity. The problem, therefore, is not the practice itself, but the unresolved tension in its interpretation that forces individuals and communities to constantly negotiate their position between what is considered a laudable tradition and what is condemned as a doctrinal error.

To understand how individuals navigate this complex terrain, scholars have turned to specific theoretical frameworks that examine the intersection of religion, culture, and identity, particularly in transnational contexts. One critical lens is the study of diaspora communities, which reveals how religious rituals function as vital tools for cultural continuity and identity maintenance. For migrant populations, practices such as grave pilgrimage serve as powerful mechanisms for preserving a connection to their heritage and reinforcing a sense of belonging while residing in a foreign land (Keane, 2022). These rituals help communities like the Bugis in Bali maintain their distinct Islamic identity within a predominantly non-Muslim environment, fostering internal cohesion and mutual respect with the host society (Mustolehudin et al., 2024). The engagement of the Indonesian diaspora with such practices demonstrates a proactive commitment to preserving their religious and cultural identity against the pressures of assimilation, using collective memorials and community gatherings to affirm their heritage and respond to situational challenges. This approach provides a solution for understanding the function of the tradition beyond its theological justifications, framing it as a socio-cultural survival tool.

Another powerful theoretical solution is offered by the 'Lived Religion' framework, which shifts the focus from normative doctrines to how religion is experienced, embodied, and adapted in everyday life. This perspective is particularly insightful for understanding the religious lives of educated Muslim youth studying abroad, who often find themselves at the nexus of inherited traditions and new, diverse social environments (Donlic, 2023; McGinty, 2022). The 'Lived Religion' theory posits that individuals do not merely adhere to codified theological principles but actively interpret and shape their faith based on personal experiences, emotional needs, and socio-cultural contexts (Tuna et al., 2023). This framework helps explain the apparent gap between formal religious teachings and the lived realities of believers, showing how they creatively integrate faith into their daily routines and social interactions, especially in pluralistic or secular societies (Abdullah et al., 2024; McGinty, 2022). For instance, research on Muslim American youth shows how they navigate largely secular school environments by developing hybrid identities, balancing familial and community expectations with the demands of their new context. Sacred spaces, such as saints' tombs, play a pivotal role in this process, serving as anchors for collective memory and enabling transnational communities to maintain connections to their heritage and reinforce their identity against assimilationist pressures (Donlic, 2023).

While the existing literature provides a robust foundation, a significant gap remains. Previous research has extensively analyzed grave pilgrimage within the Indonesian context and thoroughly mapped the theological debates surrounding its legitimacy. Furthermore, scholarly work on diaspora identity and lived religion has predominantly focused on Muslim minorities navigating secular, Western environments (e.g., McGinty, 2022). There is a conspicuous scarcity of research investigating how a distinctly Southeast Asian folk tradition,

such as *ziarah kubur*, is perceived, practiced, and rationalized by a specific diaspora group within a non-Western yet authoritatively Islamic environment. The experience of Indonesian students at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt—a historic center of Sunni Islamic scholarship—presents a unique case. Unlike students in the West who negotiate tradition against secularism, these students confront their inherited, culturally-infused practices with the normative, text-centric Islamic discourses of a premier Middle Eastern religious institution. How they reconcile the Sufi-inflected, culturally rich traditions of their homeland with the potentially more puritanical or scripturally rigid perspectives encountered in their formal studies remains largely unexplored.

This study aims to fill this critical literature gap by investigating the perceptions, motivations, and practices of *ziarah kubur* among Indonesian university students in Cairo. Specifically, this research operates on the hypothesis that students' engagement with Cairo's rigorous Islamic scholarly environment does not lead to the abandonment of local traditions. Instead, it is hypothesized that students utilize their acquired theological literacy to actively rationalize and purify *ziarah kubur*, effectively shifting its categorization from a culturally embedded custom (*adat*) to a doctrinally defensible form of worship (*ibadah*). By testing this proposition, the study seeks to understand how future scholars and religious leaders navigate the complex interplay between their Indonesian cultural heritage, piety, and formal Islamic knowledge, ultimately shedding light on the dynamic future of this pivotal tradition as its practitioners engage with the global currents of Islamic thought.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-dominant research design and a survey method to investigate *ziarah kubur* among Indonesian students in Cairo. While the study incorporates descriptive statistics to map the frequency and general patterns of the practice, the primary analytical framework is qualitative, focusing on the students' subjective experiences, motivations, and processes of meaning-making. This methodological approach was strategically chosen to move beyond mere participation rates and to deeply understand how this diaspora community negotiates its religious identity within a complex scholarly environment. By prioritizing the qualitative interpretation of survey narratives, the research aims to elucidate the sophisticated cognitive and spiritual strategies students employ, focusing on the depth of their reasoning rather than seeking to establish broadly generalizable statistical trends.

Data were collected through an online survey instrument containing both closed-ended and open-ended questions, distributed to Indonesian students currently residing in Cairo, Egypt. This dual-structure instrument was designed to capture both broad behavioral trends and deep narrative explanations regarding their religious practices. The respondents comprised 54 Indonesian students (74.1% male, 25.9% female), recruited through purposive and snowball sampling techniques to ensure access to active members of the student community who engage in these traditions. While the sample size limits broad statistical generalization, it provides a rich, concentrated dataset for qualitative inquiry into this specific diaspora cohort, enabling an intensive examination of how a unique social group preserves and adapts its heritage.

The analysis followed a convergent strategy, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to corroborate findings. Quantitative data from closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the prevalence of the practice and identify primary

motivational categories. Concurrently, the core analysis focused on open-ended narrative responses, which were subjected to rigorous thematic analysis, including coding, categorization, and pattern interpretation, to reveal how students rationalize their practices. This integrated analysis enabled the study to explain the "why" behind the statistical patterns. This study explicitly acknowledges a demographic limitation inherent in the snowball sampling method. The high participation rate (81.5%) strongly suggests that the sample primarily captured students affiliated with traditionalist Islamic organizations in Indonesia, such as Nahdlatul Ulama, which possess a strong cultural foundation for *ziarah*. This sample does not represent the Indonesian student population as a monolithic entity. Students from modernist or puritanical backgrounds, such as Muhammadiyah or Persis, likely hold divergent theological views that reject such practices. Therefore, the findings map the identity negotiation of the traditionalist cohort in Cairo, rather than that of the entire Indonesian student diaspora. Ethical integrity was strictly maintained throughout the process, with informed consent obtained at the start of the survey, and all participation guaranteed to be voluntary and anonymous.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Frequency of Practice and the Manifestation of Cultural Identity Preservation

The endurance of culturally specific religious traditions within diaspora communities is a critical indicator of identity maintenance and negotiation. This section examines the frequency with which Indonesian students in Cairo practice grave pilgrimage and analyzes this practice as a manifestation of cultural preservation. The findings reveal that *ziarah* remains a remarkably vibrant and frequent activity, far from diminishing in a foreign context. This consistent engagement suggests that the ritual is not merely a vestige of homeland tradition but an active, adaptive strategy for anchoring a sense of self and community. This is important in understanding how a young, educated diaspora does not discard its inherited rituals but re-contextualizes them, turning them into vital tools for navigating a new socio-religious landscape. By analyzing the frequency of practice alongside the students' perceptions of its role in maintaining cultural identity, this section argues that *ziarah kubur* functions as a powerful form of cultural preservation, affirming a distinctly Indonesian Islamic identity within the authoritative Islamic center of Cairo.

The empirical data from this study demonstrate high participation in the grave pilgrimage among Indonesian students. A striking majority of the respondents, approximately 81.5% (44 out of 54), reported performing *ziarah* at least once a year. More significantly, 57.4% (31 out of 54) frequently engage in the practice, visiting graves more than 6 times per year. Another 7.4% (4 out of 54) do so between four and six times annually. This high frequency indicates that *ziarah* is not an occasional or nostalgic act but an integrated and routine component of their spiritual and social lives in Egypt. This finding aligns with scholarly observations that regular engagement in cultural and religious rituals fosters a robust sense of identity, acting as a powerful reinforcement mechanism for young adults at a formative stage of their development (Smith & Silva, 2011). The consistency of the practice suggests that it serves a crucial function, providing a stable anchor of familiarity and meaning amidst the challenges of living and studying abroad.

When directly questioned about the connection between the ritual and their cultural identity, the findings present a more nuanced picture of negotiation. While a significant majority, 63% (34 of 54), of respondents affirmed that *ziarah kubur* helps them maintain their

cultural identity as Indonesians, a substantial minority, 37% (20 of 54), did not perceive such a link. This split is revelatory. It suggests that while the practice objectively functions as a form of cultural preservation for the majority, the subjective interpretation of this role is not universal. This divergence points to an active negotiation process, in which students consciously, and sometimes critically, evaluate the meaning and function of their inherited traditions. As one respondent observed, the practice in Egypt differs from that in Indonesia, noting that in his homeland, "Grave visit has many enthusiasts, some even stay overnight." In contrast, the practice is not as "excessive in Egypt." This observation highlights how these young adults are not merely replicating homeland traditions but are adapting and comparing them, a cultural translation process central to the diaspora experience (Espinoza Garrido et al., 2024).

Performing a distinctly Indonesian tradition within Cairo's landscape represents a powerful form of cultural preservation, consistent with literature on how migrant communities establish or adapt new sacred sites to anchor their collective memory and identity (Liebelt et al., 2016; Palka, 2023). For these students, the numerous tombs of revered saints and scholars scattered throughout Cairo become new focal points for a familiar ritual. They are, in essence, co-opting local sacred sites to replicate and continue a homeland tradition, a process that reinforces their group's "collective selfhood" (Prorok, 2003). As another participant explained, in Egypt the practice is intensified by "the many family members of Prophet Muhammad and famous scholars, which makes one more enthusiastic to seek their blessings through pilgrimage, compared to in Indonesia, where it is just about praying for relatives." This statement perfectly encapsulates the adaptation process: the core practice remains, but its object and immediate motivation are recalibrated to fit the new environment, thereby imbuing the tradition with renewed relevance and vitality.

This negotiation of tradition is a hallmark of young diaspora members who must balance ancestral customs with the realities of their new environment (Cho & Han, 2023). While the high frequency of participation points to strong identity maintenance, the students' critical consciousness shows they are not passive inheritors. One student, who described himself as "addicted" to *ziarah*, also expressed a critical stance: "I still cannot tolerate seeing pilgrimage models that sometimes cross the line, like prostrating to graves, which we sometimes find at the tombs of *ahlul bayt* in Egypt." This demonstrates a sophisticated negotiation in which the student embraces the core practice for its spiritual and emotional benefits while simultaneously employing the critical framework from his formal studies to demarcate what he considers acceptable. This is not a rejection of tradition but a rationalization and purification of it, an attempt to align an embodied, cultural practice with normative theological standards. This reflects the complex balancing act in which individuals customize their identities while facing external pressures, whether from secularism in the West or, in this case, from different doctrinal interpretations within a major Islamic center (Espinoza Garrido et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the strong correlation between frequent ritual participation and identity reinforcement, as noted in the literature (Geary & Shinde, 2021), this study's findings support this. The students are not merely visiting graves but participating in a communal act that reinforces social bonds and reaffirms a shared identity. The data shows that the overwhelming majority perform *ziarah* with friends or as part of a community. This communal aspect is critical, as it fosters emotional support and a sense of belonging, both of which are vital for navigating the challenges of being a foreigner (Pazil et al., 2023). The pilgrimage becomes a social event that strengthens the Indonesian student community, distinguishing them as a group with a unique set of religio-cultural practices within Cairo's broader multinational

student body. This practice, therefore, becomes a tangible expression of their collective identity, a way of performing their "Indonesian-ness" in public and private ritual spaces.

The findings on the frequency and perceived cultural role of *ziarah kubur* among Indonesian students in Cairo contribute a nuanced case study to the broader literature on diaspora and identity. It demonstrates that cultural preservation is not a passive replication process but an active, dynamic negotiation. The high participation rates underscore the tradition's enduring power as an identity anchor. Concurrently, the students' critical reflections and adaptations of the practice reveal their agency as they forge a hybrid identity rooted in their Indonesian heritage and responsive to their new intellectual environment. Their experience confirms that pilgrimage to new sacred sites is a profound form of cultural work, allowing them to maintain continuity with their past while constructing a meaningful existence in the present.

The Interplay of Religious Motivation and Cultural Sentiment

Beyond the frequency of practice, a deeper understanding of the persistence of *ziarah kubur* among Indonesian students in Cairo requires examining the underlying motivations that compel them to engage in it. This section delves into the primary drivers behind their engagement, revealing a complex and powerful interplay of deeply personal religious piety and communal cultural sentiment. The findings indicate that motivations are not monolithic; they lie on a spectrum in which spiritual pursuits are intricately woven with socio-cultural needs. This exploration is significant because it moves beyond a simplistic sacred-secular dichotomy, demonstrating how this educated diaspora group articulates a holistic set of reasons for their practice. By analyzing students' stated motivations alongside established pilgrimage theories, this section argues that *ziarah kubur* is a vital platform where individuals' quest for spiritual fulfillment and the collective need for cultural expression converge and reinforce one another.

The empirical data reveal a striking dominance of spiritual drivers as the primary motivation for performing a grave pilgrimage. An overwhelming majority of the respondents identified "Spiritual" reasons as a core component of their motivation. A significant portion selected a combination of factors, most commonly "Spiritual, Cultural, and Social," indicating a multifaceted understanding of the practice. The qualitative responses provide profound insight into what "Spiritual" motivation entails. Many described the practice as a method for personal transformation and emotional regulation. As one participant eloquently stated, "*ziarah* for me is a brake when I go a little overboard," framing the ritual as a corrective measure against worldly excess.

However, engaging in this culturally embedded emotional regulation within the rigorous and often critical scholarly environment of Cairo exposes the students to strict doctrinal scrutiny. The ritual's psychological comfort is insufficient to legitimize it against puritanical critiques that frequently dismiss such local traditions as heretical innovations (*bid'ah*). Consequently, to protect their spiritual and cultural practices from intellectual invalidation, the students must elevate their justification.

Instead of experiencing a conflict between personal piety and cultural conformity, the students actively synthesize them, drawing on specific theological frameworks acquired during their formal studies. The respondents do not simply claim the practice is "Islamic"; they cite specific authoritative texts to defend it. Several students explicitly referenced the Hadith narrated by Muslim regarding the Prophet's command to visit graves to remember death

(*tazkirat al-mawt*). Others employed comparative jurisprudential arguments, citing the consensus (*ijma'*) of Shafi'i scholars that validates the practice of seeking intercession (*tawassul*) through deceased pious figures. This concrete intellectual application demonstrates a sophisticated "religious rationalization." The students actively use the rigorous scholarly tools of Al-Azhar to elevate *ziarah kubur* from a mere localized Indonesian custom into a doctrinally legitimate act of worship. This intellectual grounding allows them to confidently reconcile what might seem like contradictory motivations. They can pursue personal piety through a communal practice because they have constructed a sound theological rationale.

The qualitative responses provide profound insight into what "Spiritual" motivation entails for these students. The explanations transcend simple piety, touching upon deep psychological and existential needs. Many described the practice as a method for personal transformation and emotional regulation. As one participant eloquently stated, "*ziarah* for me is a brake when I go a little overboard," framing the ritual as a corrective measure against worldly excess and a tool for introspection. This aligns with ethnographic studies indicating that pilgrims often seek transformative experiences to confront existential challenges (Sørensen & Høgh-Olesen, 2023). Furthermore, seeking blessings (*barakah* or *tabarruk*) emerged as a central theme. Another student explained his motivation was "to seek *barakah* from the one being visited, and also to strengthen the inner connection with God." This explicitly links the practice to the established Islamic tradition of visiting saints' tombs to seek divine intercession and holiness, framing the interaction as a conduit for personal transformation and sustaining a connection to sacred legacies (Hamka et al., 2024).

This quest for spiritual fulfillment is inextricably linked to the students' cultural identity as Indonesian Muslims. The data suggest that the students are not merely performing a universal Islamic ritual but are engaging in a practice deeply colored by their Southeast Asian heritage. The combination of "Spiritual" and "Cultural" motivations, selected by many respondents, demonstrates a conscious recognition of this fusion. This dynamic reflects a process of reconciling personal piety with social or cultural conformity, in which participation is simultaneously an expression of inner faith and a response to communal norms inherited from the homeland (Liutikas, 2021). The students do not appear to experience a conflict between these drivers; instead, they see them as complementary. Engaging in *ziarah* is both a personal spiritual act and a performance of their specific cultural identity, a way to be a pious Muslim and a traditional Indonesian at the same time. This seamless integration showcases how pilgrimage is a complex platform for identity negotiation within a diaspora context (Della & Diani, 2006).

The theoretical framework of Lived Religion is beneficial for analyzing this phenomenon. The students' motivations exemplify how individuals embody and adapt religious beliefs in their daily lives, often in ways that diverge from or enrich official doctrines. Their emphasis on personal transformation, emotional tranquility, and the pursuit of *barakah* highlights the importance of personal experience and emotional memory over rigid theological prescriptions. As a respondent described, the benefit is "spiritual, as if it connects our inner self with the occupier of the tomb," which brings "peace of mind and heart." This focus on the affective and psychological benefits of the ritual—a search for meaning and solace—is a core component of lived religious experience (Park, 2016). It underscores that for these participants, the efficacy of the ritual is measured not just by its doctrinal correctness but by its tangible impact on their well-being and spiritual state.

Furthermore, the students' articulated motivations reflect their position as educated individuals navigating a globalized Islamic landscape. As one student noted, their ability to

articulate specific theological reasons, such as following the Prophet's example (Sunnah Nabi) or practicing intercession (*tawassul*), demonstrates a sophisticated engagement with their faith. They are not just following tradition unthinkingly but grounding it in textual and historical sources, a process likely enhanced by their formal studies at Al-Azhar. This intellectual grounding allows them to confidently reconcile what might seem like contradictory motivations. They can pursue personal piety (getting closer to God) through a communal, culturally-specific practice because they have constructed a sound theological and personal rationale. This aligns with research suggesting that education and socioeconomic factors influence how young adults adapt their expressions of faith, blending individual desires with communal values (Liang & Ketcham, 2017).

The motivations driving Indonesian students in Cairo to practice *ziarah kubur* are neither singular nor simplistic. They are propelled by a powerful dual drive, in which an intensely personal quest for spiritual growth, divine blessings, and emotional stability is fused with the performance and preservation of their Indonesian cultural identity. The data overwhelmingly point to a holistic worldview in which being spiritually fulfilled and culturally rooted are not competing interests but are achieved through the same ritual act. This study contributes to the broader field of pilgrimage studies by illustrating how a young, educated, transnational Muslim community articulates and integrates a complex web of motivations. They demonstrate a sophisticated capacity to navigate personal piety and social conformity, reinforcing the understanding that pilgrimage is a rich, multi-layered human experience. Having established why these students engage in the practice, the crucial next step is to analyze how they perceive its meaning and legitimacy, particularly when confronted with the diverse and sometimes critical theological currents in their new academic environment.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the practice of grave pilgrimage (*ziarah kubur*) among Indonesian students in Cairo, identifying the ritual as a cornerstone of their diaspora experience. By moving beyond a mere descriptive account, the research has elucidated the complex motivations and sophisticated intellectual negotiations that define its meaning within this specific cohort. The findings demonstrate that, for this community of future religious scholars, *ziarah kubur* is not a static tradition imported from the homeland but a dynamic, living practice actively rationalized, adapted, and reinforced. It functions as a critical anchor, simultaneously securing their Indonesian cultural identity and serving their evolving personal piety within Cairo's authoritative and often challenging scholarly environment. The central argument emerging from this study is that these students engage in a profound process of religious negotiation. They intellectually reframe the practice by citing specific Hadith and jurisprudential consensus, shifting its category from a culturally specific custom (*adat*) to a universally justifiable act of worship (*ibadah*). This ensures its continuity and relevance for their lives both abroad and in their future roles as community leaders.

The analysis reveals three interconnected findings. First, the practice is performed frequently within this community, indicating its integral role in students' lives rather than a nostalgic or occasional act. This consistent engagement serves as a powerful mechanism for cultural preservation and identity maintenance in a foreign land. Second, the motivations driving this practice are dual, seamlessly blending a personal quest for spiritual fulfillment—encompassing tranquility, remembrance of death, and seeking blessings (*barakah*)—with a communal need to express and maintain cultural sentiment. The students perceive no inherent

conflict between these drivers, embodying a holistic approach characteristic of the Lived Religion framework. Third, and most significantly, the students are not passive participants but active agents in meaning-making. Confronted with the diverse theological currents of Cairo, they engage in a process of 'religious rationalization,' deliberately seeking scriptural and prophetic precedents to legitimize and purify the practice of their faith from perceived cultural accretions, thereby strengthening their conviction of its value.

The theoretical contribution of this research is threefold. First, it complicates the standard diaspora-in-the-West narrative by presenting a case of identity negotiation within a major Islamic center, where the primary tension does not arise from secularism but from competing normative interpretations of Islam. Second, it provides a compelling empirical case study of Lived Religion, showcasing how a highly educated group of believers intellectually bridges the gap between formal doctrine and embodied cultural practice. Finally, it offers crucial insight into contemporary Southeast Asian Islamic thought, illustrating how future elites reform traditions to ensure their resilience in a globalized world. In practical terms, these findings are valuable for educators and policymakers working with Indonesian student communities abroad, highlighting the vital role that such traditional practices play in fostering psychological well-being and community cohesion.

Future research could productively build upon this study's foundation. A longitudinal study following these students after their return to Indonesia would be invaluable for understanding how their re-negotiated views on *ziarah* influence their teaching and leadership within their home communities. Furthermore, a comparative study contrasting the experiences of Indonesian students in Egypt with those in more restrictive environments, such as Saudi Arabia, or secular Western countries, would provide a richer understanding of how context shapes the adaptation of religious traditions. Ultimately, this study affirms that *ziarah kubur* is far more than a visit to a grave; for the Indonesian diaspora in Cairo, it is a sophisticated and essential act of becoming—a ritual journey where identity is remembered, negotiated, and forged.

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