

## LIVING QUR'AN AND PENCAK SILAT: PRACTICING PAGER WOJO IN PAGAR NUSA UIN SAIFUDDIN ZUHRI PURWOKERTO

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### Abstract

In the current digital age, there is a growing return to spiritual practices such as dhikr and Qur'anic recitation, which serve as sources of emotional resilience, moral grounding, and community cohesion within religious-based organizations like Pencak Silat Pagar Nusa. While studies on the integration of Islamic values in martial arts settings are growing, there remains a gap in understanding how specific Qur'anic verses, especially Ayat Kursi, are ritualized and pedagogically adapted in everyday spiritual practice. This study offers a novel contribution by examining the Pager Wojo ritual as a Living Qur'an phenomenon within Pagar Nusa at UIN Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, focusing on the embodiment of Qur'anic teachings in localized martial traditions. Accordingly, this study aims to understand how the Qur'an, particularly Ayat Kursi, is interpreted, internalized, and practiced in daily life through protective rituals, reflecting a dynamic interaction between scripture and society. Employing qualitative

*field research methods and a Living Qur'an approach, this study utilizes Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge to analyze the multifaceted meanings embedded in these ritual practices. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation involving ritual participants. The findings reveal three layers of meaning: objective meaning, which frames the ritual as a medium for seeking divine protection and spiritual closeness; expressive meaning, which emphasizes its role in calming the heart and fostering a sense of safety; and documentary meaning, which highlights its function in Islamic da'wah and cultural preservation. The ritual incorporates specific breathing techniques combined with Qur'anic recitation, performed individually and collectively. This research concludes that the Pager Wojo ritual exemplifies how the Qur'an lives through communal practices, integrating Islamic teachings with local wisdom while preserving scriptural authenticity. Future research may consider comparative practices in other regions or adopt interdisciplinary approaches—such as psychology or health sciences—to assess the broader impact of embodied Qur'anic rituals on practitioners.*

Di era digital saat ini, terdapat peningkatan minat terhadap praktik spiritual seperti dzikir dan pembacaan Al-Qur'an sebagai sumber ketahanan emosional, landasan moral, dan kohesi sosial dalam organisasi berbasis agama seperti Pencak Silat Pagar Nusa. Penelitian ini mengkaji ritual Pager Wojo sebagai fenomena Living Qur'an di Pagar Nusa, UIN Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, yang menunjukkan bagaimana ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an dihayati dan diwujudkan dalam tradisi seni bela diri lokal. Meskipun minat terhadap integrasi nilai-nilai Al-Qur'an dalam komunitas seni bela diri terus meningkat, studi-studi sebelumnya belum secara mendalam mengeksplorasi bagaimana ayat-ayat tertentu—seperti Ayat Kursi—diritualkan dalam praktik sehari-hari dan diadaptasi secara pedagogis dalam membentuk ekspresi spiritual. Oleh karena itu, studi ini bertujuan untuk memahami bagaimana Al-Qur'an, khususnya Ayat Kursi, ditafsirkan, diinternalisasi, dan dipraktikkan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari melalui ritual perlindungan, yang mencerminkan interaksi dinamis antara teks suci dan masyarakat. Dengan menggunakan metode penelitian lapangan kualitatif dan pendekatan Living Qur'an, studi ini menerapkan teori sosiologi pengetahuan dari Karl Mannheim untuk menganalisis makna berlapis dari praktik ritual tersebut. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi dengan partisipan ritual. Temuan penelitian mengungkap tiga lapisan makna: makna objektif yang menunjukkan bahwa ritual ini menjadi sarana untuk mencari perlindungan ilahi dan kedekatan spiritual; makna ekspresif yang menyoroti fungsi ritual sebagai praktik penenang hati dan perlindungan diri; serta makna dokumenter yang menggambarkan perannya dalam dakwah Islam dan pelestarian budaya. Ritual ini melibatkan teknik pernapasan khusus yang dikombinasikan dengan pembacaan ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an, dilakukan secara individu maupun kolektif. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa ritual Pager Wojo merupakan contoh nyata bagaimana Al-Qur'an hidup dalam praktik komunitas, dengan

berhasil mengintegrasikan ajaran Islam dan kearifan lokal tanpa mengabaikan keaslian teks suci. Penelitian selanjutnya dapat mengeksplorasi praktik serupa di wilayah lain atau menggabungkan pendekatan interdisipliner, termasuk psikologi atau ilmu kesehatan, untuk menilai dampak yang lebih luas dari ritual Al-Qur'an yang diwujudkan secara fisik bagi para praktisinya.

**Keywords:** Ayat Kursi, Living Qur'an, Pagar Nusa, Pager wojo ritual, spiritual practice

## Introduction

As devout Muslims, drawing closer to Allah Swt is an obligation that must be remembered and fulfilled. Human beings are limited creations—constantly changing and dependent—so they can never be equal to God, who possesses eternal attributes. In addition to approaching Allah Swt through rituals such as prayer, *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah), and fasting, reading the Qur'an is also believed to be a powerful means of attaining closeness to Him (Siregar, 2018). However, practicing the teachings of the Qur'an without first studying and understanding them will not yield optimal results. Manna' al-Khalil al-Qatan classifies the general purposes of reading the Qur'an into three categories: first, as an act of worship; second, as a means of seeking guidance; and third, as a way of affirming or justifying something (Zulihafnani et al., 2020).

*Dhikr* plays a vital role in the spiritual life of Muslims. It is not merely the repetition of liturgical phrases (*wirid*), but a practice of internalizing and living out what is recited. *Dhikr* includes specific forms of remembrance, such as *takbir* (declaration of God's greatness), praising Allah, reciting the Qur'an, and making supplications—all of which strengthen a believer's connection with the Divine (Nurhasanah, 2019). The Qur'an, in Surah An-Nisa (4:103), emphasizes the importance of *dhikr* for spiritual well-being, offering peace and a sense of security to those who practice it consistently. Among the most revered verses used in *dhikr* is Ayat Kursi (Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 255), which many Muslims regard as one of the most powerful and majestic verses in the Qur'an (Khoiruro, 2020).

This research explores the practice of Ayat Kursi recitation among members of the Pencak Silat Pagar Nusa organization. Ahsan and Savii argue that religious-based institutions should integrate Qur'anic verses into their guiding principles and daily practices to support moral education, social interaction, and spiritual development. These practices are expressed through various forms, including verbal recitation, physical action, and spiritual

contemplation (Ahsan et al., 2024; Savii, 2021).

Living Qur'an studies focus on how Qur'anic verses are understood and practiced within specific cultural and community settings. Several scholars have explored Qur'anic use in martial arts traditions. Akbar (2024) examined how Surah al-Fatihah is recited during the initiation of new members in Ikatan Keluarga Silat Putra Indonesia (IKSPI) Kera Sakti, showing its role as a spiritual foundation. Fauziyah and Mutrofin (2021) studied the use of Surah Yasin verses 9 and 83 in Pagar Nusa's asma' pamungkas and panglimunan rituals. Firmansyah et al. (2024) looked at how Qur'anic values are internalized in the Pagar Melayu Silat Kemenyan Putih group in Jambi, showing how Islamic teachings are woven into martial arts training.

However, most of these studies have concentrated on ceremonial or foundational aspects of Qur'anic practice in martial arts, giving less attention to the everyday ritualistic practices involving specific verses and their socio-cultural meanings within the community. A key debate in the current literature revolves around whether the Living Qur'an should be viewed merely as a textual or ritual act, or as a broader socio-cultural phenomenon that shapes collective identity and spiritual expression.

Although interest in Living Qur'an studies within martial arts settings is increasing, several key gaps remain. First, there is limited research on how specific verses like Ayat Kursi (Q.S. al-Baqarah: 255) are used regularly in martial arts training, beyond just ceremonial events. Second, past studies have not fully explored how communities interpret and give meaning to Qur'anic practices through shared rituals. Third, there is a lack of detailed analysis on how Islamic teachings are adapted within martial arts education and daily community life. Fourth, the influence of religious leaders in guiding the understanding and use of Qur'anic verses in these communities is still understudied.

This research aims to examine the practice of the *pager wojo* ritual among members of Pencak Silat Pagar Nusa at UIN Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, with a specific focus on the use of Ayat Kursi as a daily spiritual exercise. The study seeks to understand the process of meaning construction and the socio-cultural dynamics that inform this practice by employing Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge framework. It specifically analyzes three dimensions of meaning: objective, expressive, and documentary (Baum, 1999).

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the *pager wojo* ritual, a topic not yet explored in academic research. Unlike previous studies on the use of Qur'anic verses in martial arts ceremonies (Akbar, 2024; Firmansyah et al.,

2024; Umi Fauziyah & Mutrofin, 2021), this research looks at the daily use of a specific verse within a defined community. By applying Mannheim's sociological theory, the study reveals how sacred texts like the Qur'an are practiced as living traditions. It also emphasizes the role of religious leaders—especially Gus Sugeng Riyadi—in guiding how these rituals are interpreted and performed, connecting classical Islamic knowledge with modern martial arts education.

As mentioned earlier, Qur'anic studies have evolved over time to include social and cultural perspectives. Living Qur'an studies focus on understanding how the Qur'an is experienced and practiced in everyday life, not just as a written text. Fitriana (2018) explains that this field explores how social realities within Muslim communities contribute to bringing the Qur'an to life. Through this lens, people actively interact with the Qur'an, making it relevant to their environment and daily experiences.

This study examines the daily use of *Ayat Kursi* in the *pager wojo* ritual by Pagar Nusa members at UIN Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, a practice introduced by Gus Sugeng Riyadi through martial arts training. The ritual is unique because it is performed both individually and in groups. To understand its meaning, the study uses Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, which explains that human actions are shaped by meaning and behavior (Mannheim & Hardiman, 1991). It identifies three types of meaning: objective (shared by the community), expressive (personal feelings), and documentary (symbolic or cultural significance) (Baum, 1999).

## Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with field research to explore the social and symbolic meanings of the *pager wojo* ritual in its natural religious context (Irkhamiyati, 2017; Sugiyono, 2008). The research was conducted at UIN Saizu Purwokerto, focusing on the Pagar Nusa martial arts group, which includes the recitation of *Ayat Kursi* as part of their spiritual protection. A sociological approach is important in Living Qur'an studies because it helps explain how people individually and collectively engage with the Qur'an beyond reading, by embodying it in daily life (Junaedi, 2015).

To collect meaningful data, the research used observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations took place during Pagar Nusa training and rituals, while documentation included organizational records, photographs, and recordings. Interviews helped reveal the personal, communal, and religious meanings of the *pager wojo* practice. A total of 23 informants

were selected through purposive sampling, covering various roles, genders, and skill levels. One key figure was Gus Sugeng Riyadi, a spiritual guide and trainer who has a direct link to the chain of transmission (*sanad*) of the *pager wojo* ritual.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, which includes three steps: reducing the data, displaying it, and drawing conclusions (Soehada, 2018). To interpret the findings, Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge theory was used, focusing on three layers of meaning: objective (shared purpose), expressive (personal meaning), and documentary (cultural and historical context) (Baum, 1999).

Through this methodological framework, the study seeks to provide a nuanced and multi-layered understanding of how the Qur'an—particularly Ayat Kursi—is experienced, embodied, and ritualized within the context of a local martial arts tradition rooted in both Islamic and Javanese cultural values.

### ***Finding and Discussion***

The following section describes the origins and significance of Pencak Silat Pagar Nusa, a traditional Indonesian martial arts organization rooted in both cultural heritage and Islamic spirituality. As a form of pencak silat, this martial art not only focuses on physical self-defense but also integrates deep spiritual and moral values. Pagar Nusa serves to preserve and promote the legacy of the Walisongo, the revered Islamic saints who played a key role in spreading Islam across Java.

### ***A Brief History of Pencak Silat Pagar Nusa***

Pencak silat, an Indonesian traditional martial art that combines self-defense techniques and spiritual elements, has deep historical roots in the nation's culture (Maryono, 1999; Paetzold & Mason, 2016). Within this broader martial arts tradition, Pagar Nusa stands out as a significant organization that bridges Islamic spirituality with martial practice. Pagar Nusa is a pencak silat organization operating under the auspices of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Islamic organization. It is tasked with preserving and developing the martial arts heritage of the Walisongo—the nine Islamic saints credited with spreading Islam in Java in particular, and Indonesian martial culture more broadly.

The establishment of Pagar Nusa reflects what Woodward (2011) describes

as the syncretic nature of Indonesian Islam, in which local cultural practices are integrated with Islamic teachings. Pagar Nusa was formally established on January 3, 1986, at the Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School (pesantren) in Kediri, East Java. Its official recognition by NU was ratified through a decree issued on 9 Dhul Hijjah 1406 AH / July 16, 1986. This recognition stemmed from growing concerns over the declining presence of martial arts within Islamic boarding schools (Pimpinan Pusat Pagar Nusa, 2020).

Pesantren have long served as centers for preserving both religious and cultural traditions. According to Dhofier (1980), they play a crucial role in maintaining traditional knowledge. One tradition that began to fade was martial arts training, which historically had been part of the pesantren experience. In the past, religious leaders were not only spiritual guides but also warriors believed to possess *karomah*—miraculous abilities granted by Allah to pious individuals, often manifested as spiritual authority or extraordinary powers beyond normal human capacity. As this tradition declined, the establishment of Pagar Nusa emerged as a response to revive and preserve the martial skills once integrated into pesantren life.

On January 13, 1986, a key meeting at Lirboyo pesantren brought together martial arts leaders from several regions. They first proposed the name IPSNU (Nahdlatul Ulama Pencak Silat Association), but it was later changed to Pagar Nusa—short for “the fence of NU and the nation”—by K.H. Mujib Ridwan of Surabaya. Since then, Pagar Nusa has grown nationwide, including at UIN Saizu Purwokerto, showing how Islamic organizations adapt to contemporary needs while maintaining traditional roots. As an official body under NU, it benefits from NU’s wide-reaching influence.

Pagar Nusa also possesses a distinctive emblem or logo, rich in symbolic meaning. The logo features a globe, marked with latitude, longitude, and the equator, with a trident placed at its center. Encircling the top of the globe are nine stars, symbolizing the Walisongo (the nine saints), with the central top star rendered larger than the others. Above the stars is a semicircular inscription that reads “Pencak Silat Nahdlatul Ulama.” Below the Arabic inscription *la ghaliba illa billah* (there is no victor except through Allah) is the name “Pagar Nusa,” placed on a ribbon that encloses the globe. The logo is further framed by a pentagon-shaped curved line and three parallel edge lines following the curve (Tim Penyusun, 2017).



Figure 1. Pagar Nusa's Logo

### **Pagar Nusa UIN Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto**

The establishment of Pagar Nusa at UIN Saizu Purwokerto reflects the decentralized nature of Islamic practice in Indonesia (Feener, 2007). This branch was formed in the Banyumas region by martial artists who had trained in various areas and wanted to continue developing their skills. They united with the shared goal of introducing and sustaining Pagar Nusa activities within the academic setting of UIN Saizu Purwokerto (F. M., personal communication, December 23, 2024).

Pencak Silat Nahdlatul Ulama Pagar Nusa at UIN Saizu Purwokerto was officially established on December 17, 2018, under its original name, Pencak Silat Nahdlatul Ulama IAIN Purwokerto. At the time, it was part of the Pencak Silat Student Activity Unit (UKM) at IAIN Purwokerto, which comprised three martial arts groups: the Setia Hati Terate Brotherhood, Tapak Suci, and Pagar Nusa. Following the transformation of IAIN Purwokerto into UIN Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, all affiliated units, including Pagar Nusa, adopted the new institutional name. Thus, the former Pagar Nusa district IAIN Purwokerto officially became Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto (Tim Penyusun, 2022).

The integration of martial arts practices within academic institutions exemplifies what Lukens-Bull (2005) describes as the modernization of Islamic education in Indonesia, where traditional religious practices are incorporated

into contemporary educational frameworks. Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto operates within the campus of UIN Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, located at Jalan Ahmad Yani No. 40-A, Karanganjing Village, Purwokerto District, Banyumas Regency, Central Java. The organization functions as one of the officially recognized student martial arts units at UIN Saizu Purwokerto (Tim Penyusun, 2022).

Pagar Nusa is a martial arts group under Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) that brings together NU members skilled in *pencak silat*, which combines sport, culture, and self-defense, while supporting NU's goal of spreading *ahlu al-Sunnah wa alJama'ah* values (Tim Penyusun, 2017). These values reflect the mainstream Sunni Islamic tradition in Indonesia (Kersten, 2007). To carry out this mission, the organization depends on instructors who understand both martial arts and the group's spiritual principles. At Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto, members advance through seven belt levels, each with a specific color combination showing their rank and progress (N. K., personal communication, December 23, 2024).



Figure 2. Belt levels

Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto, like other branches, holds regular training sessions three times a week, covering physical skills, techniques, and campus-specific martial arts styles (N. K., personal communication, December 23, 2024). Its spiritual aspects are maintained through *ziarah* (pilgrimage) to the graves of Islamic saints in the Banyumas area, which take place every Friday and include *tahlil* (recitation of "la ilaha illa Allah") and the study of *kitab kuning* (classical Arabic Islamic texts). These practices help ensure that the branch stays aligned with the core principles set by Pagar Nusa's central leadership and its founding figures (I. W. N., personal communication, December 21, 2024).

The combination of martial arts and spiritual practices shows how Islamic values are practiced in everyday life—a concept known as the Living Qur'an. At every training session, members begin and end with the communal recitation of *pager wojo*, led by a senior or trainer. This includes moments of reflection, *sholawat*, and the recitation of Surah al-Fatihah. In addition, members also practice *pager wojo* individually after their daily prayers.

### ***A Brief History of the Ritual Pager Wojo***

The ritual of *pager wojo* adds to the study of how Muslims live out the Qur'an in their daily lives. This practice originated from Javanese traditions that once involved calling upon jinn for protection. It used to be called *tameng wojo* or *lembu sekilan* and often included the *basmalah* along with prayers directed to beings other than Allah. The incantations used in these older versions of *pager wojo* included phrases such as:

*“Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, bismillah Muhammad Rasul, kakang kawah adi ari ari simbah mulia nyi mbah rantansari kawulo nyuwun katurangan jurus kawulo kagem kabarekso, la haula wa la quwwata illa billah”*

This practice reflects the syncretic nature of Javanese spirituality, where pre-Islamic beliefs coexisted with Islamic elements (Ricklefs, 2007; Woodward, 2011). Historically, *tameng wojo* or *pager wojo* was a prayer directed to Mbah Rantansari, not to Allah, even though it used the *basmalah*. Phrases like “Simbah Mulia Nyi Mbah Rantansari” show that the ritual honored a jinn figure believed to take her form. The mantra was considered sacred, had to be memorized, and was not written down (S. R. Sy., personal communication, September 22, 2024).

The transformation of *pager wojo* from a Javanese (*kejawen*) spiritual chant into a ritual based on Ayat Kursi reflects what Islamic reformers call the purification (*tahdhib*) of religious practices. This change was initiated by Mbah Imam Mustajab of Gedongsari, Prambon, Nganjuk. He aimed to address three concerns: the risk of *ujub* (spiritual pride), the invocation of beings other than Allah Swt, and the need to instill stronger religious discipline among *santri* (Islamic students). To address these, he replaced the old formula with Qur'anic recitations, especially Ayat Kursi (S. R. Sy., personal communication, September 22, 2024).

This transformation reflects what Bruinessen (2013) calls the ongoing

negotiation between local traditions and Islamic orthodoxy in Indonesia. Today, *pager wojo* is practiced as an *amaliyah* (spiritual act) for seeking divine protection. It is a form of *dhikr* rooted in Qur'anic recitation, especially Ayat Kursi, aimed at bringing the practitioner closer to Allah Swt. Besides personal protection, it also serves as a spiritual shield (*pageran*) for guarding valuables or possessions (Sjaichudin, 2004).

Using Qur'anic verses for protection is common in Islamic traditions (Nasr, 2003; Sells, 2001). *Pager wojo* is passed down through *ijazah* (authorization) and preserved through a scholarly chain (*sanad*). This chain began with Mbah Imam Mustajab and was continued by Sheikh Achmad Sjaichudin, then to S. R. Sy., who now oversees the practice at Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto (S. R. Sy., personal communication, September 22, 2024).

The *sanad* of *pager wojo*, now held by Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto, comes through Gus Sugeng Riyadi. This practice continues today and also functions as a form of *da'wah* (Islamic outreach), showing that Pagar Nusa is not only a martial arts group but also part of the broader Islamic tradition of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah (Q. C., personal communication, December 24, 2024).

#### *Pager Wojo Ritual Practice in Pagar Nusa UIN Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto*

The practical implementation of *pager wojo* at Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto exemplifies what Living Qur'an scholars describe as the "lived experience" of Qur'anic texts, where verses are actively integrated into daily spiritual routines (Mawani et al., 2025; Nurmasitah & Muliono, 2021). Like other *amaliyah* (spiritual practices), *pager wojo* follows a specific set of procedures and can be performed individually or in groups (S. R. Sy., personal communication, September 22, 2024). At UIN Saizu Purwokerto, it is usually practiced communally before and after regular training sessions, led by trainers or senior members (N. K., personal communication, December 23, 2024). This structured form reflects the formalization of popular religious practices within institutional frameworks, as noted by Feener (2007) and Woodward (2011).

The *pager wojo* ritual at Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto follows six steps. First, it is held every Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday at 14:30 WIB before training and again at 18:00 WIB after training, led by a trainer or the highest-ranking member. Second, everyone must perform *wudu* (ablution) before starting; female members also do *wudu* even if not ritually pure, since

Ayat Kursi is recited silently. Third, the ritual is done in a kneeling (*simpuh*) position, facing the qibla or as adjusted, with the head lowered and hands on the thighs. Fourth, it begins with Surah al-Fatihah, followed by reflection on the Prophet Muhammad Saw, his companions, and the respected scholars of the Pagar Nusa tradition. Fifth, participants inhale through the nose while saying "Ya-Hu" silently, hold their breath while reciting Ayat Kursi internally, then exhale through the mouth saying "Allah." Sixth, the ritual ends with a group recitation of *sholawat* (N. K., personal communication, December 23, 2024).



Figure 3. *Pager Wojo* Ritual Practice in Pagar Nusa

The *pager wojo* ritual practiced at Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto is fundamentally a form of *dhikr*, with the primary aim of drawing the practitioner closer to Allah Swt. Beyond spiritual proximity, the ritual also serves a protective function—seeking divine assistance and safeguarding the practitioner in difficult or threatening situations. *Pager wojo* further functions as a *pageran* (spiritual shield), believed to protect the home from unseen disturbances, such as interference from supernatural beings or negative energies in the surrounding environment.

The *pager wojo* ritual includes the recitation of several Qur'anic verses. Before practicing it, followers are advised to perform *tirakat*, or spiritual preparation, to increase the ritual's effectiveness. *Tirakat* also helps strengthen the spiritual bond between teacher and student, reflecting the transmission of religious knowledge through *sanad ilmi* (chain of scholarly transmission). The verses recited in the ritual are Surah al-Fatihah and Ayat Kursi. Al-Fatihah is read at the beginning as an opening prayer, while Ayat Kursi forms the main part of the recitation (S. R. Syamsuddien, personal communication,

September 22, 2024).

Surah al-Fatihah is seen as the gateway to all goodness and is recited at the start of any important act. It is known as “*the Opening*” and often called *umm alkitab* (mother of the Book), symbolizing its central role in the Qur'an. This surah is believed to bring healing, peace of mind, protection from harm, and help in times of trouble. It is also an expression of gratitude to Allah Swt and represents the essence of prayer. As explained by M. Quraish Shihab (2002), al-Fatihah is at the heart of all *du'a*, making it a vital part of ritual worship.

Surah al-Baqarah verse 255, known as Ayat Kursi, is considered the most powerful verse in the Qur'an. It repeatedly mentions the name of Allah Swt and highlights His divine qualities, which remove doubts about His greatness and protection. According to M. Quraish Shihab, Ayat Kursi strengthens the reciter's faith in Allah's power and constant help, making it natural to believe that those who recite it are protected from satanic influences (M. Q. Shihab, 2002). The following is the meaning of Ayat Kursi:

“Allah - there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence. Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows what is [presently] before them and what will be after them, and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills. His Kursi extends over the heavens and the earth, and their preservation tires Him not. And He is the Most High, the Most Great”.

The primary function of Ayat Kursi above is to provide protection from all forms of evil, including disturbances caused by devils and malevolent *jinn* that seek to influence or overpower the self. Additionally, it serves as a powerful expeller of negative energy present in one's surroundings (S. R. Sy., personal communication, September 22, 2024). The use of this specific Qur'anic passage in spiritual practice reflects its well-established significance in Islamic tradition, as documented in both classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship (Al-Qurtubi, 2003; Ibn Kathir, 1999).

### ***The Meaning of the Recitation of Qur'anic Verses in the Pager Wojo Ritual***

The analysis of meaning within the *pager wojo* ritual contributes to the broader field of Living Qur'an studies, which explores how Muslim communities interpret and apply Qur'anic texts in their daily lives (Lukman, 2022; Rafiq,

2014). The Qur'an serves as a comprehensive guide for life—offering a framework for social transformation, a pathway out of oppression, a source of light amid darkness and ignorance, and a driving force toward a better and more ethical life. As Junaedi (2015) notes, the verses of the Qur'an function as a remedy for the various challenges and problems encountered in human life.

The recitation of Qur'anic verses in the *pager wojo* ritual at Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto can be understood through Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge. This theory, often used in Islamic studies in Indonesia, helps explain how religious meanings are shaped by social context (Bruinessen, 2013; Woodward, 2011). Mannheim argues that beliefs and ideas are influenced by the environment in which they develop, meaning that the same ritual or expression may hold different meanings depending on its cultural and social setting (Hamka, 2020).

The sociology of knowledge studies how thought and society influence each other, especially in modern contexts, and seeks to understand how ideas relate to actions (Mannheim & Hardiman, 1991). According to Mannheim, human behavior involves both meaning and action, and social practices should be analyzed through both internal intentions and outward expressions. He identifies three types of meaning: objective meaning (shared and universal), expressive meaning (personal and emotional), and documentary meaning (linked to cultural and historical context) (Baum, 1999). This framework helps explain the complex meanings behind rituals like those practiced in Pagar Nusa.

### **Objective Meaning**

Objective meaning refers to the values or intended purposes derived from the social context in which an activity occurs (Baum, 1999). This type of meaning is used when one seeks to understand the foundational or original intent behind a practice. In the case of *pager wojo*, its objective meaning is shaped by the social realities of the practitioners and can vary when interpreted within the framework of Islamic legal and textual traditions. At Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto, the *pager wojo* ritual is routinely performed before and after martial arts training sessions, as well as after completing daily prayers. Through this repetition, the ritual cultivates specific spiritual behaviors and habits among its members.

The objective meaning embedded in the *pager wojo* ritual is rooted in the *ijazah* (authorization) granted by traditional teachers and Kiai of earlier

generations. For the members of Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto, this practice functions as a spiritual discipline aimed at drawing closer to Allah Swt, invoking divine protection, and safeguarding their homes and possessions from unseen disturbances. As a form of *amaliyah*—pure *du'a* and *dhikr*—*pager wojo* primarily serves to repel harm (*bala*) and protect the practitioner from negative influences and spiritual threats.

Thus, in the quest to attain closeness to Allah Swt, the *pager wojo* ritual operates as a *wasilah* (means or intermediary) for *dhikr*, through which practitioners seek protection for both body and soul. As stated by Rizal, a member of Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto:

“*Pager wojo* is a practice that aims to get closer to Allah Swt, aims to protect the body and spirit and aims to *dhikr* to Allah Swt” (R. A, personal communication, September 22, 2024).

Training sessions at Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto are conducted three times a week, with sessions on campus typically lasting until just before *Maghrib* prayer. This timing exposes members to both physical and spiritual vulnerability, potentially subjecting them to harmful influences—whether *majud* (visible) or *ghaib* (unseen). For this reason, the *pager wojo* ritual is performed as a protective measure against negative forces. As stated by Ifdal, one of the trainers at Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto:

“Every time the Pagar Nusa training begins, the *pager wojo* ritual is always performed because *pager wojo* is believed to be able to fortify ourselves from the supernatural. The purpose of the *pager wojo* ritual is to get closer to Allah Swt and pray to Allah Swt so that we are protected from bad things that are *majud* or supernatural” (I. F, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

In addition, the *pager wojo* ritual performed by members of Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto holds significance as a spiritual shield or antidote against negative influences. This meaning was emphasized by Arini Khawasalngilmi, one of the members of Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto, who stated:

“*Pager wojo* is a practice authorized by Gus Sugeng Riyadi aimed at fortifying ourselves and warding off something negative or mystical” (A. K, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

Prayer (*du'a*) is a key way for humans to get closer to Allah Swt. It shows humility and reliance on the Divine, as humans are naturally drawn to hope, which is expressed through prayer (Shihab, 2018). The Qur'an clearly

commands prayer in Surah al-Mu'min, verse 60, where Allah instructs His servants to call on Him and warns that those who arrogantly refuse to pray will be humiliated (Sambas & Sukayat, 2007).

### ***Expressive Meaning***

Expressive meaning relates to the values or intentions shaped by a person's personal background and inner motivations. How someone understands a practice often depends on their life experiences—such as being deeply religious, influenced by local beliefs, or part of a spiritually rich community. In the case of the *pager wojo* ritual at Pagar Nusa, each practitioner's unique background influences how they interpret and experience the ritual (Nurrohman, 2021).

The expressive meaning of the *pager wojo* ritual was explored through interviews with members of Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto. Many interpret the ritual as a prayer that brings inner peace and emotional clarity. As stated by Qoshmal, a member of Pagar Nusa and an alumnus of UIN Saizu Purwokerto:

“*Pager wojo* aims as a reassuring medicine when in a situation of fear. Once upon a time, I was in a forest where it was very quiet at night. At that time I felt anxious about my situation in the forest, afraid of unwanted things happening. I did the *pager wojo* practice, alhamdulillah my heart felt calmer and more relaxed again” (Q. C, personal communication, December 24, 2024).

In Islamic teachings, inner peace is referred to as *nafs al-muṭma'innah*—a tranquil soul or heart that consistently turns toward Allah Swt. Such a heart is continuously engaged in *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah), striving to maintain closeness to Him. As a result, it remains steady, free from anxiety, confusion, hesitation, or fear, because it finds reassurance in the constant remembrance of Allah. In essence, *dhikr* is a fundamental act of worship in Islam, offering immense spiritual benefit and reward. Through *dhikr*, a person is reminded that they are never truly alone, for Allah is always near (Widiyanti, 2022).

Peace of mind is also understood as a psychological state that arises from one's faith. True belief in Allah Swt is the source of this serenity; however, belief does not arise spontaneously—it must be nurtured through regular *dhikr* (Sari, 2015). In addition, in practice, the *pager wojo* ritual is also interpreted as a *pageran*—a spiritual shield—to protect the body from various physical ailments. This understanding is based on personal experience, as expressed

by Afwi Aonilah, one of the members of Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto, who stated:

“*Pager wojo* is a practice to fence the body and can be used to cure diseases. The experience I feel after practicing the *pager wojo* ritual is that the body feels more fit, relaxed and calm because when practicing it the disease in the body is slowly expelled along with the breath released” (A. A, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

Allah Swt is the ultimate source of protection and help. However, people may sometimes doubt whether He will truly assist them in hard times. To strengthen this belief, one must remember Him through *dhikr*, which brings spiritual strength and reassurance (Husnia, 2018). When facing challenges, believers find peace in trusting that Allah will help, as affirmed in Q.S. Al-Imran verse 150. Strong faith in His promises brings calm and confidence to the soul (Husnia, 2018).

The practice of *dhikr* in the Qur'an—especially the recitation of Ayat Kursi—serves different purposes depending on the person's intentions. At Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto, the *pager wojo* ritual is often used for basic spiritual protection, such as guarding one's home. By reciting Ayat al-Kursi, members believe they are asking for Allah's protection, trusting that He watches over all creation without difficulty. This belief is supported by Q.S. al-An'am verse 61, which explains that Allah assigns angels to protect every living being (Shihab, 2002). In short, every Qur'anic practice holds spiritual power, and its effect depends on the faith and needs of the person performing it.

The *pager wojo* ritual practiced by members of Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto has been shown to yield positive effects and serves a range of purposes for its practitioners. Each member interprets the ritual's meaning through the lens of their personal experiences and individual history. For some, *pager wojo* acts as a source of inner calm and spiritual reassurance; for others, it serves as a means of protection against individuals with harmful intent, a method for healing physical ailments, or a *pageran*—a spiritual shield—to purify and safeguard haunted or spiritually disturbed spaces, such as residences.

### **Documentary Meaning**

Documentary meaning refers to the implicit values or purposes embedded in an action—often unnoticed by the individuals performing it—which reflect broader cultural or traditional frameworks (Hayati, 2020). This meaning becomes visible when a practice reveals collective patterns that express and preserve a community's lived cultural values.

The *documentary meaning* derived from the *pager wojo* ritual at Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto can be identified in several ways. First, from the content of the practice itself—namely the recitation of Ayat Kursi—it is evident that the ritual shifts the reliance on supernatural entities such as *jinn* or spirits, once common in older traditions, toward a reliance on divine protection from Allah Swt. This transformation, though perhaps unconscious, represents a revitalization of the Qur'an in daily life, as demonstrated by the central role of Qur'anic recitation in the ritual.

Second, the *pager wojo* ritual serves as a medium for *da'wah* (religious outreach). As an autonomous body under Nahdlatul Ulama—Indonesia's largest Islamic organization—Pagar Nusa actively upholds Islamic values and contributes to the development of Islamic scholarship. Therefore, the incorporation of the *pager wojo* ritual within Pagar Nusa's framework aligns well with its mission and offers a culturally grounded form of preaching through martial arts.

Third, the ritual reflects a deep-seated tradition of student obedience and respect toward religious teachers. In Islamic tradition, obedience to one's teacher includes honoring their words, showing deference during instruction, and faithfully carrying out their teachings—especially when those teachings are spiritually beneficial. The practice of *pager wojo* has been transmitted across generations, from Mbah Imam Mustajab of Kedungsari, Prambon, to current members of Pagar Nusa at UIN Saizu Purwokerto, through the guidance of Gus Sugeng Riyadi. As expressed by Listia Kurniati, a member of Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto:

“*Pager wojo* is a practice passed down by Gus Sugeng Riyadi which aims to fortify ourselves from something supernatural” (L. K, personal communication, September 16, 2024).

Fourth, the *pager wojo* ritual represents a form of local cultural content rooted in Javanese tradition. As a spiritual practice, it indirectly contributes to the preservation of Javanese cultural heritage. Historically, *pager wojo* predates

the arrival of Islam in Java and was originally performed using *mantra* or incantations directed toward supernatural beings other than Allah Swt. Over time, Islamic scholars transformed this ritual by replacing such elements with Quranic recitations—most notably Ayat Kursi—thereby aligning the practice with Islamic monotheism while retaining its cultural framework. In this way, the *pager wojo* ritual exemplifies how local traditions are preserved and recontextualized through the process of Islamization, allowing the Javanese community to maintain cultural continuity within an Islamic worldview.

## Conclusion

The *pager wojo* ritual, as introduced by Gus Sugeng Riyadi Syamsuddien and routinely practiced by members of Pagar Nusa UIN Saizu Purwokerto, exemplifies a meaningful embodiment of the Living Qur'an phenomenon. This practice involves the recitation of Ayat Kursi combined with specific breathing techniques, functioning both as a form of *dhikr* and spiritual protection. It is performed collectively during training sessions and individually after the five daily prayers.

Using Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge framework, the study identified three dimensions of meaning within the *pager wojo* ritual. First, the objective meaning encompasses the intention to draw closer to Allah Swt, to seek His protection, and to repel negative energy. Second, the expressive meaning, as articulated by practitioners, includes its role as a calming prayer recited routinely after obligatory prayers, a remedy for physical ailments, a protective shield (*pageran*) for personal belongings or residences, and a tool for warding off negative energy in spiritually disturbed locations. Third, the documentary meaning reflects deeper cultural and religious values: the ritual serves to revive the Qur'an through the recitation of Ayat Kursi as a form of *dhikr*; it functions as a vehicle of *da'wah* through Pagar Nusa, an autonomous body of Nahdlatul Ulama; it symbolizes students' obedience to their teacher, continuing a chain of knowledge transmission (*sanad*) while seeking spiritual blessings; and it preserves Javanese cultural heritage by embedding Islamic values into a localized spiritual practice.

The findings of this study have broader implications for understanding how sacred texts such as the Qur'an are not only recited but embodied in everyday life, particularly within culturally rich environments like traditional martial arts communities. The *pager wojo* ritual demonstrates the potential of religious practices to serve as tools for spiritual education, cultural continuity,

and community identity formation. This highlights the importance of supporting local expressions of Islamic spirituality that remain grounded in scriptural sources while adapting meaningfully to specific socio-cultural contexts.

However, this study also presents certain limitations. First, its focus is context-specific, centering exclusively on the Pagar Nusa community at UIN Saizu Purwokerto, which may limit the generalizability of its findings to other martial arts or Islamic communities. Second, although the study explores psychological and spiritual dimensions, it does not quantitatively assess the impact of the *pager wojo* ritual on participants' well-being. Future research could pursue comparative analyses in other regional settings or employ interdisciplinary approaches—including psychology and health sciences—to more fully examine the broader effects of embodied Qur'anic rituals on practitioners.

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