

Crossing Two Traditions: Ramadan Experiences and Transnational Identity Formation of Egyptian BIPA Students

Taufan Januardi^{1*}

¹ UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: taufanjanuardi@gmail.com

Abstract: This study explores the religious and sociocultural experiences of Egyptian foreign learners (BIPA students) during Ramadan in Indonesia. Drawing upon a multidisciplinary framework that integrates the sociology of religion, intercultural communicative competence, and acculturation theories, this research examines how these learners navigate the intersections of a shared faith and local culture. A qualitative descriptive approach with a phenomenological lens was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews conducted between December 2022 and August 2023 with eight Egyptian students funded by the KNB and Darmasiswa scholarships across various Indonesian universities. The findings demonstrate that despite facing minor initial sociocultural shocks regarding local dietary habits and distinct logistical dynamics, the informants actively adapted to unique Indonesian Ramadan traditions. These include participating in “*ngabuburit*” (the communal wait for iftar), engaging in communal fast-breaking at local mosques, and adjusting to local Tarawih prayer variations. Furthermore, a significant phenomenon of bidirectional cultural transference occurred; the learners deeply internalized Indonesian religious material culture, adopting local garments such as the “*baju koko*”, “*sarung*”, and “*mukena*”. Remarkably, these behavioral and material adaptations persisted even after they returned to Egypt, where they continued to practice active socialization and utilize Indonesian prayer attire. The study concludes that the intersection of shared Islamic identity and Indonesian hospitality facilitates deep, transformative acculturation, fostering a lasting transnational connection that establishes Indonesia as a “second home” for foreign learners.

Keywords: Acculturation; BIPA Learners; Cultural Transference; Egyptian Students; Ramadan in Indonesia.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the Indonesian for Foreign Speakers program (Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing, or BIPA) has grown into more than a language-teaching instrument; it now functions as a channel of cultural diplomacy that brings foreign students into direct contact with the social and religious life of Indonesian society. Scholarship schemes such as the Developing Countries Partnership (KNB) and the Darmasiswa program open the way for students from many countries, Egypt among them, to live and study within Indonesian society long enough to experience a full annual cycle of religious life — Ramadan being one of its most significant moments.

For Egyptian students, arriving in Indonesia means bringing along an already well-formed religious repertoire: they come from one of the world’s foremost centres of Islamic learning, carrying fasting and worship practices shaped by a distinctly Middle Eastern Ramadan tradition. When that repertoire meets Indonesia’s local expression of Islam — one enriched by centuries of acculturation with Nusantara (archipelagic) culture — a unique point of contact emerges: a shared theological and ritual foundation set against differences in form, rhythm, and festive atmosphere. Ngabuburit, communal iftar at neighbourhood mosques, variation in the number of Tarawih raka’at, and prayer attire such as the baju koko, sarong, and mukena are among the more visible markers of that difference.

The phenomenon is worth studying precisely because it does not end with a passing adjustment. Field data gathered by the author show that a number of Egyptian students who once studied BIPA in Indonesia continue to hold on to habits and material symbols acquired during their Ramadan in Indonesia long after returning home — from prayer attire to the patience and hospitality they observed among Indonesians. This points to an acculturation process that is not purely one-directional but reciprocal and ongoing, one that may well leave behind a lasting transnational identity.

Existing BIPA scholarship published through Indonesia’s official language institutions — the Journal of Indonesian for Foreign Speakers (JBIPA) and Ranah: Jurnal Kajian Bahasa, both issued by the Language Development and Cultivation Agency under the Ministry of Education and Culture — together with the textbook Pembelajaran BIPA (Suyitno, 2021), has so far concentrated on linguistic issues, communication strategies, and teaching-material development. The verbal and non-verbal communication strategies used by Filipino BIPA learners at UNS’s Language Unit, for instance, have been examined elsewhere (Purwiyanti et al., 2017), while much of the JBIPA literature has focused on cultural-immersion approaches and locally grounded teaching materials. Research that specifically addresses the religious experience and sociology-of-religion dimension of BIPA learners remains comparatively scarce, and this study is intended to contribute to that underexplored angle.

Building on this background, the study addresses three central questions: first, how Egyptian BIPA students

make sense of and navigate the meeting point between shared Islamic faith and the distinctiveness of Indonesian Ramadan culture; second, what forms of sociocultural adaptation and material cultural transference emerge in the process; and third, to what extent this experience gives rise to a transnational identity that persists after their return to Egypt. This paper presents part of the findings of the author's master thesis. It aims to map the dynamics of that acculturation in depth through a phenomenological lens, while also offering a theoretical contribution by linking the sociology of religion, intercultural communicative competence, and acculturation theory within a field of BIPA studies that has, until now, leaned far more heavily on linguistic-pedagogical concerns than on the social and religious lives of its learners.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

1. Religion as a Site of Cultural Encounter

Religion, on this view, is at its core a social fact: it is born and celebrated collectively, and it is precisely in such communal moments that a group's social bonds are renewed (Durkheim, 1995). This idea has been taken further by describing religion as a system of symbols that shapes human moods and motivations while lending a "factual gloss" to a particular conception of how existence is ordered (Geertz, 1973). Seen this way, religion never exists in a cultural vacuum; it is always realized through the local idiom of each community that holds it. Nusantara Islam took shape through a long process of acculturation with local tradition, so that its face inevitably differs from the Islam that grew up on the Arabian Peninsula or in Egypt, even though both stand on the same creed and law (Azra, 2002). Ramadan, as a communal religious institution, becomes the moment where that theological commonality is most visibly brought face to face with cultural diversity — making it an apt site for observing intercultural encounter within a shared religious frame.

2. Joachim Wach's Theory of Religious Experience

Religious experience is not merely the product of a particular belief or doctrine but a phenomenon born of the encounter between human beings and transcendent reality, and can therefore only be understood through individuals' own lived experience (Wach, 1958). Three propositions from this theory serve as the analytical lens for this study (Wach, 1958). First, phenomenological experience: understanding religion requires understanding the concrete experience an individual undergoes within the context of their own life. Second, the plurality of experience: religious experience varies from one individual and one group to another, even within the same time and place. Third, the role of culture in religious experience: religious experience is never separable from the cultural context in which the individual lives, since it is culture that shapes how a person understands and expresses their own religiosity.

3. Max Weber's Theory of Social Action

In the theory of social action, human action is understood to carry subjective meaning and to be oriented toward others; an individual does not simply perform an act but invests it with a motive directed at some intended end (Weber, 1978). This framework helps read the Egyptian students' participation in Indonesian Ramadan traditions not as passive mimicry but as meaningful action grounded in both religious and social motives — among them the wish to belong, to feel accepted, and to live out a sense of togetherness as fellow Muslims.

4. The Theory of Religious Symbol Systems

Drawing on a reading of Clifford Geertz, religion is understood here as a symbol system that functions to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in people by formulating a conception of the general order of existence (Pals, 2011). Cultural patterns, as symbol systems, are external to the individual yet supply conceptions that are subsequently internalized. Ramadan-specific practices — Tarawih prayer, ngabuburit, sharing takjil, and prayer attire such as the mukena, sarong, and peci — are read in this study as religious symbols dense with meaning, symbols the Egyptian students have continued to carry out even after returning to their home country.

5. Acculturation and Transnational Identity

As a complementary frame, this study also draws on an acculturation model holding that an integration strategy — retaining one's original cultural values while actively adopting elements of a new culture — tends to proceed more smoothly where a shared foundation of identity already exists, in this case a shared Islamic identity (Berry, 1997). The persistence of Indonesian-style Ramadan habits after informants returned to Egypt can likewise be read through the lens of transnationalism (Vertovec, 2009): the capacity of individuals to build and sustain

social and cultural ties across national borders, such that the identity formed is no longer singular but dual and fluid.

6. Culture Shock and Intercultural Communicative Competence in BIPA Research

The culture shock experienced by foreign learners is commonly read through four stages — honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment (Oberg, 1960). This framework also appears in recent BIPA scholarship, which shows that language barriers and unfamiliar food are the main sources of culture shock during the crisis phase among BIPA learners, with knock-on effects on their learning motivation (Wahyudi & Kusuma, 2026). A similar pattern is reported among Thai foreign students in an Islamic religious-education setting, where language proves to be one of the most common forms of culture shock foreign students in Indonesia encounter (Bisri et al., 2022). From the standpoint of intercultural communicative competence, the verbal and non-verbal communication strategies — borrowing English vocabulary and using gesture, among others — that Filipino BIPA learners use to bridge communication gaps with instructors and fellow students have also been documented (Purwiyanti et al., 2017). Taken together, these three studies reinforce the relevance of culture-shock and intercultural-communicative-competence frameworks as a complementary analytical lens for reading the Egyptian informants' early experience in this study, while also confirming that sociocultural adaptation remains a growing theme within Indonesian BIPA research.

Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a phenomenological lens, aimed at uncovering the essential meaning of informants' lived experience of Ramadan in Indonesia. The research subjects were eight Egyptian foreign students, recipients of the Developing Countries Partnership (KNB) and Darmasiswa scholarships, spread across several Indonesian universities: Universitas Gadjah Mada, Universitas Negeri Malang, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Universitas Padjadjaran, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, and Universitas Islam Indonesia. None of the informants had ever visited Indonesia before, so their BIPA studies represented an entirely new cross-cultural experience.

The eight informants were Radwa Mohamed, Hanem Elhosseiny, Aya Mohamed, Arwa Bahaaeldin, Mohamed Ali, Islam Ragab, Rania Khalid, and Fatimah Jamal, whose length of residence in Indonesia ranged from one to five years. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted between 10 December 2022 and 5 August 2023, a window broad enough to cover informants' experiences before, during, and after their time observing Ramadan in Indonesia, including post-return experience in Egypt for those who had already completed their studies.

Table 1. Informant Profiles and Length of Residence in Indonesia

Informant	Host University	Field of Study	City	Years in Indonesia
Radwa Mohamed	Universitas Gadjah Mada	Indonesian Language and Literature	Yogyakarta	1 year
Hanem Elhosseiny	Universitas Negeri Malang	Arabic Language Education	Malang	4 years
Aya Mohamed	Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta	Undergraduate studies	Surakarta (Solo)	4 years
Arwa Bahaaeldin	Universitas Padjadjaran	Communication Studies (graduate)	Bandung	5 years
Mohamed Ali	Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang	Indonesian Language Education	Malang	5 years
Islam Ragab	Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia	Indonesian Language Education (graduate)	Bandung	3 years
Rania Khalid	UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta	Graduate studies	Yogyakarta	3.5 years
Fatimah Jamal	Universitas Islam Indonesia	Undergraduate studies	Yogyakarta	2 years

Note. Length of residence reflects the period elapsed at the time of each informant's interview, conducted between December 2022 and August 2023.

Length of Residence and the Depth of Acculturation

As Table 1 shows, informants' length of residence in Indonesia ranged from one to five years, and this variation offers a useful, if imperfect, lens on the depth of acculturation reported in the sections that follow. Mohamed Ali and Arwa Bahaaeldin, the two longest-resident informants at five years each, supplied by far the

most granular accounts of Indonesian Ramadan practice, down to specific differences between religious organizations and specific dishes eaten at specific times of night. Radwa Mohamed, by contrast, had spent only a single year in Indonesia at the time of her interview yet reported an adaptation almost as thorough — a discrepancy best explained not by residence length alone but by her prior study of Indonesian language and her earlier contact with Indonesian nationals in Egypt, which had already done much of the acculturative work before she ever arrived.

This pattern suggests that duration of stay functions as one input among several into the acculturation process examined here, rather than as its sole determinant. Consistent with an integration model in which prior familiarity with the host culture's language and people can accelerate the same adaptive trajectory that longer residence would otherwise produce more gradually (Berry, 1997), this finding qualifies, without contradicting, the general expectation that longer exposure to a host culture yields deeper acculturation.

Data analysis proceeded through phenomenological reduction: identifying meaningful statements in the interview transcripts, grouping those statements into essential themes — initial experience, encountering local Ramadan traditions, adoption of prayer attire, influence on religious behaviour, and post-return continuity — and composing a textural-structural description that captures the shared essence of the informants' experience. Quotations from informants are presented in this paper in English translation from the original Indonesian transcripts, retaining their conversational register wherever possible.

Results and Discussion

1. Pathways to Indonesia and the Ease of Initial Adjustment

Before turning to the culture shock informants experienced upon arrival, it is worth tracing the different roads that brought them to Indonesia in the first place, since those roads shaped how readily each informant settled in. Radwa Mohamed, for instance, had already studied Indonesian language in Egypt and interacted with Indonesian nationals there before she ever set foot in the country; that prior exposure meant her early adjustment involved comparatively few obstacles. Rania Khalid's path was more circuitous: a nine-day volunteer placement in Malaysia gave her a first taste of Southeast Asia, a friend's stories about Indonesia then drew her curiosity, and she went on to study Indonesian at the Indonesian Cultural Center in Cairo before winning a Darmasiswa scholarship — a sequence of small steps that, by the time she arrived, had already primed her for the culture she was about to enter.

Aya Mohamed described choosing Indonesia over destinations in Europe for reasons that were as much about safety and shared faith as about language: a Muslim-majority country, she reasoned, would pose fewer adaptation difficulties than a European one, while also giving her the chance to deepen her Indonesian alongside the many other foreign students she expected to meet there. Arwa Bahaaeldin and Islam Ragab likewise reported that, despite early difficulties adjusting to local custom, the process of settling in eased markedly once they discovered how thoroughly mosques and prayer spaces are woven into everyday Indonesian life; for both of them, this meant that daily worship, at least, presented no obstacle at all from the outset.

Fatimah Jamal's path stands out for the interruption it took: a severe illness forced her to return to Egypt for five months of treatment, and it was only after that recovery that she came back to Indonesia with what she described as renewed motivation. Read together, these varied pathways — prior language study, circuitous exposure through a third country, a deliberate choice grounded in shared faith, and a return from a health-related interruption — indicate that ease of adjustment was less a function of any single trait than of the degree to which each informant's biography had already, in ways large or small, prepared them for a Muslim-majority host society. This is consistent with the observation that an integration strategy proceeds most smoothly where a foundation of shared identity already exists (Berry, 1997); here, that foundation was reinforced, case by case, by informants' own prior encounters with Indonesia or with the wider Muslim world beyond Egypt.

2. Initial Experience: Adjusting to Eating Habits and Social Rhythm

The culture shock informants experienced upon first arriving was minor and centred on two areas: eating habits and local social rhythm. Aya Mohamed, a student at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, said her main difficulties were the climate and unfamiliar food, so that in the early period she only dared try a handful of Indonesian dishes. Islam Ragab, a student at UPI Bandung, faced comparable difficulties with food and public transport, which he found far less extensive than in Egypt:

A little. Public transport here isn't as extensive as it is in Egypt. (I. Ragab, personal interview, 18 July 2023)

By contrast, a number of informants found adaptation relatively easy, either because their daily rhythm resembled that of parts of Egypt or because they had already studied Indonesian language and culture before departing. Islam Ragab, for example, remarked:

For me it was easy to adapt, because the pattern of life in Indonesia is similar to Upper Egypt — waking up at dawn and sleeping early, for instance. (I. Ragab, personal interview, 18 July 2023)

Hanem Elhosseiny, who had lived in Malang for four years, observed a striking contrast in the social rhythm of Ramadan: in Egypt people tend to cook and break their fast at home and stay up until close to dawn, so the streets fall quiet as Maghrib approaches but grow lively afterward; in Indonesia, by contrast, life carries on as usual, with people sleeping and waking earlier — a pattern she in fact considered better. This mild, temporary culture shock is consistent with the observation that religious experience is always bound up with the cultural context in which it unfolds (Wach, 1958); a shared Islamic identity appears to have provided an anchor of meaning that softened the intensity of cross-cultural disorientation the informants experienced.

3. Encountering and Taking Part in Indonesia's Distinctive Ramadan Traditions

All eight informants recognized and could name a range of practices distinctive to Ramadan in Indonesia, among them ngabuburit, sharing takjil, communal iftar, Tarawih, tadarus, shaking hands after prayer, takbiran, mudik (the homecoming exodus), and salawatan (collective praise-singing). Mohamed Ali, a student at Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang who had by then spent five years in Indonesia, put it this way:

For activities, well, there's ngabuburit before breaking the fast, and Tarawih, where the number of raka'at is different — in Egypt it's usually eleven — and then there are a lot of religious study sessions during Ramadan that I enjoy, and also bukber, breaking the fast together; for food it's usually the iced drinks people buy before iftar, like es buah, and I also love takbiran night in Indonesia. (M. Ali, personal interview, 6 July 2023)

The variation in the number of Tarawih raka'at across Indonesian religious organizations came up repeatedly as a new experience for the informants. Mohamed Ali explained that in Indonesia some congregations pray eleven raka'at and others twenty-three, while the imam's recitation is generally far shorter than in Egypt, where the entire Qur'an is typically completed by the end of Ramadan. Aya Mohamed likewise pointed to this variation:

Tarawih here comes in two kinds — some do two raka'at with a salam, others do four raka'at with one salam. (A. Mohamed, personal interview, 17 July 2023)

Communal iftar at the mosque emerged as one of the most widely favoured traditions, precisely because it is uncommon in Egypt. Islam Ragab explained that things such as the festivities welcoming Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr, as well as iftar gatherings at mosques, were experiences he had never encountered at home, since in Egypt communal iftar at mosques generally happens only at Ma'idatul Rahman, a charitable table set up for those in need. Fatimah Jamal, a student at Universitas Islam Indonesia, echoed a similar impression:

I often do ngabuburit, pray Tarawih at the mosque and then shake hands with friends afterward... I also often join bukber and hand out takjil at traffic lights. (F. Jamal, personal interview, 20 July 2023)

Radwa Mohamed of Universitas Gadjah Mada likewise described the range of activities she took part in during Ramadan in Indonesia:

Worshipping together with fellow Muslims at the mosque, ngabuburit, Tarawih, tadarus, shaking hands after prayer, mudik, communal iftar, meeting up with Arab friends, and breaking the fast together while reciting the Qur'an. (R. Mohamed, personal interview, 18–19 July 2023)

Shaking hands after prayer was likewise cited as a distinctive habit uncommon in Egypt, one the informants nonetheless went on to adopt, both during and outside Ramadan. Meanwhile, the diversity of religious practice — including differing determinations of Eid al-Fitr's date among Indonesian religious organizations — briefly confused some informants, as Fatimah Jamal recounted, though it was ultimately understood as part of the experience of religious diversity and tolerance in Indonesia.

4. Ramadan Culinary Culture as Symbol and Practice

Food occupied a central place in how informants came to know, and eventually embrace, Indonesian Ramadan life. The same students who, in the honeymoon-to-crisis phase described above, hesitated over unfamiliar dishes went on to name an extensive repertoire of Ramadan-specific fare among their favourites: the sweet coconut-milk dessert kolak, the iced fruit mixture es buah or sop buah sold by streetside vendors just before Maghrib, an assortment of candied sweets (manisan) and fried snacks (gorengan), and, around Eid, the rice cake ketupat. Several informants noted that their embrace of Indonesian food did not stop at the Ramadan table: nasi goreng, soto, ayam geprek, ayam bakar, martabak, tahu, and tempe had all, by the time of the interviews, become part of their regular diet well outside the fasting month.

This progression — from Aya Mohamed's and Islam Ragab's early caution around unfamiliar food to a later, broader culinary embrace — traces the honeymoon-crisis-recovery-adjustment arc that Oberg (1960) associates with culture shock, but it also illustrates something more specific to Ramadan itself. Read through an account of Geertzian symbol systems (Pals, 2011), the takjil purchased at a roadside stall in the last hour before iftar is never merely a snack; it is an edible marker of belonging to the shared moment of fast-breaking, one the informants could purchase, prepare, and eventually crave in ways that carried them well past simple dietary tolerance and into genuine culinary attachment. In this sense, food functioned alongside prayer attire as a second, no less tangible, channel through which Indonesian Ramadan culture was internalized.

5. Ma'idatul Rahman and the Institutional Logic of Charitable Iftar

Communal iftar emerged, as noted above, as one of the traditions informants prized most precisely because it has no close equivalent in Egypt. Mohamed Ali's account of Ma'idatul Rahman helps explain why:

In Egypt there is Ma'idatul Rahman — a place where people break their fast for free on the street, set up either by a wealthy resident of that street or by the residents collectively. Anyone can eat there for free, every day of Ramadan. (M. Ali, personal interview, 6 July 2023)

Islam Ragab corroborated this picture, adding that communal fast-breaking inside a mosque itself is comparatively rare in Egypt, where Ma'idatul Rahman functions as the primary — almost the only — institutional channel for shared iftar.

The contrast with Indonesia is instructive. Where Egypt's Ma'idatul Rahman targets iftar assistance specifically at those in need through a charitable mechanism operating in public thoroughfares, Indonesia routes communal iftar through the mosque as a universal congregational event, open to worshippers of every economic background rather than reserved for the needy. Read through the view of religion as a social fact renewed through collective assembly (Durkheim, 1995), both institutions accomplish broadly the same end — the ritual affirmation of communal bonds through shared eating at the breaking of the fast — but they do so through different architectures: one anchored in charity toward the vulnerable, the other in congregational inclusion at the house of worship. For informants accustomed only to the first model, encountering the second was less a matter of culture shock than of discovering an alternative, and to their eyes appealing, way of institutionalizing the same underlying value.

6. Variation in Tarawih Practice Across Indonesian Religious Organizations

The raka'at variation introduced earlier deserves closer attention, since informants experienced it not merely as a numerical difference but as a first encounter with the organizational plurality of Indonesian Islam. Mohamed Ali explained that Tarawih at NU-affiliated mosques generally runs to twenty-three raka'at, while Muhammadiyah congregations favour eleven — the same number, he noted, that predominates in Egypt — and that he had never before prayed in the four-raka'at-per-salam format common at NU mosques until he encountered it in Indonesia. He added that recitation in Indonesian Tarawih tends to move considerably faster than in Upper Egypt, where imams commonly complete one to one-and-a-half juz in a single night's prayer over the course of Ramadan.

Rania Khalid's testimony adds a further, largely commercial dimension to this picture:

What I knew of Indonesian Ramadan culture — the fasting and the prayers, Tarawih and tahajud — was really not so different from Egypt. What was different was more a matter of tradition, like the Ramadan bazaars found in almost every city, which always start selling about an hour before we break the fast: kolak, fried snacks, all kinds of food. That is distinctly Indonesian, and something particular to Ramadan alone. (R. Khalid, personal interview, 20 July 2023)

Read alongside an account of Nusantara Islam's long history of acculturation with local tradition (Azra, 2002), the NU–Muhammadiyah divergence in Tarawih practice is best understood not as inconsistency but as a visible expression of Indonesian Islam's characteristic internal plurality — an organizational diversity that stood in some contrast to the comparatively uniform Tarawih practice informants had known at home, and one they came, over time, to navigate with ease rather than confusion.

7. Arabic Language, Al-Azhar, and Intercultural Exchange

Beyond ritual and material culture, several informants reflected on the linguistic dimension of the encounter between Egyptian and Indonesian Islam. Aya Mohamed observed that Arabic proficiency matters a great deal for Indonesian Muslims, since the core texts of Islamic scholarship are transmitted in that language, and she suggested that when Al-Azhar University sends instructors to teach in Indonesia, equipping them with Indonesian language skills in turn would allow them to teach far more effectively. Her comment points to a relationship of exchange that runs in both directions: Egyptian students acquiring Indonesian religious and material culture, and Indonesian Muslims, through institutions such as Al-Azhar, drawing on Egypt's tradition of Arabic-language Islamic scholarship.

This observation resonates with an account of the role Al-Azhar alumni play in strengthening ummah unity in Indonesia through the concept of wasathiyah, or moderation (Siswanto & Ngadri, 2022) — a role that depends, in practice, on some measure of linguistic and cultural fluency in both directions. Read through the framework of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997), Aya's suggestion effectively calls for a more reciprocal model of exchange than the one-directional linguistic accommodation that BIPA instruction, by its nature as a program for teaching Indonesian to foreigners, might otherwise seem to imply. Her remark, in other words, reframes the Egyptian–Indonesian Islamic relationship as a genuinely two-way exchange of religious knowledge and language, rather than one in which only the foreign student is expected to adapt.

8. Adopting Prayer Attire as Material Cultural Transference

One of this study's most significant findings is the bidirectional nature of material cultural transference. The informants did not merely adapt behaviourally; they deeply internalized distinctively Indonesian prayer attire — the baju koko, sarong, peci or kopiah, and mukena. Mohamed Ali explained why he came to favour the baju koko:

For clothing, I really love the baju koko — it's such a unique Muslim garment. It's accepted everywhere, and batik is lovely too, though it looks out of place in Arab countries; the baju koko, though, can still be worn comfortably outside the Arab world. All these Indonesian clothes — sarong, peci, baju koko — I wear them in daily life, during Ramadan and outside it as well. (M. Ali, personal interview, 8 July 2023)

The mukena was the single most frequently mentioned favourite garment, cited by both female and male informants alike. Radwa Mohamed, who had been accustomed to wearing the mukena even before living in Indonesia, said she still wears it in Egypt today. Islam Ragab, one of the male informants, explained his own appreciation of the mukena in terms of modesty:

I like the mukena because, to me, it's very modest for women. (I. Ragab, personal interview, 18 July 2023)

Hanem Elhosseiny offered both a practical and a cultural reason for her fondness for these garments:

I like the baju koko because it connects to Indonesian culture and has such a beautifully modern character at the same time. I also like the mukena because it's easy to carry anywhere, so I can pray wherever I am. (H. Elhosseiny, personal interview, 17 July 2023)

Fatimah Jamal, for her part, described the visual impression Indonesians' prayer attire left on her, one that made her feel surrounded by a solid Muslim community:

I love seeing girls wear the mukena, and the men wear sarongs and go to the mosque — it feels like this is a place where everyone is Muslim, everyone joins the prayer, so you're never alone. It really feels like a Muslim country, different from other countries, and that makes me more eager to go pray at the mosque. (F. Jamal, personal interview, 20 July 2023)

Read through the lens of religious symbol systems, these garments are not merely functional necessities for worship. They are symbols carrying a particular conception of the order of existence — modesty, simplicity, and piety — one the informants internalized personally to the point that it became part of their everyday lives, in Indonesia and after their return to Egypt alike.

9. Influence on Character and Religious Behaviour

Beyond shaping worship practice, Indonesia's Ramadan culture also left its mark on the informants' everyday character and conduct. Mohamed Ali described how the patience he observed in Indonesian society came to influence him personally:

Maybe Egyptians aren't as easygoing as Indonesians — so when it's hot during Ramadan and people are fasting, they get angry quickly; here in Indonesia it's still normal, nobody's getting angry in the street, whereas back home if you go outside you might find people fighting. Being here has influenced me too — I've become more used to staying calm, more patient. (M. Ali, personal interview, 8 July 2023)

Arwa Bahaaeldin, a graduate student at Universitas Padjadjaran, described how Indonesian hospitality made her feel welcomed and never lonely even during a period packed with coursework:

Living in Indonesia most of the time makes me feel more relaxed, because most Indonesians are so friendly — they smile, they like talking with foreigners — and I never felt sad or alone while I was in Indonesia. (A. Bahaaeldin, personal interview, 26 July 2023)

This shared religious experience with the host community aligns with the theory of social action (Weber, 1978): the Egyptian students' participation in Indonesia's Ramadan activities was not directionless behaviour but motivated action — a motive to feel accepted, to share in a sense of togetherness as fellow Muslims, and, in turn, a motive to keep that bond alive even once distance and time separated them from Indonesia.

10. Post-Ramadan Traditions: Eid al-Fitr, Halal bi Halal, and Mudik

The informants' engagement with Indonesian Ramadan culture did not end with the final night of Tarawih; it extended into the distinctly Indonesian rituals that accompany Eid al-Fitr itself. Mohamed Ali singled out halal bi halal, the post-Eid tradition of visiting and seeking mutual forgiveness among family, friends, and neighbours, as a custom he had come to genuinely enjoy, noting that it has no direct equivalent in Egyptian Eid practice. Several informants likewise pointed to mudik, the nationwide homecoming exodus that precedes Eid, as a uniquely Indonesian institution — one they had not encountered, in any comparable scale or organization, back home.

Not every part of this season was experienced as delightful discovery, however. Hanem Elhosseiny observed that Eid day itself, somewhat paradoxically, proved harder to navigate logistically than the rest of Ramadan: public transport thinned out considerably, and a number of shopping centres closed for the holiday, briefly limiting her mobility just when she might otherwise have wished to go out and join the festivities. Read through the third

proposition on the role of culture in religious experience (Wach, 1958), this finding suggests that even a single shared holy day — Eid al-Fitr, common to Egyptian and Indonesian Muslims alike — is given a locally specific ritual and logistical architecture, one that Egyptian informants had to learn to read anew each year, in halal bi halal gatherings, in the rhythm of mudik, and in the practical adjustments that Eid in Indonesia required of them.

11. Post-Return Continuity and Indonesia as a “Second Country”

The most striking finding of this study is that these behavioural and material adaptations continued even after informants returned to Egypt. Hanem Elhosseiny, who spent part of her time back in Egypt, said:

Ramadan really affects my behaviour — I seem more active than before, and I do the same rituals here in Egypt too. I like visiting relatives, praying at the mosque, and singing Islamic songs with friends, just like I used to in Indonesia. (H. Elhosseiny, personal interview, 17 July 2023)

Rania Khalid, a student at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta who had by then observed three Ramadans in Indonesia, explicitly described Indonesia as her “second country”:

Yes, for sure — honestly, Indonesia feels like a second country to me. (R. Khalid, personal interview, 20 July 2023)

The wish to observe Ramadan in Indonesia again was voiced consistently across all eight informants — from Mohamed Ali and Islam Ragab, who answered briefly but firmly, to Arwa Bahaeldin, who expressed her hope of returning, to Hanem Elhosseiny, who wanted to spend more than one more Ramadan in Indonesia because she was so struck by the cheerful, active spirit Indonesians kept up even while fasting. Fatimah Jamal summed it up with a double kind of longing — missing Ramadan in Indonesia as much as she missed Ramadan in Egypt — which, if anything, only confirms her position as someone now living out two Islamic traditions at once.

Read against the three propositions outlined above (Wach, 1958), these findings confirm that the informants’ phenomenological encounter with Indonesian Ramadan traditions — ngabuburit, communal iftar, variation in Tarawih — did not remain mere cognitive knowledge but became internalized as behavioural and affective dispositions that persisted across space and time. The plurality of experience shows up in the varied meanings individual informants attached to the same symbol: the mukena, for some no more than a practical requirement for prayer, for others a marker of modesty. And the role of culture in religious experience is plainly visible in how Indonesian customs of handshaking, visiting relatives, and salawatan were carried home and practised again by informants in their country of birth.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Egyptian BIPA students’ experience of Ramadan in Indonesia constitutes a deep, bidirectional process of acculturation rather than a simple one-way adjustment from home culture toward host culture. The minor initial culture shock — centred mainly on eating habits and social rhythm — was quickly resolved through active participation in Indonesia’s distinctive Ramadan traditions, including ngabuburit, communal iftar, tadarus, salawatan, and variation in Tarawih practice.

In keeping with the theory of social action (Weber, 1978), that participation was motivated action, not passive imitation. And in keeping with the three propositions on religious experience — phenomenological experience, plurality of experience, and the role of culture (Wach, 1958) — this study shows that the differences in tradition and ritual the Egyptian learners encountered in Indonesia were interpreted differently by each individual, yet consistently gave rise to new patterns of religious behaviour that continued to be practised even after their return to Egypt.

A transference of religious material culture also occurred, internalized personally by the informants and marked by their adoption of prayer attire — the baju koko, sarong, peci, and mukena — which they continued to wear after returning home. These findings confirm that a shared Islamic identity, combined with Indonesian social hospitality, can facilitate transformative acculturation and build a lasting transnational bond, as one informant put it herself in describing Indonesia as her “second country.”

This point is worth reading in a wider frame too. That informants kept wearing Indonesian prayer garments and repeating Indonesian devotional habits long after leaving the country is not just a personal quirk of memory. It says something about how resilient Nusantara Islam’s own expressions of piety really are. These practices did not fade once the informants left the country that produced them. They were carried to Egypt and lived out there, in a setting shaped by a much older Islamic tradition that many regard as more central to the faith (Azra, 2002). The direction of this transfer, moving outward from Southeast Asia rather than only inward, is worth noticing. Muslim societies today increasingly borrow from and influence one another in ways that no longer run along a single historical axis. Seen against that backdrop, the transnational habits documented in this study (Vertovec, 2009) offer a small but telling example of a regional Islamic tradition holding its own ground abroad instead of simply dissolving into a more dominant one.

Further research with a broader and more diverse set of informants, and inquiry extending beyond the Ramadan context, could enrich our understanding of how shared religious identity functions as a facilitator of

acculturation within international educational mobility.

References

- Azra, A. (2002). *Islam Nusantara: Jaringan Global dan Lokal* [Nusantara Islam: Global and Local Networks]. Mizan.
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46(1), 5–34.
- Bisri, K., et al. (2022). Culture shock dan adaptasi mahasiswa asing: Studi pada mahasiswa Thailand jurusan PAI UIN Walisongo Semarang [Culture shock and adaptation among foreign students: A study of Thai students in the Islamic Religious Education program, UIN Walisongo Semarang]. *Proceeding Annual Conference on Islamic Religious Education*, 2(1).
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Multilingual Matters.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Durkheim, E. (1995). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (K. E. Fields, Trans.). Free Press. (Original work published 1912).
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books.
- Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, Language Development and Cultivation Agency. (n.d.). *BIPA Daring: Portal Fasilitas Program Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing* [BIPA Online: Facilitation Portal for the Indonesian for Foreign Speakers Program]. Retrieved from <https://bipa.kemdikbud.go.id>
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods*. SAGE Publications.
- Oberg, K. (1960). Cultural shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology*, 7(4), 177–182.
- Pals, D. L. (2011). *Eight Theories of Religion* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Purwiyanti, Y., Suwandi, S., & Andayani, N. F. N. (2017). Strategi komunikasi pemelajar Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing (BIPA) asal Filipina [Communication strategies of Filipino learners of Indonesian for Foreign Speakers]. *Ranah: Jurnal Kajian Bahasa*, 6(2), 160–179. <https://doi.org/10.26499/rnh.v6i2.448>
- Siswanto, S., & Ngadri, N. (2022). Al-Azhar and moderate: Exploring the role of alumni Al-Azhar of Egypt in strengthening ummah unity in Indonesia through the concept of “Wasathiyyah”. *Religio Education*, 2(2), 116–132. <https://doi.org/10.17509/re.v2i2.52054>
- Suyitno, I. (2021). *Pembelajaran BIPA* [Teaching BIPA]. Refika Aditama.
- Vertovec, S. (2009). *Transnationalism*. Routledge.
- Wach, J. (1958). *The Comparative Study of Religions*. Columbia University Press.
- Wahyudi, I., & Kusuma, E. R. (2026). Dampak culture shock terhadap motivasi belajar dalam pembelajaran BIPA [The impact of culture shock on learning motivation in BIPA instruction]. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial, Ekonomi dan Pendidikan*, 2(2), 82–93.
- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (G. Roth & C. Wittich, Eds.). University of California Press.
- Januardi, T. (2024). [Title to be confirmed by the author] [Master’s Thesis — primary interview data source]. UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung.

This page is intentionally left blank.