

NYEKAR AS A RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL TRADITION: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW OF GRAVE PILGRIMAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF ISLAM IN THE ARCHIPELAGO

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Abstract: This article examines the tradition of *nyekar*, or grave pilgrimage, in the Islamic Archipelago as a religious and cultural phenomenon that has significance for Indonesian society. This paper is based on the important role of *nyekar* in the lives of Muslims in the archipelago, where the practice is not only seen as a form of respect for ancestors but also as a spiritual means to reflect on life after death and strengthen social relations. This tradition illustrates the fusion of Islamic teachings and local culture, making it a distinctive practice in Nusantara Islam. This research uses an interdisciplinary approach by combining theological, anthropological and sociological studies to understand the various aspects inherent in the *nyekar* tradition. The method used is qualitative, with data collection techniques through literature studies. The data were analysed descriptively-interpretatively to explore the meaning and importance of *nyekar* from various disciplinary perspectives. The research findings show that *nyekar* is a tradition full of religious and cultural values in which Nusantara Muslims combine religious beliefs with local customs. Besides reflecting religious practices, *nyekar* also serves as a means of maintaining social ties and preserving cultural identity. This article concludes that the *nyekar* tradition in Nusantara Islam has a dual role, namely as a form of worship and as an effort to preserve cultural values that are passed down between generations.

Keywords: Culture, *Islam Nusantara*, *Nyekar*.

A. Introduction

Islam entered Indonesia around the 12th century AD. The teachings of Islam in Indonesia were easily accepted by the community because the preaching approach was a gentle humanist and did not reject the culture and traditions of Indonesian society at that time, precisely by assimilating the culture and traditions of Indonesian society at that time with the teachings of Islam, making Islam easily accepted in the archipelago. With the presence of Islam in the archipelago, most of the traditions in Indonesia have adjusted to the teachings of Islam, such as *kenduri*, *larungan*, *nyekar* or pilgrimage, and others (Wulandari, 2021).

Nyekar comes from the Javanese language, which means a form of ritual performed by the community by praying for and sowing flowers on the graves visited. Flowers that are usually used to sow flowers in *nyekar* are cantil, rose, jasmine, *kenanga*, and added with fragrances. According to the Islamic view, a grave pilgrimage or *nyekar* was originally forbidden, but later, it was recommended to remember death so that humans always prepare provisions for life in the hereafter (Yunita, 2023).

The tradition of *nyekar* has deep roots in Indonesian culture, especially among Muslims. The practice involves visiting the graves of ancestors to pray for them and sprinkling flowers as a form of respect. *Nyekar* is not only seen as a religious *ritual* but also as a way to strengthen social relations and preserve cultural identity. History shows that grave pilgrimage was initially forbidden in Islam, but over time, the practice was recognised as a way to remember death and strengthen faith. Among the Javanese community, *nyekar* is often performed ahead of religious holidays such as Eid al-Fitr and Ramadan. It is not only a spiritual moment but also a social one, where families and communities gather to remember and pray for their ancestors.

If identified with Islam, grave pilgrimage activities are commonly carried out by Muslim communities as a form of prayer addressed to people who have passed away. Islam teaches the essence of grave pilgrimage is to remember death so that every human being prepares provisions with good deeds. In the view of Islam, a grave pilgrimage or what is known in Javanese society as *nyekar* is an act of worship that was initially forbidden but later recommended in religion. The previous prohibition of grave pilgrimage was because the companions were still new to leaving the *jahiliyah* belief pattern, one of which was begging for graves. As the Hadith narrated from Anas bin Malik from Abu Buraydah, the Prophet Muhammad said:

كُنْتُ كَمَيْتِكُمْ عَنْ زِيَارَةِ الْقُبُورِ أَلَا فَرُّوْهُمَا، فَإِنَّهُ يُرِقُّ الْقَلْبَ، وَتُدْمَعُ الْعَيْنَ، وَتُذَكَّرُ
الْآخِرَةَ، وَلَا تَقُولُوا هُجْرًا

“From Anas bin Malik from Abu Buraydah (RA), that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: I have forbidden you to visit the graves, so (now) visit the graves because visiting the graves will remind you of death.” (HR. Muslim in Sahih Muslim volume 2 page 366 Kitab al-Jana’iz).

Performing grave pilgrimage is Sunnah. Its purpose is for the benefit of the grave-dwellers, not for the pilgrim, except to the extent of additional reward and gentleness of heart. As for the belief that visiting graves can ward off harm and bring benefit, there is no evidence for this (Prasetyo, 2016).

The suggestion to make a pilgrimage is inseparable from the two main objectives of making a pilgrimage: a) A means to remember death. The suggestion to always remember death is not when we are on pilgrimage alone, but at all times and at all times, we are encouraged to always remember that someday, sooner or later, our death will come too. However, by making a pilgrimage to the grave, of course, it should make us realise that we will also be buried, as well as our predecessors who are currently being buried. b) To pray for the grave experts. The second suggestion for pilgrimage is, of course, that we are allowed to pray for our grave experts. But keep in mind that based on the correct sharia, it is to pray for, not ask the grave experts. Whoever asks for other than Allah SWT, then the act is shirk. So when we make a pilgrimage, we should pray for the grave expert to Allah SWT (Saputra, 2021, hlm. 45).

Several previous studies have explored the *nyekar* tradition from various perspectives. According to Iin Yunita et al. (2023), *nyekar* is an important ritual in Javanese culture, where people sow flowers and pray at graves to maintain relationships with ancestors and remember death. Another study by Muhamad Sohib states that this tradition serves as a moment to greet each other between the living and the deceased, as well as strengthening the relationship across realms. In anthropological studies, Koentjaraningrat (1984) asserts that *nyekar* is a very important ritual activity for Javanese people, especially adherents of the *Jawi* Religion. This practice is believed to bring blessings and safety to the perpetrators. In addition, research by Abdul Munir Mulkhan shows that despite efforts to purify Islam in some areas, the *nyekar* tradition is still practised by many people as part of their spiritual life. From the literature review, it appears that although many studies have been conducted on the *nyekar* tradition, there is still room for further exploration of its meaning and role in the current

social and cultural context of Indonesian society (*Eksklusif di RI! Ini Alasan Orang Melakukan Tradisi Nyekar*, t.t.).

This article offers scientific novelty by examining the *nyekar* tradition through an interdisciplinary approach that combines theological, anthropological, and sociological studies. This research aims to dig deeper into how the *nyekar* tradition functions not only as a religious practice but also as a means of maintaining social ties and preserving cultural identity amid modernisation.

The main problems to be investigated in this article are: How does the *nyekar* tradition play a role in the spiritual and social life of Muslims in the archipelago? The hypothesis proposed is that the *nyekar* tradition is not just a ritual of respect for ancestors but also a form of worship that strengthens social relations between individuals and preserves cultural values passed down from generation to generation. Against this background, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to the understanding of the *nyekar* tradition in the context of Islam in the archipelago and its implications for Indonesian society as a whole.

B. Research Methods

This research uses a qualitative method with an interdisciplinary approach, which includes anthropology, sociology and religious studies. This approach was chosen to understand the phenomenon of *nyekar* (grave pilgrimage) in depth in the context of the Nusantara Islamic tradition. The type of research used is descriptive explorative, aiming to explore and describe the meaning and function of the *nyekar* tradition as part of the culture and religious practices of the community. The data collection technique is done through a literature study. The research instrument is document analysis. This method is expected to provide a holistic understanding of the role of grave pilgrimage in the spiritual and social life of Islamic societies in the archipelago.

C. Results and Discussion

From this research, several important findings were identified, showing how *nyekar* functions in the context of Muslim societies in the archipelago, especially Indonesia, and providing insights into the role of this tradition in strengthening spiritual and social relationships while preserving cultural values.

The main finding of this research is that the *nyekar* tradition reflects the fusion of Islamic teachings with local cultures that have long existed in

the archipelago. This tradition developed in response to the need for Muslims in Indonesia to adapt Islamic teachings to local customs. In Islam *Nusantara*, *nyekar* is not only seen as a religious practice but also as part of cultural identity. This incorporation is seen in the various ritual elements performed during *nyekar*, where Islamic beliefs and practices are combined with local customs. For example, in the *nyekar* tradition in Java, the ritual of honouring ancestors that existed before Islam came was integrated with the teachings of grave pilgrimage in Islam, creating a distinctive and unique form of practice.

This tradition also shows the flexibility of Islam *Nusantara* in accepting and adapting to local customs without losing the essence of the teachings of Islam itself. This adaptation process allows people to maintain their cultural identity while practicing their religion. Thus, the *nyekar* tradition is a reflection of how religious and cultural teachings can complement each other, creating harmony between spiritual beliefs and local traditions.

From a religious perspective, *nyekar* has a very deep meaning for Muslims in the archipelago. The tradition is seen as a way to remind Muslims of death and the afterlife, which is one of the main teachings in Islam. In many hadiths, the Prophet Muhammad encouraged his followers to make pilgrimages to graves as a reminder that every human being will face death and must prepare for the afterlife.

This study found that *nyekar* is seen by many Nusantara Muslims as a very important spiritual tool. In addition to reminding them of the afterlife, *nyekar* is also a moment to pray for those who have died. The prayers offered are thought to ease the burden of the departed in the grave, a concept based on Islamic theological teachings. Therefore, *nyekar* is not only a cultural tradition, but it is also seen as a form of worship that has high spiritual value for its practitioners.

In addition to the religious aspect, *nyekar* also acts as a social phenomenon that helps strengthen relationships between individuals within families and communities. This research shows that *nyekar* is often performed jointly by family members or community groups at certain moments, such as before Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, or in commemoration of other religious holidays. Through this ritual, moments of togetherness are created that strengthen social ties among family and community members.

In this context, *nyekar* serves not only as a means to pray for the deceased but also as a moment to strengthen social relations. This shared activity allows for intense communication and social interaction, which in turn strengthens solidarity among individuals in the community. The research found that many families use *nyekar* as an opportunity to gather

and strengthen bonds, so the tradition also serves as a reinforcement of social cohesion.

Another very important finding in this research is the role of *nyekar* in preserving cultural identity and ancestral heritage. *Nyekar* is considered one of how Nusantara Muslims preserve and honour the cultural heritage that has been passed down by previous generations. This activity often involves honouring the graves of ancestors, which is considered a form of respect for family history and tradition.

By making pilgrimages to ancestral graves, Muslims in the archipelago are not only remembering those who have passed away but also maintaining family narratives and cultural values that have been passed down from generation to generation. This is particularly important in the context of Islam *Nusantara*, where local traditions and customs have an important place in daily life. Through *nyekar*, these cultural values are not only preserved but also passed on to the next generation, ensuring that the tradition and cultural identity remain alive and relevant in the future.

This study concludes that the *nyekar* tradition in *Nusantara* Islam has a dual role, namely as a form of worship and as an effort to preserve cultural values. As a form of worship, *nyekar* is an important moment for Muslims to get closer to God, remember death, and pray for the dead. From a religious perspective, *nyekar* is considered a way to strengthen faith and prepare oneself for the afterlife.

On the other hand, *nyekar* also serves as a means to maintain and preserve cultural identity among Nusantara Muslims. This tradition allows for the fusion of Islamic teachings with local customs, creating a unique and distinctive practice in *Nusantara* Islam. Through *nyekar*, Muslims in Indonesia can honour their ancestors while practising religious teachings, maintaining social relations, and strengthening their cultural identity as Archipelago Muslims.

1. Background of *Nyekar* in Islam Nusantara

Islam Nusantara is not a new term, but it became popular again after being thrown to the public by the former Chairman of PBNU, Said Aqil Siraj, in the opening of Istighotsah Welcoming Ramadan and the Opening of the National Conference of Alim Ulama NU, Sunday, June 14, 2015, at Istiqlal Mosque, Jakarta. The term Islam Nusantara here refers to the historical fact of the spread of Islam in the archipelago with a cultural approach, not with a rigid and harsh doctrine, Islam Nusantara is preached by embracing culture, preserving culture, respecting culture, not even suppressing culture.

Said Aqil also added that *Islam Nusantara* has a friendly character, anti-radical, inclusive and tolerant, not Arab Islam, which is always in conflict with fellow Muslims and civil war. KH. Mustofa Bisri explained that the word *Nusantara* would be misleading if it was understood in the structure of na “at-man” ut (description) so that it means Islam that is translated. However, it would be correct when placed in the *idbafab* structure (designation of place) so that it means Islam in the archipelago. Gus Mus puts it as a value system¹¹ and its application in responding to actual problems from time to time. Mustofa Bisri tends to look at the values that have been practised, absorbed, and made the principles of NU citizens, such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance/harmony), *tawassut* (moderation), *ta’addul* (justice), and *amr ma’ruf nabi munkar* (Prasetawati & Asnawi, 2018).

The tradition of *nyekar*, or grave pilgrimage, existed before Islam came to the archipelago. Initially, grave pilgrimage was considered forbidden in Islam due to the potential for shirk (associating partners with God). However, along with the arrival of Islam and cultural acculturation, this tradition was modified and accepted as a legitimate religious practice (Toha, 2016a).

Nyekar was formed due to the acculturation of Islamic, Javanese and Hindu cultures. Javanese people believe that grave pilgrimages can enhance their spiritual connection with the spirits of their ancestors and holy spirits. This reflects how local traditions were absorbed and modified to fit the teachings of Islam (Yunita, 2023b).

In the view of Islam, grave pilgrimage was initially forbidden due to fears of shirk. However, after the Muslim faith was strong, the Prophet Muhammad SAW allowed grave pilgrimage as a form of worship. The permissibility of pilgrimage at the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW was then welcomed very well by people who also had a tradition of grave pilgrimage. So, when Islam entered an area that had similar traditions, there was a process of complementing each other between these traditions. In the archipelago, the tradition of pilgrimage then becomes prevalent. Grave pilgrimages are carried out not only at the graves of ancestors but also at the graves of people who are considered meritorious for religion, country and the life of the pilgrim.

In Indonesia, grave pilgrimage can be called one of the traditions for the community. This tradition is believed to have existed since long before Islam came to Indonesia. Indonesia has a long history regarding the spread of Islam in Indonesia to become the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. The spread of Islam in Java used at

least two approaches so that Islamic values were easily absorbed by the community. The first approach is the Islamization of Javanese Culture. This approach seeks to make the existing culture in the community appear Islamic, both formally and sub-substantially. The second approach is the Jawanization of Islam, through which Javanese culture is infiltrated with Islam. So, in this case, the terms in Javanese culture are still used, but the value they contain is the value of Islam so that Islam becomes *men-Jawa*. Islam has become a religion that interacts with local culture and traditions that previously existed. This combination is called syncretism. Syncretism is something that cannot be avoided from the meeting of one culture to another and will create a new culture that is embraced together. To this day, syncretism is still alive in Indonesian Muslim society. One ritual that is considered part of the results of syncretism in Indonesia is the grave pilgrimage (Mujib, 2016a).

Nyekar has different purposes for different individuals. In general, pilgrimage is done to :

- a. Remembering death: Pilgrimages remind people of death and the afterlife, encouraging individuals to reflect on their deeds during life.
- b. To pray for the dead: The *nyekar* tradition aims to pray for the spirits of ancestors and holy spirits, asking for blessings and enhancing spiritual connection.
- c. Asking for help: Some individuals perform *nyekar* to ask the Holy Spirit for help in achieving their goals, such as getting rich or getting promoted.

Nyekar, or grave pilgrimage in Indonesia, has a complex and diverse background.

Pilgrimage is an activity that has existed for a long time and is a legacy of the ancestors before Islam came to the archipelago. The arrival of Islam with tolerance does not prohibit the traditions that have been carried out by the community. Islam still allows pilgrimage activities but by changing the purpose and various rituals performed in pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is still practised by the majority of Muslims in Indonesia and other parts of the world. Pilgrimage has become one of the spiritual activities of the Muslim community as a form of freedom of worship to Allah SWT. This activity has even become a routine activity carried out by the community at certain times, individually or together. In Indonesia, there are several times commonly used by the

community to make grave pilgrimages, namely Friday, before the feast day, and other holidays. This is just a tradition carried out by the people of the archipelago, which continues to be carried out to this day (Mujib, 2016b, 210).

The tradition of pilgrimage among Indonesian Muslims, especially in the Javanese region, is still very strong. This activity has become a separate agenda in fulfilling religious activities. With the emergence of motives outside the purpose of pilgrimage, especially when it is accompanied by practices that mimic pre-Islamic traditions, some people inevitably consider this activity to be a shirk activity. Sometimes, pilgrims do not understand which is Islamic guidance and which is an ancestral tradition that is a legacy of ancient traditions.

2. Definition of *Maulid Nabi*

Nyekar, or grave pilgrimage, is one of the traditions that has a deep meaning in the spiritual and cultural life of the Islamic community in the archipelago. Religiously, the practice of *nyekar* is considered a form of respect for ancestors and the deceased by Islamic teachings to pray for them. In the Islamic context, *nyekar* is a moment for Muslims to reflect on life after death, strengthen their faith, and remind them of the transience of human life. This is based on the Prophet Muhammad's hadith, which encourages Muslims to make grave pilgrimages to remind them of death (HR Muslim no. 976) (Latifah, 2023).

On the other hand, culturally, the *nyekar* tradition reflects a combination of Islamic teachings and local customs that are strong in various regions in the archipelago. For example, Javanese people combine the practice of *nyekar* with local cultures, such as bringing flowers, incense, and certain rituals that have been passed down from generation to generation. This tradition also serves as a means to strengthen social ties between family members and communities, especially during major events such as Hari Raya, where *nyekar* is part of the rituals performed together. *Nyekar* is thus not only a form of worship but also a form of cultural preservation that strengthens social identity and ancestral traditions (Kencana, 2022).

3. Theological, Anthropological, and Sociological Perspectives

a. Theological Perspective

The tradition of *nyekar* has a deep meaning in Islamic teachings, especially since the practice aims to remind people of death and the importance of praying for those who have passed

away. *Nyekar*, or grave pilgrimage, is based on the Prophet Muhammad's hadith and encourages Muslims to make pilgrimages so that they can always remember death. In a hadith, the Prophet said, "I used to forbid you to go on grave pilgrimage, but now go on pilgrimage, for it will remind you of death" (HR Muslim no. 976). This shows that *nyekar* is one of the means for Muslims to prepare themselves for life after death by always being reminded of death and the reality of life in the afterlife.

Grave pilgrimages are not only a reminder of death but also contain an important element of prayer for those who have died. In Islamic teachings, prayers offered by the living are believed to provide benefits and goodness for people who are already in the grave. Prayers, reciting verses of the Qur'an, and doing good deeds on behalf of the deceased are considered to ease their burden and suffering in the grave. This teaching is in line with views in Islamic theology, which emphasise the importance of grave pilgrimage as a way to show devotion to those who have died while strengthening faith for the living.

In Islamic literature, this concept is widely discussed in books of fiqh and creed, one of which is the work of Imam Al-Ghazali. In his writings, Al-Ghazali emphasises that grave pilgrimage is not only aimed at praying for the deceased but also as a way to remind people of the transience of life in this world and the importance of preparing for the hereafter. In addition to strengthening faith, *nyekar* is also an opportunity for Muslims to reflect on life and understand how short human existence is in this world.

With this teaching, the tradition of *nyekar* or grave pilgrimage, has become a practice that has high spiritual value among Muslims. Grave pilgrimage is not only done as a ritual of worship but also as a form of respect for those who have gone before the Creator. In the Nusantara Islamic tradition, *nyekar* is often done at certain moments, such as before Ramadan or Eid al-Fitr, when extended families gather and make a pilgrimage together to the graves of their ancestors. This not only strengthens the spiritual bond with the departed but also strengthens the social bond between the living family members.

Besides having a religious dimension, *nyekar* is also full of cultural values, especially among the Muslim communities of the archipelago. In many cultures in Indonesia, grave pilgrimages are

not only performed as a religious obligation but also as part of a tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation. For example, Javanese people combine the *nyekar* ritual with elements of local culture, such as bringing flowers and burning incense when visiting graves. These elements show how the grave pilgrimage tradition in *Islam Nusantara* is not only a religious ritual but also a means to preserve ancestral culture that has existed since before Islam entered the archipelago.

In a sociological context, *nyekar* serves as a means to strengthen social relations between community members. The practice of grave pilgrimage is often done collectively, either with family or community. Moments like this become a place to gather, pray together, and recall family history and genealogy. Thus, *nyekar* not only aims to pray for the deceased but also to strengthen social relations between family and community members involved in the ritual. In many cases, *nyekar* is also a means to reunite families who are scattered and rarely meet, especially at special moments such as the eve of Islamic holidays.

The *nyekar* tradition contains important messages about life and death, as well as the importance of maintaining a relationship with the departed through prayer. By continuing to practice this tradition, Muslims not only strengthen their faith but also help preserve the culture and traditions that have been passed down by their ancestors. *Nyekar* teaches the living a lesson about the importance of remembering those who have passed on and reminds them that every human being will face death in due time. It is also a moment to reflect on how life on earth is temporary and how important it is to prepare for life in the afterlife.

In addition, in the *Nusantara* Islamic tradition, *nyekar* is also a strong symbol of the integration between Islamic teachings and local culture. Many elements of *nyekar* show how the people of the archipelago managed to combine religious teachings with pre-existing cultural values without losing the essence of both. This practice is one example of how Islam in the archipelago developed in an inclusive way, where local traditions are maintained within the framework of the Islamic teachings embraced by the majority of the community.

Overall, the *nyekar* tradition is important not only in religious terms but also in social and cultural terms. As part of the spiritual life of Muslims in the archipelago, *nyekar* serves as a means to reflect, strengthen faith, and maintain ties with deceased relatives.

On the other hand, *nyekar* is also a way to preserve the rich local culture, showing how this tradition has not only religious values but also deep social and cultural values (Subahri & Airiza, 2024).

b. Anthropological Perspective

From an anthropological point of view, the *nyekar* tradition reflects the combination of Islamic teachings with local customs that existed before Islam spread in the archipelago. Before Islam came, people in various parts of Indonesia, such as Java and Bali, already practised the tradition of honouring ancestors through various pilgrimage rituals. When Islam began to develop in the archipelago, the teachings on grave pilgrimage were integrated with local traditions, creating a form of *nyekar* practice that is unique to Indonesia.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz, in his study of religion in Java, explains that the development of Islam in the archipelago was influenced by animist beliefs as well as Hindu-Buddhist traditions that had previously been deeply rooted in society. In this case, the *nyekar* tradition reflects how elements of local culture involving respect for ancestors and belief in supernatural powers survive and coexist within an Islamic framework. *Nyekar*, thus, becomes a form of cultural acculturation in which Islamic teachings are combined with previously existing local beliefs and traditions. (Geertz_Clifford_Religion_of_Java_1976.pdf, t.t.)

The practices carried out in the *nyekar* tradition reflect this cultural adaptation. For example, bringing flowers, burning incense, and performing special rituals at the grave are actions that show the integration of Islamic teachings and local traditions, especially Javanese customs. Javanese culture has a high regard for ancestors and often incorporates spiritual elements in daily practices, and this is evident in *nyekar* activities.

These elements illustrate how the *nyekar* tradition is not only a religious ritual but also an effort to preserve cultural heritage and community identity. Although it has been integrated with Islamic teachings, local elements are still maintained, showing respect for ancestral history and traditions. The cultural function of the *nyekar* tradition is seen in the effort to maintain continuity between the past and the present, where this ritual plays an important role in strengthening a sense of community and social identity. *Nyekar* is not only a form of worship but also reflects cultural values that have

been passed down from generation to generation and continue to be practised today.

In other words, *nyekar* is not only a religious matter but also a strong representation of cultural preservation. Although influenced by Islam, the tradition retains local elements that show that culture and religion can coexist without losing their essence. *Nyekar* is a means for people to maintain a connection with their ancestors while reviving local spiritual and cultural values that are rich in meaning.

Overall, the *nyekar* tradition illustrates that the teachings of Islam in the archipelago developed in a unique way, namely by adapting to local culture without abandoning the basic values contained in the teachings of the religion. This tradition serves as a bridge between the past and the present, between religious teachings and local customs, making *nyekar* a symbol of the harmonious blend of religion and culture in Indonesia.

c. Sociological Perspective

From a sociological point of view, the *nyekar* tradition is not just an individual religious *ritual* but also a social phenomenon that plays an important role in strengthening social cohesion among community members. This grave pilgrimage is often carried out together, both with family and the local community. This activity is usually carried out at certain moments that have important meanings, such as before the month of Ramadan, during Eid al-Fitr, or in celebration of the Prophet's birthday. Through *nyekar*, strong social ties are created among family and community members, which in turn strengthens solidarity and relationships within the community.

According to sociologist Emile Durkheim, collective rituals such as *nyekar* play a significant role in strengthening social solidarity. In Durkheim's theory, rituals are collective actions that contain symbolic meaning, which brings together individuals in the community through shared experiences. *Nyekar*, in this case, is not only a religious ritual performed to pray for ancestors but also a social ceremony that connects community members through shared action. By coming together for a grave pilgrimage, individuals feel part of a larger community while strengthening relationships between family and community members. It also creates a deep sense of community among them, as they are all involved in the same ritual with the same purpose.

Nyekar also plays an important role in preserving cultural and religious identity among Nusantara Muslims. In many societies in Indonesia, especially in Java, grave pilgrimages are an important moment for family members to recall their family history and honour their ancestors. This activity not only serves as a way to reflect on spiritual and religious values but also as a means to maintain family narratives and cultural traditions that have been going on for generations. By visiting the graves of ancestors, family members are invited to remember their origins, the values passed down by their predecessors, and the importance of maintaining long-standing traditions.

The *Nyekar* culture in the lives of Indonesian people is very familiar. The *Nyekar* ritual performed by the Indonesian people is not without cause or purpose, but every action must have an explanation. The initial conception of *Nyekar*, or in other terms, grave pilgrimage, is to remind people that humans will return to God and will get the same treatment before God except for their Faith and Taqwanya during their lifetime. This initial concept leads to the divine values brought by the teachings of Islam (Saputra, 2021).

Thus, *nyekar* has a dual role: as a religious ritual full of spiritual meaning and as an effort to maintain a rich cultural identity. For *Nusantara* Muslims, especially in areas such as Java, this tradition is a distinctive feature that distinguishes Islam in the archipelago from forms of Islam in other parts of the world. *Nyekar* helps form a collective identity as Muslims of the archipelago, who not only practice the teachings of Islam but also respect and preserve local customs that had developed before Islam came (Toha, 2016b).

In addition, in a sociological context, *nyekar* can also be seen as a tool to maintain social stability within the community. Because it involves many people and is done together, *nyekar* creates a moment where community members can interact with each other and strengthen their social relationships. The interactions that occur during *nyekar* can strengthen mutual trust and solidarity among community members, which in turn can increase social cohesion. In other words, through *nyekar*, communities are encouraged to maintain harmonious social relations while at the same time

reminding them of the values that have been passed down by their ancestors.

In addition to strengthening social relations, *nyekar* is also a means for people to strengthen their religious identity. In the Nusantara Islamic tradition, *nyekar* is not only a form of respect for ancestors but also a means to strengthen faith and belief in the teachings of Islam. Through grave pilgrimage, Muslims are reminded of death and the importance of contemplating life in the afterlife, which in turn can strengthen their sense of religiosity. At the same time, this tradition also shows how Islamic teachings can integrate with local values, creating a distinctive and unique form of religion in the archipelago.

Furthermore, *nyekar* also serves as an educational moment for the younger generation. In this tradition, the older generation usually invites their children and grandchildren to participate in the grave pilgrimage to introduce them to the religious and cultural values passed down by their ancestors. Through *nyekar*, the younger generation is taught to respect their ancestors, maintain long-standing traditions, and understand the importance of practising religious teachings. In this way, *nyekar* helps in the process of passing on cultural and religious values from one generation to the next, ensuring that these traditions are kept alive and practised by Muslims in the future (Rahmawati & Sukarman, 2024).

Overall, from a sociological perspective, *nyekar* can be understood as a social practice that has not only a religious dimension but also a strong social and cultural dimension. Through *nyekar*, Nusantara Muslims not only strengthen their relationship with God and with their ancestors but also with family members and the surrounding community. *Nyekar* becomes a moment where social cohesion and solidarity among community members are strengthened, as well as a tool to maintain and preserve cultural and religious identity among Muslims. In this context, *nyekar* is not only an individualised ritual but also a social phenomenon that has deep meaning for the Nusantara Islamic community (Wahid, 2018).

In addition, *nyekar* also reflects how religious traditions can be a means of maintaining social and cultural relations within the community. Through this tradition, people are invited to respect each other, strengthen social relations, and maintain the values that have been passed down by their ancestors. Thus, *nyekar* plays an important role in forming a collective identity as Muslims of the

archipelago, who not only practice the teachings of Islam but also respect and preserve the cultural values that have long lived in their society. The *nyekar* tradition, with all its social, cultural and religious meanings, is an integral part of the life of Muslim communities in the archipelago, as well as a symbol of the fusion between religion and culture in everyday life (Mujib, 2016a).

D. Conclusion

From a theological perspective, *nyekar* serves as a reminder of death and the afterlife, as well as an opportunity for Muslims to pray for the deceased through Islamic teachings. The tradition strengthens faith and provides spiritual benefits for both the performer and the person being prayed for. Anthropologically, *nyekar* reflects the integration of Islamic teachings with local cultures that have long existed in the archipelago. This practice is the result of adaptation and syncretism between ancestral traditions and Islamic teachings, which form the unique identity of Islam Nusantara. Rituals such as bringing flowers and performing prayers at tombs are a blend of local beliefs and Islamic practices.

From a sociological point of view, *nyekar* plays a role in strengthening social cohesion within families and communities. *Nyekar* is often done collectively, which strengthens relationships between family and community members. In addition, *nyekar* also serves as a means of preserving cultural identity and ancestral heritage, maintaining connections between generations and reinforcing family narratives and cultural values. Overall, the *nyekar* tradition has a dual role as a form of worship that strengthens faith and as an effort to preserve cultural values passed down between generations. This tradition illustrates a harmonious blend of religion and culture and is an important part of the *Nusantara* Islamic identity. *Nyekar* not only maintains the spiritual connection between the living and the dead but also maintains the social and cultural values that are unique to Muslim societies in Indonesia.

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