



SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION IN RELIGIOUS TRADITION (An Analysis of the Sacred Grave Pilgrimage Practice in Lombok)

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Abstract

Introduction to The Problem: The tradition of visiting graves in Lombok, particularly among the Sasak community, has deep cultural roots and is firmly grounded in religious and social beliefs. **Purpose:** This study aims to explore the meaning of grave pilgrimage from the perspective of the Sasak community, as well as to identify its role in spiritual, social, and economic life, including its influence on religious tourism. **Design/methods/approach:** This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, focusing on several graves that are considered sacred. **Findings:** The research findings indicate that grave pilgrimage is not only a religious ritual but also a form of spiritual expression, a reminder of death, and a social gathering event for maintaining relationships. **Originality/value:** Grave pilgrimage also holds potential as a source of religious tourism that can provide economic benefits to the surrounding community.

Keywords: Grave Pilgrimage, Culture, Local Wisdom, West Nusa Tenggara, Tradition

Introduction

The facts show that the majority of the population on Lombok Island are Muslim, as evidenced by the many mosques on the island. In fact, Lombok Island is even known as the Island of a Thousand Mosques. However, despite the large number of Muslims on Lombok adhering to Islam, the implementation of their religious practices is divided into various Islamic sects. This reality has led to the emergence of complex religious conflicts. One example of this is the conflict between the Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaah Muslims and the Salafi-Wahhabi group in East Lombok, which illustrates how the potential for conflict still threatens the social and religious construction on the Island of a Thousand Mosques. In early 2022, a large-scale protest occurred demanding the cancellation of the construction of the Assunnah mosque owned by the Wahhabi group in Wanasaba. As reported by Kicknews.today, the community's rejection arose because the Wahhabi group was seen as disrespecting the identity and cultural traditions of the local Muslim community, which still adheres to ancestral practices such as grave pilgrimage and celebrating the Maulid (Kicknews, 2022).

As is well known, the Wahhabi sect has become a religious movement that often culturally contradicts the religious traditions that have developed in Indonesia. Therefore, the preaching

methods used by Wahhabi scholars in spreading their religious beliefs often clash with the understandings of other religious groups in Indonesia, such as NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) and Muhammadiyah (Diyani, 2019). This reality has sparked various social and religious issues across regions in Indonesia, including in Lombok Island.

Religious social conflict on Lombok Island has indeed become a widely discussed issue among various social and religious researchers. Muhammad Said notes that the Wahhabi ideology on Lombok Island has successfully erased the unique religious practices of the NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) community (Sa'id, 2019). One of the main factors driving the shift towards Wahhabi-style religious understanding in East Lombok is the widespread religious studies conducted by the Wahhabi group, both directly through mosques and prayer rooms, as well as on social media.

On many occasions, Wahhabi preachers often make statements that hurt those who adhere to the Aswaja (Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah) beliefs, such as mocking or belittling religious traditions practiced by Muslims outside their group, like celebrating the Maulid or performing grave pilgrimages. This phenomenon has been ongoing for quite some time, as seen in various social media groups or YouTube accounts of the Wahhabi community.

One particularly heated case recently discussed was a religious lecture by a Wahhabi leader in East Lombok, which contained disrespectful remarks about the graves of ancestors. This sparked a strong reaction from the Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah community. "We will not tolerate the desecration of the graves of our ancestors and saints," many people responded to the preacher's statement.

As documented in a YouTube account, the preacher's remarks became controversial because he referred to some graves, often visited by the NW (Nahdlatul Wathan), NU, Yatofa, and others, as "makam tain basong" (dog's feces). "Makem Selaparang, Bintaro, Sekarbela, Loang Balok, Ali Batu, Batu Layar, the graves of tain acong, the sacred tain acong" he said at minute 27 of a 1 hour and 1-minute sermon (Putrasir, 2022).

The statement went viral after a netizen cut the video and shared the controversial part on social media. Even though the video was later clarified and the preacher apologized for his comments, the anger among many Aswaja Muslim groups had already spread. Demonstrations erupted in front of the East Lombok regency office, demanding that the preacher be arrested. After reports were submitted to the West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) police, the preacher was eventually arrested.

In addition to the protests and police reports, the Assunnah Islamic boarding school, where the preacher taught, was attacked by several mass groups on the night after the video of the desecration spread. There was vandalism and the burning of one of the preacher's cars. The incident led the police to maintain security around the pesantren, creating a tense atmosphere. Educational activities at the pesantren came to a halt.

This event has become a painful memory in the religious life on the island, which has a Muslim majority. Throughout history, religious social conflicts have occurred several times on Lombok Island, including the Ahmadiyah conflict in 2018 in Sakra Village, East Lombok (Republika, 2022), the Salafi-Wahabi conflict in 2006 in West Lombok (Liputan6, 2022), and the dualism of NW in 1998 (Hamdi, 2014). Now, the rise of the Wahhabi movement, which often verbally and in action rejects traditional Islamic religious practices in East Lombok, seems to be stoking the seeds of religious conflict on the island known as the Island of a Thousand Mosques.

Various studies have been conducted on religious conflicts in Lombok, particularly regarding the development of the Wahhabi group. Among them, Saiful Hamdi's paper discusses how Wahhabism has led to the deculturalization of traditional Muslim communities in Indonesia, with Lombok Island as one of the research subjects (Hamdi, 2019). In addition, Muhammad Said observes that Wahhabism in East Lombok has become a problem of identity, piety, and nationalism (Sa'id, 2019). Furthermore, Saparuddin investigates how the contestation of religious ideologies within the educational space involves Wahhabism and other religious groups (Saparudin, 2017).

This paper attempts to reintroduce the discourse on Wahhabism, with a focus on the religious lecture by a Wahhabi preacher on Religious Tourism of Grave Pilgrimage, which became a national issue in early 2022. The lecture, which touched on the topic of grave pilgrimage, was perceived to disrespect a long-standing tradition among the traditional Muslim community on Lombok Island.

In addition to the difference in research material objects, the formal object used in this study also differs from previous research. While past studies primarily employed sociological, cultural, and political approaches, this study uses a formal object of Content Analysis combined with Semiotics and Social Response theory.

This paper will answer several questions. First, how is the Wahhabi preaching pattern in the lecture titled "The Law of Religious Tourism"? Second, how did the community respond to this lecture? Third, what is the impact on the harmony of religious life in East Lombok? At the end of the paper, a reflection will be provided on the incident, aiming to raise awareness that religious harmony must be maintained to build a peaceful and secure social and religious construction.

This paper does not aim to exacerbate the situation following the Aswaja-Wahhabi conflict triggered by the lecture, but rather serves as a reflection on the painful event. The author does not seek to corner the Wahhabi community in this paper but attempts to provide an objective study to restore the religious harmony that has long existed in the Island of a Thousand Mosques, Lombok. This is crucial, given the vulnerability of the religious social fabric on Lombok Island to conflict (Hamdi, 2022).

This research is urgent for several reasons. First, theoretically, it will present a social and religious study using a multi-disciplinary approach. This means that the study will not only use a social approach but will also correlate it with other fields such as Communication Science, Da'wah, Semiotics, and more. The use of Content Analysis theory in this research aims to integrate communication and semiotics theories into social theory. Additionally, the use of response theory will enrich the findings regarding social traditions surrounding the research object. In other words, this study will serve as an example of research applying an integrated interconnection approach, a model increasingly used in religious studies.

Second, practically, this paper will provide an overview of the social and religious construction on Lombok Island, which can serve as an inspiration to counter the emerging religious disharmony. It can also be used by the government, particularly the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as a reference in shaping policies to address social and religious conflicts that continue to affect the religious landscape of the nation.

Methods

This research uses a qualitative research method with a literature study approach. This method is chosen because it allows the researcher to explore and analyze various concepts, theories, and

findings from previous studies relevant to the topic (about the practice of sacred grave pilgrimage in Lombok). The literature study is conducted by utilizing various available sources, both physical and digital, such as books, scholarly journals, research reports, and other documents related to the assessment.

This study aims to understand the meaning, experiences, and perspectives from the research subjects' point of view. The literature study approach in qualitative research involves the collection and analysis of data from various written sources to gain a deep understanding of the topic being studied. According to Habsy et al. (2023), a literature review is the process of identifying, reviewing, and analyzing relevant literature with the goal of building a strong theoretical foundation, identifying research gaps, and formulating significant research questions. Sarnoto et al. (2023) emphasize that a good literature study should include a critical review of existing literature, identify relationships between concepts, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of previous research.

This approach enables the researcher to gather various perspectives and findings that have been published, thus building a comprehensive and integrative understanding of the topic being researched. Therefore, qualitative research with a literature study approach allows the researcher to explore and analyze relevant concepts and theories, as well as understand the context and meaning of the phenomenon being studied. This approach is highly beneficial in developing a strong theoretical foundation and providing deep insights into the research topic.

Result

Pilgrimages to sacred graves have been practiced since the early arrival of Islam. The word *ziarah* or *ziyara* originates from Arabic, which literally means "to visit." In terms of religious practice, *ziarah kubur* refers to the act of visiting a grave that is considered sacred with the intention of sending prayers.

Ancient graves on Lombok are located both inland and along the coast, with some of them being hundreds of years old. Local communities believe these graves hold many mysteries and possess sanctity that can bring blessings. Notably, the graves of Ketaq and Nyatoq in Central Lombok are regarded as sites of tremendous power by the local community.

There are several graves that serve as pilgrimage sites in this tradition, one of which is the Nyatoq grave located in Rambitan village, Pujut subdistrict, Central Lombok. "Nyatoq" in Sasak language means "Nyata," meaning "real" or "true," referring to the grave of a wali (saint) who brought Islam to southern Lombok from Arabia. Various activities are carried out by the local community at this site, such as praying, reciting Quranic verses, and asking for blessings and ease in their lives.

Additionally, there is the pilgrimage tradition to the grave of Mbah Koco Negoro. The community has a deep connection to this site, as the rituals performed there significantly influence their lives. One of the primary purposes of the pilgrimage tradition is to honor the saint's legacy and seek blessings.

Rosada & Wawansyah describe the pilgrimage tradition to Loang Baloq's grave, which is associated with various activities within the Sasak community. The first activity is visiting a grave, usually one belonging to a family member, relative, or someone regarded as a wali (saint). The goal is to get closer to God and receive blessings during the pilgrimage.

Although the graves are considered sacred, the belief in the sanctity of graves is not uniform. Many motivations and goals are held by the community as pilgrims, especially depending on the

intentions they bring. Pilgrimages to sacred graves also serve as a means of instilling moral values in the younger generation, especially the youth.

Discussion

Pilgrimages to sacred graves have been practiced since the early arrival of Islam (Asep Ma'mun Muttaqien: 2007; Rosada & Wawansyah, 2018). The word *ziarah* or *ziyara* originates from Arabic, which literally means "to visit." In terms of religious practice, *ziarah kubur* refers to the act of visiting a grave that is considered sacred with the intention of sending prayers (Depdikbud, 1990:1018; Rosada & Wawansyah, 2018). Ancient graves on Lombok are located both inland and along the coast, with some of them being hundreds of years old. Local communities believe these graves hold many mysteries and possess sanctity that can bring blessings. Notably, the graves of Ketaq and Nyatoq in Central Lombok are regarded as sites of tremendous power by the local community. According to Pahmi & Zakariah (2021), the community views these graves as possessing mystical powers. This belief is further supported by Widyaningsih & Abdul Hanif (2018), who state that grave pilgrimages are rituals closely associated with the belief in supernatural forces. This belief is rooted in the hope that blessings will be attained through the *karomah* (spiritual power) of the grave. These sacred aspects (Setiawan, 2016) are closely linked to the figures of the saints and religious leaders.

There are several graves that serve as pilgrimage sites in this tradition, one of which is the Nyatoq grave located in Rambitan village, Pujut subdistrict, Central Lombok. Dr. Jamaluddin (2019) explains that "Nyatoq" in Sasak language means "Nyata," meaning "real" or "true," referring to the grave of a wali (saint) who brought Islam to southern Lombok from Arabia. Various activities are carried out by the local community at this site, such as praying, reciting Quranic verses, and asking for blessings and ease in their lives. After the pilgrimage and prayers, the community gathers for *begibung*, a large communal meal held near the grave (Amal et al., 2019). The tradition of visiting Nyatoq's grave is only performed on Wednesdays, which is the designated day for pilgrimage as per the message of the saint during his lifetime. Thus, the people of Rambitan have established Wednesday as the sacred day for visits. The motivations for these pilgrimages and prayers depend on the individual's intentions, particularly related to the hopes for a prosperous and blessed life.

Additionally, there is the pilgrimage tradition to the grave of Mbah Koco Negoro. Ni'mah & Az Zafi (2020) explain that the community has a deep connection to this site, as the rituals performed there significantly influence their lives (Ni'mah & Az Zafi, 2020; Napitu et al., 2020). One of the primary purposes of the pilgrimage tradition is to honor the saint's legacy and seek blessings. The community believes that the sacredness of the graves of holy people can provide spiritual guidance and peace for those who visit them. Moreover, they trust that these activities can bring about positive changes in their lives. This reflects that all activities in the grave pilgrimage tradition are guided by sacred values that have become a collective understanding within the community. Pahmi & Zakariah (2021) mention that there are religious values embedded in these rituals, including elements of worship, belief, and ethics. One important part of the ritual is *Nede*, a cultural ceremony expressing gratitude, prayers, and hopes directed to God. The *Nede* ritual demonstrates a belief in the existence of Allah and His attributes, especially during the ceremony.

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usually one belonging to a family member, relative, or someone regarded as a wali (saint). The next step involves praying for the deceased and praying for oneself. The goal is to get closer to God and receive blessings during the pilgrimage. Additionally, this pilgrimage serves as a reminder of death and an opportunity to ask for something. Pilgrims also believe that visiting graves brings peace, especially when faced with life's challenges. This belief highlights that all wishes will be granted when praying at the grave. There is also a belief that expressing one's desires at a grave will bring blessings and safety in life.

Although the graves are considered sacred, the belief in the sanctity of graves is not uniform. Many motivations and goals are held by the community as pilgrims, especially depending on the intentions they bring. People who clearly state their motivations are often those who adhere to traditional Islamic beliefs. However, some are influenced by mystical beliefs rooted in tradition, while others rationalize it purely. Mirdad et al. (2022) highlight that pilgrims who consistently follow this tradition have a range of motivations, both sacred and secular, where every activity performed carries spiritual significance, or is driven by other motivations. The diversity in belief patterns suggests that we cannot generalize or make definitive claims about pilgrims. The motivations of pilgrims include avoiding disasters, ensuring a good harvest, fulfilling vows, seeking healing, maintaining social ties, expressing gratitude, resolving life's struggles, and even using the pilgrimage as a recreational or tourism activity.

Pilgrimages to sacred graves also serve as a means of instilling moral values in the younger generation, especially the youth. Lutfiyah (2020) mentions that one of the key values instilled during the grave pilgrimage is religious character. These pilgrimages offer opportunities for young people, particularly students, to internalize important values, including knowing and recognizing God, memorizing prayers like tahlil recited during pilgrimages, as well as learning discipline, respect for rules, and understanding the importance of visiting at designated times and places. Additionally, values such as friendship and care for others are fostered, helping youth develop a deeper sense of empathy and social awareness.

Conclusion

Grave pilgrimage is a form of tradition or custom passed down by ancestors. It is an activity performed to ask for prayers or to pray for those who have passed away. This is also the tradition observed in the Kelambi hamlet community, which has a unique practice: visiting the Keleang grave. According to local legend, the Keleang grave is not a typical grave or burial site, but rather a resting or meditation place of a wali (saint) who once spread Islam in Lombok. As a result, the site is considered sacred by the ancestors of the Kelambi community, and the tradition of visiting the Keleang grave continues to be practiced today as a form of ancestral heritage.

The pilgrimage to the Keleang grave is only carried out on Thursdays, and it takes place twice a year: first, at the beginning of the rainy season, and second, at the start of the dry season. On these specific days, the people of Kelambi visit the Keleang grave, adhering to the ancestral tradition. During the pilgrimage, there are several rituals that must be performed, including burning *timbang* (a kind of offering), slaughtering animals such as chickens, goats, and even buffaloes, making *ketupat* (rice cakes), preparing offerings, washing their faces with water that has been placed in the Keleang grave mixed with soil from the grave, and finally performing *zikir* (remembrance of God) and prayers (*roah*).

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