
Locating The Tradition of Ziarah Wali in Modern Era: A Case Study in Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan Tomb

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ABSTRACT

Ziarah wali (Muslim saint pilgrimage) is one of Muslims' practices to visit sacred tombs. This practice has been performed by a large part of Muslims long ago as a form of respect for the saints by sending prayers at their tomb. Many of the Muslims even do *ziarah wali* as an annual activity because it has been considered as a tradition with religious and spiritual values. These days *ziarah wali* is still popular as evidenced by the more crowded the locations of the saint's tomb. One of the locations that still has many visitors is Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan Tomb. Such phenomenon is very interesting to be researched because there must be factors and reasons contribute to the popularity of *ziarah wali*, so people in modern era are still attracted to perform and engage with this practice. Therefore, this article discusses how does the tradition of *ziarah wali* thrive in modern era, a case study in Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan Tomb. This is a qualitative study implementing observation and interview as the method of data collection. The results show that the tradition of *ziarah wali* persists in today's modern era, a case study at the tomb of Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan because it is a multipurpose activity, has several symbolic meanings and is an impactful practice.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with a majority of Muslim population. In Indonesia, Islam grows and develops by the influence of local culture or traditions. In practice, religious activities are often harmonized with traditional values contributing to the internalization of spiritual values against tradition and vice versa. Take *ziarah wali*, the tradition of pilgrimage to the tomb of the guardians, as an example. The word pilgrimage (*ziarah*) comes from Arabic which means to visit. However, the pilgrimage in Indonesia is frequently intended as a visiting the graves of parents or family, guardians, or pious people to send prayers. Hence, the term pilgrimage per se, without adding *grave*, denotes the meaning of a pilgrimage to the grave (Anam, 2015). Meanwhile, the term "grave" in Indonesia is often used interchangeably with a tomb of a person who gained a certain social status in their life, such as the ulama and guardians (Anam, 2015).

The tradition of pilgrimage to the guardian's tomb has become a religious part of the Muslim community in Indonesia since it has been passed down across generations. People perform *ziarah wali* individually or in groups. *Ziarah wali* is not only carried out within particular Islamic noble months but also at any time of the year. What is more, certain social groups such as recitation groups, mosque congregations, or community associations deliberately schedule *ziarah wali* as an annual activity. This reflects that *ziarah wali* has a special place for the Muslim community in this country.

Based on its history, the Indonesian Muslim community's strong and habitual liking for doing *ziarah wali* comes from the belief that *wali* or guardians are exceptional humans, appointed by Allah who are close to Allah (Rohimi, 2019). *Wali* are believed to have privileges and *karomah* (dignity) that can give goodness to others. Therefore, the main purpose of the community in performing *ziarah wali* is to send their prayers

through the guardian to be conveyed directly to Allah. *Wali* in Indonesia have a heroic story for the great service in spreading and developing Islam. The Indonesian Muslim community consider a *wali* as a religious figure and is highly respected.

One of the famous *wali* in Indonesia is Syaikhona Kholil, a religious figure from Bangkalan, Madura. Syaikhona Kholil is not only famous in Madura, but also outside Madura. This is because of his struggle in spreading Islam (Zulmi M, Alzani & Ali Haidar, 2013). Although he is not one of the *Wali Songo*, Syaikhona Kholil has a very important position and role among Indonesian Muslims for the high advantages that make him respected by many. Syaikhona Kholil has a boarding school with a large number of students. As a religious figure, he also did a lot of *da'wah* (spreading Islamic teachings) and wrote several Islamic books (Marli, 2016). A number of stories tells that Syaikhona Kholil has some *karomah* that surpasses human's reason, but happened factually (Zulmi M, Alzani & Ali Haidar, 2013). For his contribution to Islam in Indonesia and for his *karomah*, Syaikhona Kholil is still remembered and respected to this day. The tomb of Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan is also one of the pilgrimage destinations for the Indonesian Muslim community. Thousands of daily visitors who come from various regions in Indonesia regularly visit his tomb for sending prayers.

Unfortunately, in the modern era like today, there has been a shift in the way of thinking where most people glorify modernity and start to leave something traditional. This is due to the views on traditional activity is considered ancient or outdated. Religious matters are also more and more abandoned because people are also starting to believe in technology and rational affairs. According to the theory of Geertz and Riaz Hassan (in Ismail, 2016), the more modern a society is, the more likely they abandon religious practices. However, this theory does not seem to apply to the tradition of *ziarah wali* in Indonesia. As today, *ziarah wali* is still performed by majority of Indonesian Muslim community. One of these facts can be traced back at the location of the tomb of Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan which has never been emptied of visitors. Not only at special moments, numerous visitors come to the tomb of Syaikhona Kholil on a daily basis.

The clash of these two facts then becomes very interesting to study. Modernity seems unable to shift the tradition of *ziarah wali* that has been carried out by the Indonesian Muslim community for a long time. Related to this phenomenon, this study intends to find out why the tradition of *ziarah wali* persists in today's modern era, a case study at the tomb of Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan. The significance of this study is to support the development of Halal tourism in Bangkalan Regency, Madura.

Research on this topic has never been done before. Several previous studies have examined Syaikhona Kholil but from a different research topic, mostly are about his biography and his contributions to the development of Islam in Madura. While the topic of *ziarah wali* had been studied by several researchers with various perspectives and research locations, but none of them discussing the tradition of *ziarah wali* in modern era, a case study at the tomb of Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with ethnography approach. A descriptive qualitative method enables to understand a social reality from the perspective of research subjects (Nassaji, 2015). Besides, it can provide a detailed description, interpretation, and explanation of an issue which in this case is about locating the tradition of *ziarah wali* in modern era: a case study in Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan tomb. Ethnography is concerned with the study of a particular culture, either partially or mainly, on participant observation. Ethnography is concerned with the study of a particular culture, partly or mainly, on participatory observation (researchers immerse themselves in the habits and lives of the sample being studied and record their observations in extensive field notes) (Crowley, 2009). The method of data collection in this study includes observation and interviews. The data analysis involves interpretation of meaning. It

means that the researcher commits to interpret texts not only the data gathered from observations, interviews, etc., but also from previous experience and role in research. The observation and interviews were done in Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan tomb on September-Oktober, 2022. In analysing the data, this study implements two theoretical frameworks. They are religion and social theory and the theory of sociocultural psychology. The data analysis was done by sorting the data obtained, synthesizing the data, describe and analyze the data. The last step for the data analysis is drawing a conclusion to summarize the results of the research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Tradition of *Ziarah Wali* is a Multipurpose Activity

Indonesia has diverse religious traditions due to the strong cultural and religious values of Islam in its society. However, not all religious traditions can survive in the modern era. There are many religious traditions that are abandoned because considered as having no relevance to modern people's lives. One of the characteristics of modern people is busy. They are competing to be productive so they don't want to waste their time. Activities that are time-consuming will be left, including some of the religious traditions such as ceremonial activities and rituals. Modern society prefers religious traditions that have direct positive impacts on their lives.

Ziarah wali is a religious tradition that has many dimensions in its practices. *Ziarah wali* is used both individually and as a group, as a medium to achieve various goals. The tradition of *ziarah wali* has so many benefits and is impactful for the socio-religious transformation of the society (Khosiah, 2020). Besides, *ziarah wali* is also timeless, because the practices are adaptable to changes and can be modified according to the expectations of the modern society.

The popularity of *ziarah wali* among modern people persists due to several reasons. The first reason is because *ziarah wali* is a multipurpose activity. When carrying out the tradition of *ziarah wali*, the main activity is to perform spirituality. This is because the main purpose of *ziarah wali* is to send prayers through the guardian to be conveyed directly to Allah. In doing spiritual work, there are several activities besides prayer. These activities include reading the Qur'an, dhikr, and listening to religious lectures. These spiritual activities can be clearly seen in the tomb of Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan. The main activity, sending prayers, are usually done in groups. At Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan's tomb, religious nuances are very evident as visitors recite the readings of the dhikr aloud.

In addition to sending prayers, reading Qur'an and dhikr, a popular activity for visitors is studying history. This fact can be seen in Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan tomb. There is a tomb keeper or known as "Juru Kunci" who provides information about the life history of Syaikhona Kholi and his struggle in spreading Islam in Indonesia. Visitors can learn spirituality, struggle, and life values that can be applied to everyday life.

Furthermore, *ziarah wali* nowadays evolves to more interesting activity when tourism is included (Anam, 2015). This shows that *ziarah wali* is not only done for visiting the guardian's tomb, but also for pleasure. The popular term for these activities is called religious tourism. Religious tourism is a new phenomenon that is rapidly gaining popularity among the Indonesian Muslim community. Religious tourism is the journey of individuals, groups or communities to places considered important for enhancing spirituality. Others define religious tourism as either a short trip to a destination other than one's place of residence, or working to visit religious sites such as places of worship, tombs and heritage sites (Latif & Usman, 2021).

Religious tourism activities are also available as a means of family recreation and vacation (Anam, 2015). Some community groups take school holidays and public holidays to organize religious tourism activities. Religious tourism can be done in individuals as well as in groups that use public transportation such as buses to visit some of the famous *wali* tombs (Ismail, 2016). This phenomenon is clearly observable in the tomb of Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan. A lot of buses stop at Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan tomb parking lot every day, not only during holidays. Visitors come from different parts of Indonesia. Their purpose is not only for doing *ziarah*, but also tourism. There is a shopping area where the visitors can buy souvenirs and special products.

Religious tourism greatly contributes to the development of *ziarah wali* nowadays. The government and private sector are helping to rehabilitate infrastructure, especially roads, to make it easily accessible for visitors. The visitation of visitors from various places undoubtedly benefits the people around the tomb, and its economic value can be calculated (Anam, 2015).

The above elaboration shows that the *ziarah wali* is a tradition with various activities within it. In performing the tradition of *ziarah wali*, Indonesian Muslim communities not only pray, but also learn about history and religious values. Besides, *ziarah wali* can also be used as a tourism activity. Thus, the Indonesian Muslim community also benefits from entertainment and recreation.

Ziarah Wali Has Many Symbolic Meanings

According to Clifford Geertz (in Fuad, 2013), Religion is a system of symbols applied to society. These symbols have meanings that manifest themselves in the form of representations of the realities of life that are considered part of the culture. *Ziarah wali* is the result of a transformation of religion and tradition that symbolizes meaning. Every activity that takes place in tradition must have meaning. Those who practice a tradition may not be aware or understand the implications of the tradition they are practicing. There are some groups of people who carry on traditions simply because they follow existing customs. However, many practice their traditions with full awareness.

First, the tradition of *ziarah wali* symbolizes a person's spiritual and religious level (Mardiyana, et.al, 2021). Although this tradition is very popular in the Indonesian Muslim community, not all Muslims practice this tradition. This tradition is based on each individual's choice. Activities in *ziarah wali* are so strongly influenced by religious values that those who practice this tradition are considered to be of high spiritual and religious level. why? The Guardian Pilgrimage tradition requires prayer, dhikr and the ability to read the Qur'an. Therefore, when someone carries out the tradition of *ziarah wali*, they are people of great religious ability.

At Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan's tomb, all visitors were seen solemnly reading the Quran, reading dhikr and various prayers in Arabic. This reality shows that those who do *ziarah wali* have a good understanding of the teachings of Islam. They understand that sending prayers for the guardian of Allah can bring good blessings in their lives. This, of course, means that *ziarah wali* equates to a person's level of spirituality and religion.

Secondly, the tradition of *ziarah wali* may signify a yearning for the Prophet Muhammad or the guardians of Allah. Some Muslims believe that a pilgrimage to the Guardian's Tomb is almost as worthwhile as a pilgrimage to the Tomb of the Prophet Muhammad in Mecca. The yearning for the pilgrimage to the Tomb of the Prophet is indeed irreplaceable, and the pilgrimage to the guardian's tomb is a kind of antidote to the yearning for Muslims who are away from the Holy Land, Mecca (Anam, 2015). It cannot be denied that Indonesian Muslims are religious Muslims. They wanted to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. But one of them is that many of the Indonesian Muslim community are unable to do this due to the economic situation. A pilgrimage to the guardian's tomb is therefore an alternative that allows you to pray at places that are considered noble.

Thirdly, *ziarah wali* is performed by the Indonesian Muslim community as a reminder to their death. *Ziarah wali* tells Muslims that later they will also experience death (Asmaran, 2018). *Ziarah wali* symbolizes that death exists and that the world is only a temporary place. Therefore, people must carefully carry out their role in this world. Several groups led by *Ustadz* (religious teacher) were seen at the tomb of Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan. After the prayer and dhikr, some of the group received a speech from the *Ustadz* who was leading the gathering. They are reminded of death and the importance of doing good while living in this world.

In addition, some Indonesian Muslim community groups have made the tradition of *ziarah wali* a symbol of the Da'wa (Mardiyana, et.al, 2021). *Ziarah wali* is used to reach, invite or call on Muslims to learn and practice the teachings of their religion in their daily lives. *Ziarah wali* which has strong Islamic religious values can represent the Islamic religion with its various virtues. The meaning of this symbol is very important, as *ziarah wali* is seen not only as a tradition, but also as a vehicle for further strengthening the values of Islamic teachings.

At Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan's tomb, all visitors show an attitude of mutual respect even though they come from different places. They also give alms which later will be given to those in need. This shows that the *ziarah wali* is not just a tradition, but there are many other Islamic religious values that can show the glory of Islam. This is of course can be considered as a da'wah.

Ziarah Wali is an Impactful Practice

A powerful tradition with religious values, the tradition of *ziarah wali* has immediate benefits for those who undertake it. Modern society is made up of busy and hard-working people. Many of them have various life problems that sometimes are difficult to solve. This can cause stress in their lives. In this context, people who surrender to Allah for their faith, will demonstrate strong belief that Allah will show the way of light to solve their problems. *Ziarah wali* can be done as a way to get closer to Allah.

The tradition of *ziarah wali* can have a psychological effect on those who do it. The believe of having intimate relationship with Allah through prayer, dhikr, or reading the Qur'an in front of the tomb of one's Allah's guardian is uplifting and motivating, which influences emotional stability. This stable emotional state helps those who follow the tradition of *ziarah wali* to be calmer and wiser in dealing with life's problems (Yuliyatun, 2015). After doing *ziarah wali*, most people feel that they are experiencing enlightenment, they are closer to Allah, they live more optimistically, and their lives feel lighter.

Based on interviews with some visitors at Syaikhona Kholi Bangkalan tomb, they said that visiting the guardian's tomb gives them peace of mind. By doing *ziarah wali*, they take a break from their daily lives. They spend their time praying and reading the Qur'an. Additionally, *ziarah wali* is done with family and friends can restore intimacy, so that these moments of unity can bring peace. The psychological benefits that can be felt from the tradition of *ziarah wali* show that this tradition has a positive impact. The effect is immediately noticeable. After the Wali pilgrimage, the faces of the pilgrims look fresher and calmer. It turns out that there is a positive change in mood between them. Reflection during the pilgrimage also produces a more stable emotional state than before the pilgrimage.

CONCLUSION

Tradition tends to close with people at the past. Modern people think that tradition is time consuming and not very profitable. As such, there are many traditions that have been gradually abandoned and do not survive in today's modern world. But the tradition of *ziarah wali* reveals a different fact. This can be seen in

the always crowded areas of the Guardian Tomb, such as at Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan's tomb. The Indonesian Muslim community continues to carry out this tradition due to several factors.

The primary reason that the tradition of *ziarah wali* continues to grow and is still practiced by people today is that it involves many activities. *Ziarah wali* is more than just a religious tradition that emphasizes spiritual activity. *Ziarah wali* can also be used as an arena to learn about history and tourism. This, of course, is an attraction for people. Secondly, the tradition of *ziarah wali* has survived to this day as it is one of the religious traditions full of meaningful symbols. *Ziarah wali* is a symbol of a person's spiritual and religious level, a symbol of the death reminder, and a form of da'wah. Thirdly, *ziarah wali* can have positive psychological effects that can be felt directly. By doing *ziarah wali*, people can get closer to Allah through prayers and reading the Quran, so they can achieve peace. All those reasons are the factors why the tradition of *ziarah wali* persists in today's modern era, a case study at the tomb of Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan.

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