FROM QUR'ANIC PHILOSOPHY TO LOCAL PRACTICE: ẒĀHIR–BĀṬIN INTERPRETATIONS OF *AL-ṢALĀT AL-WUSṬĀ* AND THE *SEMPAJANG TEMMAPPETTU* TRADITION IN SOUTH SULAWESI

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Abstract

This article examines interpretations of al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā (Qur'an 2:238) through the ẓāhir (exoteric) and bāṭin (esoteric) approaches, focusing on their relevance to sempajang temmappettu, a Sufi ritual rooted in the Bugis Islamic tradition of South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Drawing on Qur'anic philosophy, the study explores how the literal and spiritual dimensions of al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā can be understood in relation to local religious practice. Using a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach, it combines a literature review with field research. The findings suggest that sempajang temmappettu is more than a cultural ritual; it represents a process through which Qur'anic values are interpreted, internalized, and expressed in practice, bringing together the sharī'ah and ḥaqīqah dimensions of Islam. This practice illustrates how Islamic teachings can be integrated into local cultural contexts while maintaining their theological foundations. The study contributes to discussions of Qur'anic exegesis and culturally grounded da'wah by highlighting how local religious practices shape the interpretation and enactment of Qur'anic values in diverse social contexts.

Keywords: *Local Islam, Qur'anic Philosophy, Ṣalāt Al-Wusṭā, Sempajang Temmappettu, Ẓāhir And Bāṭi*

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INTRODUCTION

Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā (the Middle Prayer) remains an important subject in Islamic studies. Although it is mentioned only once in the Qur'an (Surah al-Baqarah [2]: 238), the term has generated diverse interpretations since the time of the Prophet Muhammad and throughout subsequent exegetical traditions. These interpretations can broadly be examined through two hermeneutical approaches: *ẓāhir* (exoteric) and *bāṭin* (esoteric). The exoteric approach identifies *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* with a specific obligatory prayer, such as *ʿAṣr* or *Ẓuhr* (Al-Thabari, 1954; Al-Qurtubi, 1964). By contrast, the esoteric approach interprets it in terms of the inner essence of prayer, emphasizing spiritual purity and consciousness (Al-Alusi, 1994; Al-Jailani, 1995). These interpretive differences have implications beyond theoretical debates, shaping religious understandings and practices across the Muslim world, including Indonesia. Sufi interpretations of *Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā*, for example, have been documented in the Malay Archipelago since the seventeenth century. One example is the manuscript *Asrār al-Ṣalāt*, which reflects a local adaptation of al-Ghazālī's seminal work *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (Satriawan, 2009). This manuscript illustrates the influence of Sufi thought on the development of Islam in the region.

Sufism played a significant role not only in the spread of Islam in Indonesia but also in its integration with local cultural traditions. In South Sulawesi, for instance, the Islamization process initiated in the seventeenth century by *Dato ri Bandang*, a scholar from the Aceh–Minangkabau region, unfolded within a Sufi framework that resonated with local spiritual traditions (Pelras, 1996). This historical trajectory provides a context for understanding *sempajang temmappettu*, a religious practice whose name literally means "uninterrupted prayer." The practice emphasizes the continuity of prayer as a means of inner purification (Mahmud, 2012). Its emphasis on spiritual continuity makes *sempajang temmappettu* a relevant subject for examining how Sufi understandings of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* are expressed in local religious practice.

This study addresses the relationship between *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* and *sempajang temmappettu*, two themes that intersect within the Sufi tradition and the broader context of Islam in Indonesia. It also seeks to address a gap in research on how interpretations of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* relate to local cultural practices. Existing studies on *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* in Qur'an 2:238 can be grouped into several categories. The first examines particular figures and their interpretations (Baharuddin HS, 2002; Yaqin et al., 2023; Nurfauzia et al., 2022). The second explores its relationship with other Qur'anic verses (Romadlan & Sari, 2019). The third addresses related socio-religious issues (Arif, 2020; Jaya et al., 2023). Although these studies provide insights into the interpretation and significance of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā*, the relationship between its Qur'anic meanings and local religious practices remains an area for further investigation. This study therefore examines how Sufi interpretations of the Qur'an inform local religious expressions and contribute to the formation of local wisdom.

To investigate this relationship, the study draws on Oliver Leaman's (2016) framework of Qur'anic philosophy. This framework offers a philosophical approach to the Qur'an that can engage with Sufi and other interpretive perspectives (Campanini, 2017). It accommodates both exoteric and esoteric readings by bringing together textual, contextual, and traditional exegetical approaches, including perspectives informed by Sufi thought (Gama, 2024). Through this framework, the study examines both the literal and esoteric meanings of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* and explores their relevance to contemporary religious practices. This approach is particularly pertinent because esoteric interpretations need to remain connected to, rather than contradict, the Qur'an's literal meaning. It also provides a basis for engaging with differences in interpretation arising from diverse perspectives. The resulting interpretive framework is then used to examine *sempajang temmappettu* and the relationship between

Qur'anic interpretation and local religious practice.

Literature Review

Studies of local religious practices in South Sulawesi suggest that religious rituals are shaped by the ongoing interaction between local traditions and Islamic teachings. Pabbajah (2021) argues that local religious practices in the region involve continuous negotiation between cultural traditions and Islamic values. Ma'arif (2011) illustrates this interaction through *jenne' tellukka, sempajang temmappettu*, a practice that reflects how the Ammatoa community understands and practices Islam in the context of its lived experiences. The community acknowledges the diversity of individual religious understandings and rejects the imposition of a single interpretation on others. This tradition thus represents a locally grounded form of Islamic understanding and practice through which the community articulates its own conception of authentic Muslim identity.

Regarding *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā*, Hafifi et al. (2026) argue that its interpretation should extend beyond scholarly disagreements over which obligatory prayer the term denotes. They emphasize the need to examine its functional significance in establishing prayer as a religious priority. This perspective provides a basis for exploring how the Qur'anic emphasis on prayer extends beyond identifying a specific ritual obligation to encompass the internalization of religious values and their expression in local practices.

Nurfauzia et al. (2022) associate interpretations of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* with an understanding of prayer as an act of worship through which individuals acknowledge their profound dependence on Allah. They also relate this understanding to the interpretations of scholars such as al-Alūsī. Similarly, Ahadah et al. (2022) argue that *tafsīr isyārī* reveals deeper spiritual meanings in Qur'anic verses, particularly those concerning a servant's love for God, which transcends the limits of verbal expression.

Taken together, these studies provide insights into the relationship between Islamic teachings, spiritual interpretation, and local religious practices. However, the relationship between the exoteric and esoteric interpretations of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* and the *sempajang temmappettu* tradition warrants further examination. This study addresses this issue by exploring how these interpretive dimensions relate to the meanings and practices associated with prayer in the local context of South Sulawesi.

Conceptual Framework

This study conceptualizes the Qur'an as both a normative source of Islamic teachings and a foundation for understanding how religious meanings are interpreted and expressed in local practices. Within this framework, *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā*, as mentioned in Qur'an 2:238, is examined through the interpretive dimensions of *ẓāhir* (the outward or textual dimension) and *bāṭin* (the inward or spiritual dimension). The *ẓāhir* dimension concerns prayer as a ritual act governed by Islamic prescriptions, whereas the *bāṭin* dimension emphasizes spiritual awareness, consciousness of God, and the internalization of prayer's values in everyday life. These dimensions serve as complementary analytical lenses for examining the relationship between the Qur'anic text, its interpretation, and the formation of religious understandings within local cultural contexts.

The framework is then applied to the *sempajang temmappettu* tradition among Muslim communities in South Sulawesi to examine how Islamic values are understood and enacted within local cultural and social contexts. Specifically, the study investigates how interpretations of prayer inform spiritual orientations, religious dispositions, and everyday practices through interactions between Qur'anic teachings, local interpretations, and lived experiences. Rather than evaluating the tradition solely against externally imposed normative categories, the study considers the meanings attributed to it by the community itself. This approach makes it possible to examine how the textual and spiritual dimensions of prayer are understood and expressed through a locally situated religious practice.

By connecting Qur'anic philosophy, *ẓāhir–bāṭin* interpretations, and local

religious practice, the framework provides an analytical basis for investigating how Qur'anic meanings are understood and enacted in specific cultural contexts. The study thus contributes to contextual Qur'anic interpretation, the anthropology of religion, and scholarship on local Islam by examining the relationship between the broader normative teachings of Islam and the diverse ways Muslim communities in South Sulawesi interpret and practice their religion.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study combines library research with fieldwork. The conceptual dimensions of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* are examined through classical and contemporary *tafsīr* literature, while its relevance to local religious practice is explored through ethnographic engagement with the *sempajang temmappettu* tradition in South Sulawesi. The study distinguishes between *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* as a normative theological concept and *sempajang temmappettu* as a local religious practice shaped by historical and cultural contexts.

Data were collected through textual analysis, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and field documentation. The textual analysis drew on Arabic dictionaries and Qur'anic exegeses to examine the linguistic meanings and interpretations of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā*. In-depth interviews were conducted with five informants, including academics and Sufi scholars with relevant knowledge of the research topic. Their names and professional backgrounds are presented in Table 1.

Table. 1: Research Informants

No	Name	Professional Background and Location
1	Firdaus	Academic, Makassar
2	Abd. Syukur Abubakar	Academic and Sufi Scholar, Makassar
3	Saidah Jamaluddin	Academic, Bulukumba
4	Hermanto Arase	Sufi Scholar, Bone
5	Bustamin	Sufi Scholar, Bone

Source: Authors' fieldwork data (2026)

Participant observation was conducted to examine religious practices relevant to *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* and the *sempajang temmappettu* tradition. Field documentation included textual records, photographs, and other materials relevant to the research questions. Fieldwork was conducted in Makassar, Bulukumba, and Bone, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, from August 2025 to October 2026.

The data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach informed by Qur'anic philosophy. The analysis began with a philological and historical examination of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā*, considering both its context during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime and its subsequent interpretation in post-prophetic exegetical traditions. The analysis then examined *sempajang temmappettu* as a local religious practice in relation to the spiritual dimensions of prayer. Finally, the study explored the relevance of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* to this tradition, contributing to discussions of Qur'anic philosophy and local Islamic traditions in the Indonesian archipelago.

Data triangulation across locations, time points, and methods was used to strengthen the credibility of the findings. By comparing evidence from different sources and research settings, the study sought to establish a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between Qur'anic interpretation and local religious practice.

DISCUSSION

The Meaning of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā*

As outlined in the Introduction, this study examines the meaning of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* through two complementary interpretive dimensions: *ẓāhir* (exoteric) and *bāṭin* (esoteric). This section explores its meaning through linguistic analysis, exegetical principles, the context of revelation, and classical and contemporary interpretations. By examining these perspectives, the study seeks to identify common themes across the diverse interpretations of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* and establish an analytical basis for investigating its relevance to the *sempajang temmappettu* tradition in the following section.

Linguistically, *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* consists of the noun *ṣalāt* (prayer) modified by the adjective *wusṭā* (middle). The semantic analysis therefore focuses on *wusṭā*, which derives from the Arabic root *w-s-ṭ* (*wasatha*). Classical Arabic dictionaries, including *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Mandzur, 1414 AH) and *Muʿjam Maqāyīs al-Lughah* (Zakariyah, 1990), associate this root with meanings such as centrality and excellence. *Al-Muʿjam al-Wasīṭ* also includes the sense of being chosen or distinguished (Anis, 2004). Taken together, these meanings suggest a concept of centrality associated with balance and distinction. In the context of prayer, *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* may therefore refer to a prayer accorded particular priority or to dimensions of prayer considered especially significant (interview with Hermanto Arase, 2026).

Drawing on classical Arabic lexicography, Quraish Shihab argues that the concept of *wasat* denotes a position that is not detached from either side, suggesting both equilibrium and superiority (Shihab, 2020). Within Islamic thought, the principle of *wasatiyyah*, or moderation and balance, is also associated with the pursuit of the righteous path and spiritual well-being (interview with Saidah Jamaluddin, 2026).

From a syntactic perspective, *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* appears in Qur'an 2:238 alongside the plural term *al-ṣalawāt* (prayers), linked by the conjunction *wāw al-ʿaṭf*. In Arabic rhetoric and Qur'anic exegesis, the coordination of a specific expression with a general one may serve to emphasize the particular expression or highlight its special significance (Al-Sabt, 1421 AH; Harun, 2022). Accordingly, the mention of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* alongside the broader category of prayers can be interpreted as underscoring its particular importance among the prescribed prayers.

The importance of preserving *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* becomes clearer when the verse is examined in the context of the surrounding passages. Qur'an 2:238–239 places the command to safeguard prayer between verses addressing family matters, including divorce and marital obligations, and a verse emphasizing the need to maintain prayer even in situations of danger. This textual context highlights the role of prayer, particularly *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā*, in sustaining spiritual commitment amid life's challenges. It also suggests a connection between religious observance and the maintenance of ethical conduct in social and family relationships. In exegetical accounts, *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* is generally understood as referring to one of the obligatory prayers, although not all reports explain the rationale behind a particular identification.

Some interpretations, however, offer psychological and sociological explanations. Al-Suyūṭī, for example, identifies *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* as the *Ẓuhr* prayer because its timing coincides with the midday rest period, when the Companions might have been less attentive to prayer (Al-Suyūṭī, 1991). By contrast, al-Ṭabarī identifies it as the *ʿAṣr* prayer, which falls during a period of considerable social and economic activity that may distract people from worship (Al-Ṭabarī, 1954). Both interpretations emphasize the risk of neglecting prayer and the need to give it particular attention.

In subsequent exegetical traditions, interpretations of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* expanded considerably. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī discusses seven views, while al-Qurṭubī presents ten, and al-Ālūsī records as many as thirteen interpretations concerning the identity of this prayer (Al-Rāzī, 1981; Al-Ālūsī, 1994). These interpretations identify *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* not only with *ʿAṣr* or *Ẓuhr*, but also with *Subḥ* (Fajr), *Maghrib*, or all five daily prayers (Al-Ṭabarī, 1954; Ibn Kathīr, 1999; Shihab, 2019). Some exegetes also extend the interpretation to the Friday prayer (*Ṣalāt al-Jumuʿah*) and the *Witr* prayer (Asy-Syirazi, n.d.). This diversity demonstrates that exegetical discussions encompass different understandings of the prayer's identity and significance.

Beyond identifying a particular prayer, some interpretations emphasize the spiritual quality with which prayer is performed. From this perspective, safeguarding prayer involves not only maintaining its prescribed performance but also cultivating humility, sincerity, and spiritual attentiveness. Al-Ālūsī, for instance, interprets *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* in terms of *ṣalāt*

al-qalb (the prayer of the heart), characterized by wholehearted devotion to God and freedom from distraction (Al-Ālūsī, 1994). A similar emphasis appears in the writings of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, who stresses the importance of the heart's engagement in worship. From this perspective, prayer performed through bodily movements alone is incomplete if the heart remains disengaged. The inward dimension of prayer thus extends beyond the physical and temporal boundaries of ritual performance to encompass a sustained spiritual orientation toward God (Al-Jīlānī, 1995). This emphasis on inward devotion also resonates with Imām al-Ghazālī's teachings on sincerity and the presence of the heart in acts of worship.

Taken together, these interpretations suggest that the philosophical significance of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* lies in the integration of outward observance and inward devotion. Although exegetes differ over which prayer the term denotes, the interpretations discussed above highlight the importance of maintaining prayer and cultivating spiritual attentiveness. This understanding extends to the five daily prayers, which structure the believer's day around recurring acts of worship and remembrance of God. Safeguarding prayer therefore involves both fulfilling its prescribed requirements and sustaining an awareness of the Divine in everyday life. This understanding provides a basis for examining the *sempajang temmappettu* tradition in South Sulawesi, which emphasizes an uninterrupted spiritual connection with God. The following section explores how this local tradition expresses and embodies the spiritual dimensions of prayer.

Sempajang Temmappettu: Prayer in the Context of Local Culture

The preceding discussion examined *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* through the lens of Qur'anic philosophy, emphasizing the spiritual dimensions of prayer alongside its formal requirements. From this perspective, prayer serves not only as a prescribed ritual but also as a means of maintaining a continuous spiritual connection with Allah throughout the day, including in times of hardship. In Indonesia, the spiritual dimensions of religious practice are often expressed and transmitted through their integration into local cultural and social systems (Salapudin et al., 2022; Jubba et al., 2018). This pattern reflects a form of Islamization that accommodates local cultural elements, including mystical traditions, as illustrated by various religious practices in South Sulawesi. One example is the tradition of *sempajang temmappettu*.

The term *sempajang temmappettu* originates from the Bugis language and consists of two words: *sempajang*, meaning prayer (*ṣalāt*), and *temmappettu*, meaning uninterrupted or continuous. Literally, the phrase means "uninterrupted prayer," emphasizing the continuity of spiritual devotion. This understanding reflects an esoteric (*ishārī*) approach to prayer without diminishing the importance of its formal and legal requirements. Muhammad Yusuf, a Sufi-oriented Islamic scholar, explains that *sempajang temmappettu*, as understood within the Sufi tradition of South Sulawesi, encompasses both the exoteric (*sharīʿah*) and esoteric (*ḥaqīqah*) dimensions of prayer. These dimensions are understood as complementary, with *sharīʿah* providing the foundation for realizing *ḥaqīqah* (Muhammad Yusuf, 2025). Although the precise origins of the tradition remain uncertain, its development has been shaped by longstanding mystical traditions embedded in the cultural life of South Sulawesi (Rais, 2022).

Similar mystical traditions can be found in other parts of Indonesia, including Aceh (Saprijal, 2024). Before the arrival of Islam, communities in South Sulawesi already held beliefs about the supernatural, which formed an integral part of their understanding of human existence (Mattulada, 1998; Supratman & Susmihara, 2022). Within this worldview, human beings were understood to have metaphysical relationships with ancestors, spiritual beings, and divine forces. These relationships were expressed and reinforced through various rituals and ceremonial practices (Munawar, 2022; Pelras, 1985).

The Islamization of South Sulawesi developed through a contextual and adaptive process shaped by the region's sociocultural

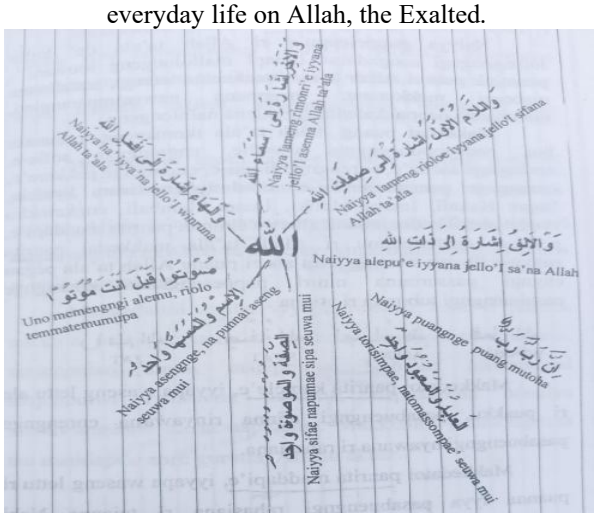
landscape. Both legalistic and Sufi approaches contributed to this process, beginning with early Islamic figures such as Sayyid Jamaluddin al-Husayn al-Akbar and continuing through the work of three prominent scholars: Dato ri Bandang, Dato ri Tiro, and Dato ri Pattimang (Mattulada, 1976; Anzar, 2016). These preachers adapted their approaches to local cultural and religious orientations. In Makassar, where scriptural and rational approaches were influential, Dato ri Bandang emphasized *sharīʿah*-oriented teachings (Alimi, 2018). By contrast, in areas such as Bulukumba and Sinjai, where mystical and spiritual traditions were more prominent, Dato ri Tiro adopted a stronger Sufi orientation (Bahtiar, 2012; Anis, 2013). Rather than functioning as mutually exclusive approaches, these orientations contributed in different ways to the Islamization of the region.

During this process of cultural and religious interaction, existing mystical beliefs were not simply eliminated; they were also negotiated, reinterpreted, and transformed. For example, the concept of *Dewata Seuwae* (the Supreme Deity) was reinterpreted in relation to the Islamic doctrine of *tawḥīd*, which affirms the oneness of Allah (Pabbajah, 2021). Similarly, earlier forms of spiritual veneration were reoriented toward the example of the Prophet Muhammad (Amir et al., 2024). In this context, Dato ri Tiro introduced a framework of spiritual relationships informed by Islamic cosmology, encompassing the spirit of Allah, the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad, and the human soul (Bahtiar, 2012).

These developments contributed to the emergence of religious expressions grounded in Islamic teachings, including the concept of *sempajang temmappettu*. This tradition encompasses both outward and inward dimensions of purification (Anis, 2013), encouraging individuals to maintain an ongoing spiritual connection with Allah through formal prayer and everyday activities (Chittick, 1989; Nasr & Chittick, 2001). This understanding resonates with spiritual conceptions found in South Sulawesi, in which human beings are understood in relation to the Divine and are called to maintain an enduring spiritual connection with the ultimate Source (Usman, 2025; Alam Usman, 2025).

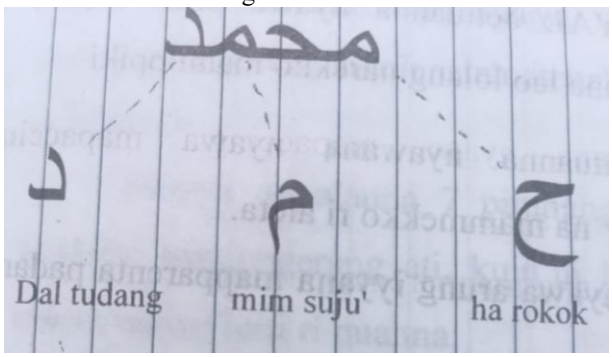
Such spiritual connectedness extends beyond the five obligatory daily prayers to encompass all aspects of everyday life. In this sense, *sempajang temmappettu* represents an integrative form of devotion that brings together the legal and mystical dimensions of Islamic practice. Firdaus, a scholar of South Sulawesi religious traditions, explains that the essence of *sempajang temmappettu* lies in maintaining an uninterrupted remembrance of Allah, both during and between formal prayers, until the next prayer time (interview with Firdaus, 2025). For example, after performing the dawn prayer (*ṣalāt al-Subḥ*), practitioners maintain an awareness of the Divine until the noon prayer (*Ẓuhr*), and so on throughout the day. This continuous awareness is cultivated through the integrated engagement of the body, soul, breath, movements, and character, following the example of the Prophet Muhammad's prayer. The practice also includes contemplative meditation on the name "Muhammad," understood through a spiritual interpretive framework. A classical manuscript entitled *Jenne Telluka Sempajang Temmappettu*, attributed to Shaykh Ridwan Hanai and reportedly discovered in the Makassar region, with indications of wider circulation in South Sulawesi, further elaborates this concept through symbolic Sufi illustrations and metaphysical interpretations (Hanai, n.d.). One illustration places the name of Allah at the center, with lines connecting it to various aspects of human existence and spiritual life, symbolically emphasizing Allah as the center of devotion (Figure 1). Another illustration interprets the Arabic letters in the name "Muhammad" in relation to prayer movements: *dāl* (د) represents the sitting position (*tudang*), *mīm* (م) represents prostration (*sujūd*), and *ḥāʾ* (ح) represents bowing (*rokok* or *rukuk*) (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Centering all aspects of the self and everyday life on Allah, the Exalted.



Source: Jenne Telluka Sempajang Temmappettu manuscript

Figure 2. Symbolic Representation of Prayer movements through the name "Muhammad."



Source: Jenne Telluka Sempajang Temmappettu manuscript

Over time, the understanding and practice of *sempajang temmappettu* have evolved within certain communities in South Sulawesi. One development that has raised theological concerns is the separation of its spiritual meaning from the *sharīʿah* requirement to perform the five obligatory daily prayers. This interpretation appears to arise, in part, from a critical response to religious practices perceived as emphasizing the outward performance of worship at the expense of its inner meaning and spiritual purpose.

Abd. Syukur Abubakar emphasizes that the essence of *sempajang temmappettu* lies in cultivating sustained spiritual awareness, both during formal prayer and throughout everyday activities (interview with Abd. Syukur Abubakar, 2026). Syamsurijal (2014), citing Amma Toa, a prominent figure in the Kajang community of Bulukumba associated with the *sempajang temmappettu* tradition, reports a theological objection to reducing the Divine to symbolic representations, such as letters or names, arguing that such an understanding may approach *shirk* (associating partners with God). A similar concern is reflected in the observation that some communities, including the Amma Toa community, use figurative symbols to express spiritual concepts, although these symbols cannot be equated with the Essence of Allah (interview with Saidah Jamaluddin, 2026).

According to Ista et al. (2024), some members of the community have abandoned the formal performance of the five daily prayers: *Subḥ* (dawn), *Ẓuhr* (noon), *ʿAṣr* (afte rnoon), *Maghrib* (sunset), and *ʿIshāʾ* (night). This practice is reportedly based on the view that continuous inward remembrance of God (*dhikr*) is more important than adherence to the formal rituals prescribed by Islamic law. This development raises important questions about the relationship between spiritual devotion and ritual obligations in local interpretations of Islam. It also highlights the need to examine *sempajang temmappettu* through the framework of Qur'anic philosophy, particularly in relation to interpretations of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* (the Middle Prayer). Such an examination can help clarify the relationship between the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of worship and establish the theological and interpretive boundaries within which local cultural practices engage with fundamental Islamic teachings. These issues are examined further in the following section.

The Relevance of *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* to the *Sempajang Temmappettu* Tradition

The preceding section examined the *sempajang temmappettu* tradition in South Sulawesi, focusing on its meanings, spiritual values, practices, and associated developments. The tradition can be understood as a local expression of Islamic understandings of *ṣalāt* shaped by the region's sociocultural context. This interpretation provides a basis for exploring its relationship with *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* and examining how

Qur'anic teachings interact with local religious practices. Such an inquiry also highlights the potential for Qur'anic meanings to be interpreted and expressed across different historical periods and cultural settings. The relationship between *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* and *sempajang temmappettu* is examined here through three dimensions: semantic interpretation, historical and cultural context, and spiritual orientation.

Semantically, both *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* and *sempajang temmappettu* can be understood through an esoteric (*ishārī*) perspective that remains connected to the outward (*ẓāhir*) dimensions of prayer. *Al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* is interpreted in terms of centrality and excellence, emphasizing the importance of giving prayer particular attention. Similarly, *sempajang temmappettu* conveys the idea of uninterrupted prayer, emphasizing the continuity of spiritual devotion in everyday life. Both concepts highlight the cultivation of awareness of God, whether through the regular observance of the five daily prayers or through continuous remembrance (*dhikr*) that extends the spiritual significance of prayer beyond the ritual itself.

Their relationship can also be examined in historical and cultural terms. The Qur'anic command concerning *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* emphasizes the importance of safeguarding prayer, including amid competing demands and challenging circumstances. This emphasis underscores the need to maintain one's relationship with Allah in all situations. Similarly, *sempajang temmappettu*, as understood in the cultural and religious context of South Sulawesi, emphasizes the inner significance of worship and challenges approaches that focus exclusively on ritual performance. It calls for sustained attention to God and the cultivation of sincere spiritual intentions. As Bustamin explains, the connection established through prayer extends beyond the physical and psychological dimensions of human experience to encompass a deeper form of spiritual connectedness, which is integral to the meaning of *sempajang temmappettu* (interview with Bustamin, 2026).

In practice, both concepts highlight the relationship between outward observance and inward devotion. *Al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* emphasizes the importance of maintaining the prescribed form of prayer while remaining attentive in heart and mind. Likewise, *sempajang temmappettu* conveys the understanding that spiritual devotion continues beyond the performance of formal rituals and informs everyday life. Together, these perspectives suggest a reciprocal relationship between *sharīʿah* and *ḥaqīqah*: *sharīʿah* provides the normative foundation for religious practice, while *ḥaqīqah* deepens its spiritual significance. Through this relationship, outward observance and inward devotion can be understood as complementary dimensions of worship. Both also emphasize the importance of aligning human intentions and actions with divine guidance, while recognizing that the Divine transcends the limits of human understanding and the constraints of space and time.

This understanding also provides a context for considering Amma Toa's criticism of interpretations that represent God through symbolic forms, such as letters or names. As a prominent figure in the Kajang indigenous community of Bulukumba associated with the *sempajang temmappettu* tradition, Amma Toa emphasizes the importance of preserving divine transcendence in human efforts to understand and approach God. This perspective underscores the need to distinguish between symbolic expressions of spiritual experience and claims about the Divine Essence itself.

Taken together, these interpretations suggest that *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* and *sempajang temmappettu* can be examined as complementary expressions of the relationship between the normative and spiritual dimensions of Islamic practice. Their relationship illustrates how Qur'anic teachings may be interpreted and embodied within particular cultural settings. Rather than treating local tradition as a direct equivalent of the Qur'anic concept, this study examines how the spiritual emphases associated with *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* resonate with the values expressed in *sempajang temmappettu*. This perspective highlights the continuing

interaction between Qur'anic interpretation and local religious practice, through which Islamic teachings acquire context-specific expressions while remaining connected to their broader theological foundations

Philosophy, Qur'anic Idealism, and Local Islam

The preceding section examined the relationship between *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* (the Middle Prayer) and the *sempajang temmappettu* tradition, highlighting conceptual and practical connections between them. This relationship illustrates how religious teachings are interpreted and expressed within specific sociocultural contexts. Such contextualization is consistent with the Qur'an's role as a guide for human life across historical periods and cultural settings (Ishlahiyah & Hasyim, 2023). This process involves interpretation (*tafsīr*), the internalization of religious meanings into collective consciousness, and their externalization through religious practices (Mahfudz, 2016; Weber, 1963).

From this perspective, the relationship between *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* and *sempajang temmappettu* extends beyond thematic similarities: the tradition can be examined as a local expression of how the Qur'anic injunction in Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 238 is interpreted and enacted in South Sulawesi. This understanding reflects the view that interpretation emerges through the interaction between the text, its interpreters, and their sociocultural contexts (Saeed, 2006; Gadamer, 2004). More broadly, *sempajang temmappettu* illustrates how Qur'anic ideals can find expression in local religious practices. It also highlights the value of an exegetical approach that considers both the outward (*ẓāhir*) and inward (*bāṭin*) dimensions of meaning. By bringing these dimensions together, such an approach moves beyond a rigid opposition between textual and spiritual interpretations and enables a more context-sensitive understanding of the Qur'an.

Integrating the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* dimensions also provides a framework for engaging with the diversity of interpretations found in classical exegetical traditions and for examining contemporary expressions of local Islam. As discussed above, *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* has been interpreted in various ways, reflecting the different methodological approaches adopted by Qur'anic commentators. Qur'anic philosophy offers a basis for examining these interpretations in relation to one another without reducing their differences to a single reading. Within this framework, *sempajang temmappettu* can be understood as a local religious practice whose spiritual emphases resonate with interpretations of Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 238. This relationship can be considered in light of the history of Islamization in South Sulawesi, where Islamic legal teachings and Sufi traditions have interacted over time. In this context, *sempajang temmappettu* represents a form of religious praxis through which Qur'anic values are expressed within the cultural and social life of local communities.

Here, the Qur'an's role as a guide is understood in relation to the interpretive processes through which its teachings acquire significance in particular contexts. The expression of values associated with *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* through *sempajang temmappettu* illustrates how local religious actors may interpret Qur'anic teachings in ways that resonate with their communities' cultural values and lived experiences. Such processes can bring local practices into dialogue with Qur'anic ideals and reshape their spiritual significance. The interaction between text and context thus provides an important perspective for understanding the historical development of local forms of Islam during the spread of Islam in South Sulawesi.

As illustrated by *sempajang temmappettu*, local Islam reflects a form of religious understanding shaped by the circumstances and cultural settings in which people live. This perspective resonates with Eliade's (1959) account of religious experience as grounded in human encounters with the sacred. The relationship between God, human beings, and the cosmos can therefore be examined in terms of how religious meaning is experienced and expressed within particular cultural worlds. From this standpoint, local Islam should not automatically be regarded as an inferior

version of a universal religious tradition. Rather, it can be understood as a historically situated expression of Islamic teachings. The Qur'anic ideals of Islam acquire lived significance as communities interpret and practice them within their own cultural contexts. In this sense, the spiritual values associated with Islam in the Prophet Muhammad's time may continue to inform Muslim life in contemporary South Sulawesi, although their expressions are shaped by different historical and social circumstances. The relationship between *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* and *sempajang temmappettu* thus illustrates how a Qur'anic teaching may find local expression while retaining its broader spiritual significance.

CLOSING

The findings suggest that *sempajang temmappettu* represents more than a local cultural practice; it provides a context for examining how the Qur'anic injunction concerning *al-Ṣalāt al-Wusṭā* in Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 238 is understood and expressed in local religious life. The analysis of its meaning, historical context, and practical expressions highlights a shared emphasis on maintaining a continuous spiritual connection with God through both the outward (*sharīʿah*) and inward (*ḥaqīqah*) dimensions of religious practice. In this context, *sempajang temmappettu* can be understood as a process through which Qur'anic values are interpreted, internalized, and expressed within the religious and social life of South Sulawesi. This relationship illustrates how the Qur'an acquires contextual significance through its engagement with local cultural practices. The integration of *ẓāhir* (outward) and *bāṭin* (inward) dimensions also offers a Qur'anic philosophical perspective that views *sharīʿah* and *ḥaqīqah* as complementary aspects of Muslim religious life.

These findings contribute to discussions of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) and context-sensitive *daʿwah* by highlighting the role of local cultural contexts in shaping the interpretation and practice of Islamic teachings. They also underscore the value of contextual and philosophical approaches to Qur'anic interpretation in understanding how religious values are expressed in everyday life. The study's contribution lies in extending discussions of *tafsīr ṣūfī* in the context of local Islam and examining how Qur'anic ideals interact with lived religious practices. Practically, the findings may inform the development of religious education curricula and *daʿwah* strategies that are responsive to local cultural contexts. Future research could compare similar practices in other regions through interdisciplinary approaches to develop a broader understanding of the relationship between Qur'anic interpretation and local Islam. This study is limited, however, by its exploration of the ongoing contestation surrounding the meanings of *sempajang temmappettu* amid contemporary sociocultural change. Further research could therefore examine how younger generations understand, negotiate, and adapt such traditions as part of their evolving Islamic identities.

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