

NEGOTIATION AND CONTESTATION AMONG THE SANGIL IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES: DEBATES ON RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND BELIEFS

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Master's Study Program of Islamic Studies at the
Faculty of Islamic Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of**

Master of Arts (M.A.)



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**UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INTERNASIONAL INDONESIA
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ABSTRACT

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This study explores the micro-level dynamics of religious negotiation and contestation among the Sangil Muslim minority community in Southern Philippines, focusing on the interplay between traditional adat-based practices and emerging Salafi reformism. As a minority within a minority, the Sangil negotiate a syncretic form of Islam rooted in the legacy of Sharif Masad Akbar, while engaging with transnational Salafi ideologies propagated through madrasahs, da'wah, and local actors. The study draws on Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Practice and addresses two central questions: (1) How and why do religious negotiation and contestation between traditional and Salafi-influenced Sangil groups exist? (2) How do Sangil communities manage these dynamics while maintaining social cohesion? Employing an ethnographic methodology, the study utilizes semi-structured interviews with 20 respondents (mainstream imams/panditas, Salafi-oriented ustadhs, youth, and community members), participant observation (e.g., *Diko so*, *Ganding*, *Kanduri*, *Manuwak*, *Manunjong*), historical analysis, and archival research. It reveals significant shifts and transformations in the religious practices and beliefs of the Sangil Muslim community in Kiamba, Sarangani Province, as they navigate the tensions between adat-based traditions and Salafi reformism. The study also identifies the phenomenon of religious cherry-picking (selective assimilation). Innovatively, this research moves beyond macro-level studies of Salafism in Muslim-majority contexts to examine micro-level dynamics within a minority Muslim community. It contributes to understanding religious dynamics in minority contexts, glocalized Salafism, Islamic pluralism, and adat-based resistance, recognizing the localized dimensions and impacts of Salafism on marginalized groups. This study enriches the anthropology of religion and the study of Islam by extending our understanding of religious pluralism and glocalization in a Southeast Asian minority context, and presents a model for how identity can be negotiated and contested.

Keywords: *Sangil Muslims, Religious Negotiation and Contestation, Salafi Reformism, Adat, Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, Social Cohesion, Glocalization*

ملخص

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ماجستير في الدراسات الإسلامية

الجامعة الإسلامية الدولية الإندونيسية

تحاول هذه الدراسة استكشاف ديناميكية التنافس الديني، على المستوى الجزئي، بين الأقليات المسلمة السانغيلية في جنوب الفلبين، مع التركيز على التفاعل بين الممارسات التقليدية القائمة على الأعراف والسلفية التجديدية، التي بدأت تظهر مؤخراً. كأقلية داخل أقلية، يقوم السانغيليون بممارسة شكل من أشكال الإسلام التوفيقي، متأصل في مفهوم شريف مسعد أكبر، ويتفاعلون مع الأيديولوجيات السلفية التي تنتشر عبر المدارس الدينية والدعوة ووسائل الدعاة المحليين. تستند الدراسة إلى نظرية الممارسة لبير بورديو وتتناول سؤالين أساسيين: (1) كيف ولماذا توجد ديناميكية التنافس والتفاوض الديني بين الجماعات التقليدية والجماعات السلفية في السانغيل؟ (2) كيف تدير مجتمعات السانغيل هذه الديناميكية مع الحفاظ على التماسك الاجتماعي؟ باستخدام منهجية إثنوغرافية، تستخدم الدراسة مقابلات شبه منظمة مع 20 مشاركاً (أئمة من التيار السائد، وأساتذة متأثرون بالسلفية، وشباب، وأفراد من المجتمع)، وملاحظة المشاركين (على سبيل المثال، ديكو سو، غاندينغ، كاندوري، مانواك، مانونجونغ)، والتحليل التاريخي، والبحث في الوثائق الأرشيفية. وتكشف الدراسة عن تحولات وتغيرات مهمة في الممارسات والمعتقدات الدينية لمجتمع مسلمي سانجيل في كيامبا، مقاطعة سارانغاني، في ظل التنافس بين التقاليد القائمة على الأعراف والإصلاح السلفي. كما تكشف الدراسة عن ظاهرة الانتقائية الدينية (الاندماج الانتقائي). ويبتكر هذا البحث في تناوله للسلفية في سياقات ذات أغلبية مسلمة، حيث يتجاوز الدراسات الكلية ليدرس الديناميات الجزئية داخل مجتمع الأقليات المسلمة. ويساهم في فهم الديناميات الدينية في سياقات الأقليات، والسلفية المحلية، والتعددية الإسلامية، والمقاومة القائمة على الأعراف، مع الاعتراف بالأبعاد المحلية للسلفية وتأثيرها على الفئات المستضعفة. وتساهم هذه الدراسة في إضافة معلومات جديدة إلى الأنثروبولوجيا الدينية ودراسة الإسلام من خلال توسيع فهمنا للتعددية الدينية والعولمة المحلية في سياق الأقليات في جنوب شرق آسيا، وتقديم نموذجاً لكيفية التداول حول الهوية والتنازع عليها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مسلمو سانجيل، التداول والتنافس الديني، السلفية الإصلاحية، الأعراف، نظرية بورديو للممارسة، التماسك الاجتماعي، العولمة المحلية.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Research Questionnaire

ABBREVIATION DIRECTORY

BARMM	: <i>Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao</i>
BOL	: <i>Bangsamoro Organic Law</i>
ICCAD	: <i>Integrated Cultural Communities Affairs Division</i>
ICCs/Ips	: <i>Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples</i>
IPRA	: <i>Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act</i>
MILF	: <i>Moro Islamic Liberation Front</i>
MNLF	: <i>Moro National Liberation Front</i>
NCCA	: <i>National Commission for Culture and the Arts</i>
NCMF	: <i>National Commission on Muslim Filipinos</i>
OFWs	: <i>Overseas Filipino Workers</i>
PD	: <i>Presidential Decree</i>
RA	: <i>Republic Act</i>

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The negotiation and contestation of religious practices and beliefs have long played a pivotal role in shaping Muslim communities worldwide, particularly at the intersections of localized traditions and transnational ideologies.¹ From the earliest theological disagreements over creedal differences between Muslims to contemporary divisions between reformist and traditionalist interpretations of Islam, the process of contestation and negotiation has not only defined belief systems but also shaped Islam's ability to remain historically and culturally relevant over time.

One of the most influential contemporary Islamic reform movements is Salafism- according to its traditional definition it is a movement within Sunni Islam that seeks to return to what its adherents believe to be the purest form of Islam, as practiced by the Prophet Muhammad SAW and the first three generations of Muslims, specifically the companions of Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Sahabah*), followers of the companions (*Tabi'un*) and followers of the followers (*Tabi al Tabi'in*). These three first-generation Muslims are known as the (*al-salaf al-salih*). These individuals are considered important carriers of the purest form of Islam because they lived close to the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW himself or, in some cases, contemporaneously with him. Salafism emphasizes the return to the original teachings of the Quran and Sunnah, purifying monotheism from polytheistic beliefs by accepting independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) and rejecting blind imitation (*taqlid*). Salafism has existed since the very beginning of Islam, as it reflects the way the Prophet Muhammad SAW and his companions practiced and understood their religion.² Salafism is not a monolithic movement; its definition has complexities that are evolving, contested, and negotiated among different actors.³ Some scholars and commentators subdivided Salafism into three main categories- *Quietist Salafism*, which focuses on personal piety and avoids political engagement; *Political Salafism*, which engages with governance and societal reform; and *Jihadi-Salafism*, which advocates militant action.⁴ While rooted in Islamic history, Salafism has gained global

¹ Martin van Bruinessen, *Ghazwul Fikri or Arabization? Indonesian Muslim Responses to Globalization*, ed. Ken Miichi and Omar Farouk (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

² Roel Meijer, *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2014).

³ Muhammad Muhammad Nasir, "Politics, Proselytization, and the Glocalization of Salafism in Post-9/11 Indonesia and Nigeria" (Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia, 2024).

⁴ Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafī Thought and Action," ed. Roel Meijer, *Oxford University Press*, 2014, <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199333431.003.0002>.

traction over the past Century, particularly with the rise of Saudi Arabia as a religious and geopolitical power.⁵ This transnational influence has created new terrains of religious negotiation and contestation, especially when Salafī doctrines come into contact with localized forms of Islam.

Before 9/11, academic engagement with Salafism remained relatively limited, except for a limited interest during the classical and early modern periods. When addressed, Salafism was predominantly examined through the lens of Saudi Arabia's religious history, rather than as a dynamic transnational movement. Earlier research on Salafism is either general or localized. Previous studies were often framed through the lens of radicalization and security studies.⁶ Historically, Salafism is anchored in Saudi Wahhabism as they share a common doctrinal foundation, which is strict monotheism (*Tawhīd*) and rejection of religious innovation (*bid'ah*). However, as it disseminated globally, it was reinterpreted, adapting to local cultural context and social realities. Saudi Arabia invested heavily in religious institutions, scholarship programs, and missionary networks across Asia, Africa, and beyond, creating a global infrastructure for the promotion of Salafī Islam. It shows that Saudi Arabia plays a central role in institutionalizing and exporting Salafī Islam; however, it was also a result of local agency. After 9/11, it led to global scrutiny, which reduced direct Saudi support. Glocalization of Salafism occurred as local actors played a crucial role in adapting and sustaining Salafī ideologies shaped by local political, social, and religious dynamics.⁷

Southeast Asia illustrates how Salafism is reinterpreted in various cultural contexts. Academic perspectives often construct narratives of Southeast Asia Islam in terms of conflict (Salafism) or as an explicit fusion (syncretism) between adat (local customs) and Islamic law, as if these are peculiar to the region. The application of terms (for example, heartlands and peripheries) can reinforce biases that imply that an Islamic faith is weaker the further we are from Mecca. Such metaphors not only fail to account for Islam's participation within Southeast Asia society but also fail to recognize its specific form as a living and functioning force essentially instilled in the region's culture along with its diverse traditions. In Muslim-majority states like Indonesia and Malaysia, it is noted that Salafī teachings have given direction to various forms of traditionalist Islam and have replaced older forms. For example, in Indonesia, Salafī ideology moves beyond a theological question to guide social practices like styles of clothing in public spaces for

⁵ Roel Meijer, *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*.

⁶ Roel Meijer, *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*.

⁷ Muhammad Muhammad Nasir, "Politics, Proselytization, and the Glocalization of Salafism in Post-9/11 Indonesia and Nigeria."

both Muslim men and women.⁸ Transformation of greater piety involves adopting a conservative lifestyle and social interaction.⁹ Increased piety and spirituality to strengthen religious commitment that is aligned with the Salafī ideologies.¹⁰ Traditionalist Islamic groups, particularly Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and habaib, perceive the rise of Salafī followers as a challenge to local religious authority rather than just traditions. Traditionalist Islam embraces a strong anti-Salafī rhetoric, considering that Salafī groups provide a severely ultraconservative interpretation of Islam that challenges the flexibility of traditionalist Islam. Traditionalist Islam rejects some principles of Salafī groups but endorses others. For example, traditionalists generally reject Salafī groups' rejection of local customs, such as *maulid* and *tahlilan*, but endorse Salafī groups' adherence to strict monotheism (*tawhīd*). Because traditionalist actors act as a strategic handle on Salafī ideology but do not comprise an identity as Salafists, they are involved in complex negotiations to distinguish themselves from Salafist actors. Traditionalists engage and position counterarguments using digital platforms, educational institutions, social discussion and sermon groups, pesantren networks, and authority based on lineages.¹¹ Additionally, local actors concurrently negotiate religious/cultural realities surrounding Salafī ideologies. Some local religious/cultural figures advocate reinterpretations of religious tenets, while others may merely incorporate selective Salafī elements into their roles as religious figures while maintaining their longstanding traditions.¹² In Malaysia, the increasing influence of Puritan Salafī Islam introduces changes to the community. Many Malaysian Muslims now reject local cultural practices as un-Islamic and support the implementation of Islamic laws and the establishment of an Islamic state.¹³

The Philippines case is distinct yet also shows parallel patterns of tension and change. As a Muslim minority within a predominantly Christian nation, the Philippines has historically embraced a plethora of various Islamic expressions, many of which were influenced by pre-Islamic beliefs and customs, by Sufism, and by centuries of more

⁸ Noorhaidi Hasan, *Education, Young Islamists and Integrated Islamic Schools in Indonesia*, 19 (2012).

⁹ Yuyun Sunesti, "Young Salafī-Niqabi and Hijrah: Agency and Identity Negotiation," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* Volume 8 (December 2018).

¹⁰ Diah Ayu Agustina, "Cultivating Piety in The Urban Landscape: A Study on The Spiritual Odyssey of Salafī Women in Jakarta" (Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia, 2023).

¹¹ Syamsul Rijal, *Opposing Wahhabism: The Emergence of Ultra-Traditionalism in Contemporary Indonesia* (2020).

¹² Muhammad Muhammad Nasir, "Politics, Proselytization, and the Glocalization of Salafism in Post-9/11 Indonesia and Nigeria."

¹³ Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, "The Islamic Conservative Turn in Malaysia: Impact and Future Trajectories," *#Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht*, 2016, <https://doi.org/DOI.10.1007/s11562-016-0373-3>.

localized Islam. There are many influences, including Arab influence,¹⁴ on the emergence of Islam in the region and Malay missionaries,¹⁵ which helped in localizing Islam to indigenous customs. While much has been written on the Islam/Islamicate dynamic, there is ongoing debate around authenticity and adaptation, as well as the preservation of cultural identity, colonialism,¹⁶ and modernization.¹⁷ Not to mention, ideological transformations shaped the traditions of the Moro, resulting in some loss of indigenous expressions of Islamic practice and the emergence of new expressions of Islamic practice. Local Muslim communities eventually developed their traditions of belief and practice by combining Quranic norms with pre-Islamic customs and indigenous religious rituals.

Nevertheless, these behaviors have become the subject of heightened interest since the 1970s, as Salafī influence has grown. The rise of Salafism in the Philippines is a consequence of transnational religious networks linked to the propagation of Islam through Saudi Arabian influence and also linked to local and regional institutions of Islamic education over the decades. Salafī scholars and movements attempted to challenge many of the well-established traditions of the day by advocating for theological change and scriptural purity. This has initiated conflict among local Muslim groups in the Philippines, with disagreement about religious traditions reflecting larger debates over ideology and geopolitics. The influence of Salafism on local Muslim communities in the Philippines originates from Saudi funding and support for scholarships, mosques, and Islamic institutions in Mindanao starting in the 1970s and 1980s. 1977, for example, Saudi Arabia provided scholarships to many Moro students to study at the Islamic University in Medina. These educational exchanges facilitated the introduction of Salafī teachings, leading to the establishment of numerous madrasahs that focused on core aspects of Islamic faith.¹⁸ During this period, Saudi Arabia sought to counter the influence of Egypt and Iran in the Muslim world, overtaking Egypt and Libya as the primary source of Islamic scholarship for Muslim Filipinos. In 1976, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) split from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The MILF, although also influenced by Salafī and Muslim Brotherhood beliefs, was influential in incorporating Salafī ideologies into the

¹⁴ Abubakar, Carmen A., *The Advent and Growth of Islam in the Philippines". Islam in Southeast Asia: Political, Social and Strategic Challenges for the 21st Century*, ed. K. S. Nathan and Mohammad Hashim Kamali (ISEAS Publishing, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789812306241-005>.

¹⁵ Najeeb M Saleeby, *Studies in Moro History, Law, and Religion*, n.d.

¹⁶ Cesar Adib Majul, *The Role of Islam in the History of the Filipino People*, n.d., 13.

¹⁷ Ghislaine Loyre, "Foreign Influences on Muslim Rituals," *Mag* 46 (Fourth Quarter 1998): 429–51.

¹⁸ Wan Kadir bin Che Man, "Muslim Separatism: The Moros in Southern Philippines and the Malays in Southern Thailand," *Australian National University*, 1987.

structure of its movement.¹⁹ The creation and proliferation of Saudi-funded madrasahs, mosques, and charities in the 1980s and 1990s were important institutions for Salafi outreach. Local actors played a significant role in disseminating Salafi ideologies within the local Muslim communities, with many local ulama and ustadh having a prominent role in da'wah through community spaces and social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, radio stations). Additionally, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who worked in Saudi Arabia often converted to Islam and adopted Salafi practices, bringing these influences back to the Philippines.²⁰ In May 2025, Saudi Arabia announced the Saudi Scholarship Program for Filipino Students, continuing the longstanding tradition of educational exchange. The National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) participated in an official press conference for the scholarship program at the Royal Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Makati City. Filipino students are now invited to apply for 265 fully funded scholarships for 2025-2026 to study undergraduate and graduate studies at select universities in Saudi Arabia. This program is part of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which focuses on cooperation with other countries and cultural exchange.²¹ Opportunities of this nature have been significant in shaping religious discourse in Mindanao. Salafism continues to transform religious and social norms in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), primarily through the connections with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). This Saudi transnational training of scholars creates a path into the MILF's religious authorities and religious structure, affecting public sector ideologies, education, and the interpretation of Islamic law in the BARMM. The effects of these influences on social values and religious practices are yet to be understood, and these influences have long-term implications for the region. These developments have resulted in theological debates within Muslim communities, with the actions of certain older religious customs denounced by Salafi-oriented preachers as bid'ah (unwarranted innovation) or, more severely, as shirk (polytheism). Long-practiced customs have thus been transformed into arenas of contestation, creating rifts between communities and negotiating local Islamic identities. The conflict between maintaining traditional culture and religiously informed reformist approaches also offers a productive space for studying the negotiation and contestation of religion.

¹⁹ Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), "The Growing Influence of Salafism in Muslim Mindanao," *Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC)*, January 8, 2020.

²⁰ Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), "The Growing Influence of Salafism in Muslim Mindanao."

²¹ Bureau of Muslim Cultural Affairs, *NCMF Joins the Official Announcement and Press Conference on Saudi Scholarships for Filipino Students*, Facebook, June 3, 2025.

In the Philippine context, Research into Salafism generally adopt a macro-level perspective,²² examining the transnational networks established through, for example madrasahs, Saudi funded scholarships, and online digital da'wah, and these studies rarely engage with examining micro-level examples of how local actors from marginalized groups seem to engage selectively with Salafi teachings or directly resist adopting Salafi teachings while simultaneously attempting to maintain their adat practices. Similarly, scholars examining Salafi's relationship to traditional rituals²³ tend to focus on ritual changing²⁴ and reconfiguration²⁵ or security-based discourses as opposed to focusing on everyday negotiations of religious identity and social cohesion.²⁶ This is a critical gap given that the Sangil are an enumerated community of roughly 10,000²⁷ adherent Muslims located in Southern Mindanao, and are therefore often ignored when it comes to understand how smaller communities engage with religious discourse in their everyday lived experiences.

The broader Southeast Asian context provides examples of studies on Islamic syncretism and reformism that offer useful insights, for example classic work on Javanese Islam²⁸ demonstrated how the Javanese integrated their Islamic piety with their own local cosmological beliefs, a dynamic we see at play with the Sangil's Karamat Islam. In Muslim-majority states like Indonesia and Malaysia, it is noted that Salafi teachings have given direction to various forms of traditionalist Islam and have replaced older forms. For example, in Indonesia, Salafi ideology moves beyond a theological question to guide social practices like styles of clothing in public spaces for both Muslim men and women.²⁹ Transformation of greater piety involves adopting a conservative lifestyle and social interaction.³⁰ Increased piety and spirituality to strengthen religious commitment that is aligned with the Salafi ideologies.³¹ Traditionalist Islamic groups, particularly Nahdlatul

²² Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), "The Growing Influence of Salafism in Muslim Mindanao."

²³ Ghislaine Loyre, "Foreign Influences on Muslim Rituals."

²⁴ Isman Iskandar, "Islamic Dynamics of Southeast Asia: Ideological Problems," *Institut Ilmu Al-Qur'an (IIQ) Jakarta, Indonesia*, 2023.

²⁵ Federico V. Magdalena, PhD, "Muslims in the Philippines: Between Past and Present," *Published in Arabic and English, Dubai: Al-Mesbar Research & Studies Center*, November 2020, 125–48.

²⁶ Kanami Namiki, "'Maranao-Ness' Reconsidered: The Impact of Islam on Maranao 'Maranao-Ness' Reconsidered: The Impact of Islam on Maranao Dance," *Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities Asia Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities Asia* 8 (October 2018).

²⁷ National Commission for Culture and the Arts, "Peoples of the Philippines: Sangil (Sangir/Marore)," National Commission for Culture and the Arts, <https://ncca.gov.ph/about-culture-and-arts/culture-profile/glimpses-peoples-of-the-philippines/sangil-sangir-marore/>.

²⁸ Geertz, Clifford, *The Religion of Java* (University of Chicago Press, 1976).

²⁹ Noorhaidi Hasan, *Education, Young Islamists and Integrated Islamic Schools in Indonesia*.

³⁰ Yuyun Sunesti, "Young Salafi-Niqabi and Hijrah: Agency and Identity Negotiation."

³¹ Diah Ayu Agustina, "Cultivating Piety in The Urban Landscape: A Study on The Spiritual Odyssey of Salafi Women in Jakarta" (Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia, 2023).

Ulama (NU) and habaib, perceive the rise of Salafī followers as a challenge to local religious authority rather than just traditions. Traditionalist Islam embraces a strong anti-Salafī rhetoric, considering that Salafī groups provide a severely ultraconservative interpretation of Islam that challenges the flexibility of traditionalist Islam. Traditionalist Islam rejects some principles of Salafī groups but endorses others. For example, traditionalists generally reject Salafī groups' rejection of local customs, such as *maulid* and *tahlilan*, but endorse Salafī groups' adherence to strict monotheism (*tawhid*). Because traditionalist actors act as a strategic handle on Salafī ideology but do not comprise an identity as Salafists, they are involved in complex negotiations to distinguish themselves from Salafist actors. Traditionalists engage and position counterarguments using digital platforms, educational institutions, social discussion and sermon groups, *pesantren* networks, and authority based on lineages.³² Additionally, local actors concurrently negotiate religious/cultural realities surrounding Salafī ideologies. Some local religious/cultural figures advocate reinterpretations of religious tenets, while others may merely incorporate selective Salafī elements into their roles as religious figures while maintaining their longstanding traditions.³³ In Malaysia, the increasing influence of Puritan Salafī Islam introduces changes to the community. Many Malaysian Muslims now reject local cultural practices as un-Islamic and support the implementation of Islamic laws and the establishment of an Islamic state.³⁴

Globally, research on Muslim minorities involved in transnational Islamic movements offers comparative insights; however, it has not been widely applied in the Philippine context. For example, Werbner studies how Sufi movements in South Asia have resisted reformist pressure,³⁵ while Bayat examines youth agency in negotiating religious identities in the Middle East.³⁶ Although such studies highlight universal trends of hybrid identity formation, they are seldom applied to the distinct socio-political contexts of the Philippines. For Muslim minorities like the Sangil, the challenge of negotiating religious identity is intensified by their position as a minority within a minority, compounded by a post-conflict milieu and limited demographic presence.

³² Syamsul Rijal, *Opposing Wahhabism: The Emergence of Ultra-Traditionalism in Contemporary Indonesia*.

³³ Muhammad Muhammad Nasir, "Politics, Proselytization, and the Glocalization of Salafism in Post-9/11 Indonesia and Nigeria."

³⁴ Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, "The Islamic Conservative Turn in Malaysia: Impact and Future Trajectories," *#Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht*, 2016, <https://doi.org/DOI.10.1007/s11562-016-0373-3>.

³⁵ Pnina Werbner, *Sufi Regional Cults in South Asia and Indonesia: Towards a Comparative Analysis*, ed. Kathryn Robinson (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

³⁶ Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Stanford University Press, 2013).

This study addresses the previous gaps in academic literature by exploring the Sangil Muslims' negotiation of Karamat Islam and Salafi reformism through the framework of Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, focusing to habitus, capital, and symbolic power. Previous literature has tended to approach the study of religious negotiation at the macro-level, often focused on security issues. In contrast, this study will approach the micro-dynamics of religious negotiation amongst the Sangil, including key specificities of the Sangil as their appeals to kinship, dialogical strategies they employ, and their legal protections to maintain their social cohesion. In this study, the emergent ethnographic data (2024-2025) [interviews; participant observation; digital content analysis] will point towards identifying, and then exploring, the Sangil's cleft habitus that will support their selective accommodation of Salafi teachings, while simultaneously maintaining their adat practices.

Through the localized ethnolinguistic and religious minority of the Sangil people in Southern Mindanao, we can explore the broader dynamic. The Islamic religiosity of the Sangil community reflects a dynamic negotiation and contestation between ancestral cultural practices and the growing influence of transnational reformist ideologies. The Sangil are a small Muslim ethnolinguistic group in the southern Philippines, with an estimated population of approximately 10,000,³⁷ primarily residing in areas such as Glan,³⁸ Kiamba,³⁹ South Cotabato, Davao del Sur, and the islands of Balut and Sarangani. They speak Sangirese, a Sangiric Austronesian language with influences from Malay, Spanish, and Ternate dialects.⁴⁰ serving as a linguistic bridge between Sulawesi, Indonesia, and Mindanao. Their religion is Islam, characterized by a syncretic blend of Islamic practices and pre-Islamic animist traditions. It is shaped by historical figures like Sharīf Masad Akbar, who introduced Islam to the community. Sharīf Masad Akbar is a fundamental figure in the religious history of the Sangil. He introduced Islam Masade, a syncretic version of Islam that combined Qur'anic teachings with pre-Islamic animist and customary practices, incorporating Islamic beliefs into the Sangil's local cosmological and ritual systems. This syncretic tradition that was established during Akbar's time, which represented Sangil's genealogical ties to the Sangihe and Talaud Islands of Indonesia, defined religious practices that were recognized as Islamic, such as Soleleng Koraang (a communal prayer ritual) and Diko So (a form of dhikr). These rituals combined Islamic

³⁷ National Commission for Culture and the Arts, "Peoples of the Philippines: Sangil (Sangir/Marore)."

³⁸ Felicitas Sunio Sontohot, "Rites and Rituals of the Sangils," *Ateneo de Manila University*, Second Quarter 1994, 177–93.

³⁹ "Kiamba, Sarangani Profile," PhilAtlas, <https://www.philatlas.com/mindanao/r12/saranga>.

⁴⁰ Kenneth R. Maryot, *Sangil Elevationals and the Performative Analysis*, 18 (1974).

devotion with symbolic representations of local culture. The Islamic identity established by Akbar has remained intact, and even evolved, according to their history of leadership by a mixture of customary authorities (e.g., sultans) and religious leaders (e.g., Imāms and Panditas), an overall Islamic and indigenous form of governance.

The Sangil maintains a strong cultural identity tied to their ancestral ties to the Sangihe and Talaud Islands in Indonesia, with a social structure historically led by sultans and religious leaders like Imāms and Panditas, reflecting a blend of customary and Islamic governance. Their community is marked by resilience, adaptability, and a dynamic interplay of local traditions with global Islamic influences, including Salafism, mediated through transnational networks and modern education. Historically, Sangil Islam, emphasized in the syncretic Islam Masade brought by Sharīf Masad Akbar, represented the merging of Qur'anic understanding alongside customary rites. Therefore, Islam's beliefs were in a local cosmological and ritual framework.

However, throughout recent decades, Salafi-oriented teachings have shifted to a narrower Quran-and-Sunna interpretation. Reformist-based scholarly discourse valorizes the textual practices of Salafi ideology and often deems adat-based rituals problematic. It seeks to reorient religious practice toward textual orthodoxy.

Despite these observations, the religious encounter did not drive homologous religious change. Instead, a selective assimilation process emerged wherein Sangil Muslims participated in what might be called religious cherry-picking, assimilating Salafi teachings as spiritually and socially beneficial, while simultaneously retaining traditional rituals, symbols, and cultural practices that bond them with the community. Regarding selective incorporation, the agency of the Sangil people is being prioritized through their agency to mediate between global Islamic discourses and local epistemological practices. Furthermore, this development prompts us to observe that Sangil Muslims have created an adaptive, flexible religiosity that rejects and succumbs to reformist interventions. They create a pluralistic religious environment wherein elements of contestation and continuity exist. Consequently, religious authority within the Sangil community is not merely contested between competing agents and actors but is constantly reformulated in layered practices of adoption, negotiation, and symbolic preservation.

These studies explain that negotiation and contestation over rituals are not new to Muslims in the Southern Philippines. However, the literature predominantly discusses ritual changes within the context of the Moro community, and there has been less analysis of the social processes that it inherently reflects. Scholars have previously examined how global reformist ideologies, particularly Salafism, exert pressure on traditional forms of

ritual that were typically analyzed in the realms of ritual purity or radicalization. Nevertheless, studies that emphasize and promote understanding of religious changes in a social sense have limited ability to observe the social processes of negotiation, explicit contestations over religious authority, intergenerational division, and alternative organizational forms of community life. This study addresses this gap through research questions focused on religious negotiation and contestation among traditional and Salafist-influenced Sangil groups, and how the Sangil developed strategies for social cohesion when disputing these issues. The focus on the Sangil community allows this study to demonstrate a disadvantaged minority community exhibiting agency by responding to Salafī teachings while engaging in groups cofounded in adat practices.

Using the linguistic and religious localized minority of the Sangil in Southern Mindanao, we can begin to investigate the broader dynamic. The Sangil communities' relationship with Islam reflects the ongoing negotiation and contestation between the community's historic cultural traditions and the proliferation of transnational reformist models. The Sangil is a relatively small Muslim ethnolinguistic group from the southern Philippines, numbering around 10,000, primarily residing in Glan, Kiamba, South Cotabato, Davao del Sur, and the islands of Balut and Sarangani. The Sangil speak Sangirese, a Sangiric Austronesian language family member, with elements from Malay, Spanish, and Ternate dialects, functioning as a bridge language between Sulawesi, Indonesia, and Mindanao. The Sangil are Muslims who follow a syncretic Islam inherent in the animistic traditions that preceded their Islamization, which occurred at the hands of historical figures such as Sharīf Masad Akbar, who was significant to the community's religious evolution after formally introducing Islam to the community. The Sangil is inextricably linked to their ancestral connections with Indonesia's Sangihe and Talaud Islands. Regarding social organization, Sangil social systems identified leaders who blended between customary leaders and followers of culturally historical sultans. Sangil Islam was historically defined by a transnational, sultanic lineage of religious authority, which included several other religious leaders, such as Imāms and Panditas, forming cosmological and Islamic governmental processes.

The Sangil are resilient and adaptable people characterized by an active, creative, and contextualized negotiation of localization and global Islamic ideological imperatives. To approximate Salafism, the Sangil communities adopt Salafī references, not as a rigid orthodoxy but as a critical frame, through a selective practice ascertained through transnational networks, experiences, and modern education. Historically and contemporaneously, Sangil Islam was described -softened into the term for reasons of

discomfort- with the importation of a syncretic Islam brought by Sharīf Masad Akbar, with significant elements of non-Islamic and customary practices, simultaneously imposing Qur'anic meaning alongside customs.

However, recent decades of Salafī orientation and preaching rooted in a narrower Quran-and-Sunna interpretation have moved away from the Qur'an, Sunna, and decorum. Salafi-based scholarly traditions favour textual practices of Salafī ideology and often seek to delegitimize customary adat-based ritual practices. In these recent Salafī understandings, the tradition of thinking outside the study of the tradition seeks to replace the tradition with textual normativity and personal commitments that are supposedly a notion of authentic religious practice. The ideas of authenticity about Salafism represent canonizing fidelity to reformist interpretations of the Qur'an and Sunna.

Notwithstanding the above observations, the religious encounter has not generated homologous religious change, but rather a selective integration contingent upon some degree of advances towards religious cherry-picking, wherein Sangil Muslims bring into their religiously-stances habitual and traditional rituals, as socially useful and spiritually valuable, while seeking out and retaining each group's traditional cultural symbols and practices as communal attachment to others in the community. In terms of a selective incorporation, the agency of the Sangil community is elevated through their agentive capabilities to mediate negotiated practices between disparate modes of global Islamic doctrines and local epistemological practices and understandings.

This study argues that negotiations and contestations of Islamic practices among the Sangil Muslims in Kiamba, Sarangani Province, emerge from a cleft habitus created from a combination of traditional adat-based practices, with roots in Sharīf Masad Akbar's syncretic *Islam Masade*, and reformism, influenced by relatively new Salafī networks and local agency. This occurs within competing fields: data-based mosques and Salafī madrasahs, which allow actors to engage with cultural and educational capital to negotiate and contest symbolic power over authoritative practices of Islam. The Sangil Muslims negotiate social cohesion through several adaptive strategies, including selective assimilation and pluralistic conversation, while negotiating a hybrid religious identity of multiple piety to balance pressures of global reformism against local cultural continuity. By utilizing Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, this study has illuminated both how and why these negotiations and contestations take place and how they make the Sangil Muslims resilient as a community in this process, while also providing new ethnographic and theoretical insights into the anthropology of religion in minority Muslim contexts.

The negotiation and contestation among the Sangil Muslims is illustrated through their selective assimilation of Salafi-inspired practices (e.g., *modest dress, stricter modes of prayer*), inheriting or remaking their adat rituals (e.g., *Soleleng Koraang, Diko So*), as discussed above in fieldwork interviews. These practices represent a cleft habitus in that the traditional dispositions, or dispositions rooted in syncretic rituals related to the cosmology of the Sangihe and Talaud Islands, coexist in tension with reformist practices. The why of these negotiations, engagements, and contestations is a product of both transnational Salafī networks (e.g., Saudi Arabia-funded madrasahs from the 1970s onward, teachings by Ustādh), and local agency or the practices by the Sangil Muslims that reinterpret Islamic orthodoxy. Contestations are played out in fields such as mosques and social media. The inherent power of traditional leaders, who are often armed with cultural capital (e.g., adat knowledge), clashes with Salafī preachers, who wield educational capital (e.g., Middle Eastern educational experiences) to engage and contest over authoritative symbolic power, existing or emerging at the field of practice level. The contested ritual Diko So (Salafī labeled *bid'ah*) as a collective dhikr represents a local ritual practice that benefited the community, which was enhanced by the local conversion to Salafī. What Diko So represents and why it has continued through contestation involves dynamic global discourses around reformism, cast into local strategies of power based on resorting to further legitimacy.

The Sangil Muslims engage other social cohesion modes or strategies of *nafsi-nafsi* and conversation dialogue alongside legally enacted indigenous rights-based laws to grant legitimacy to the Sangil's adat-based practices. Including *nafsi-nafsi* and informal conversation and discussion strategy has allowed the Sangil Muslims to sustain the Salafī encouraged piety and practices alongside their adat practices, allowing them resilience in contestation. Empirically, this study fills a gap in our understanding of how a minority Muslim group like the Sangil (around 10,000 are found in Southern Mindanao) navigates the discourses and practices of global Islamic discourses through the additional clarity and contribution to the field of established and newer majorities in South East Asia, and the contours of these practices, in a non-majority context. Theoretically, it extends aspects of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice by productively applying cleft habitus to religious pluralism. The case of the Sangil Muslims shows how aspects of localized Salafism contribute to the identity of Muslims in a non-majority context. This study provides a viable case study to conceptualize what glocalization looks like in Southeast Asian Islam, with legal and moral help in a case of becoming something else alongside a minority community that has to continuously negotiate and contest as a form of becoming.

1.2. Research Aims and Objectives

This study aims to investigate the processes and rationale of religious negotiation and contestation between traditional and Salafi-influenced Sangil groups in Southern Philippines, as well as how these processes contribute to shaping religious identity and social cohesion in the Sangil community. The study aims to achieve the following goals:

1) Document traditional religious practices among Sangil people: To identify and assess the traditional forms of rituals, rites, and beliefs among Sangil people, focusing on those internalized through adat and influenced by the syncretic Islam of Sharīf Masad Akbar, to make sense of the negotiation and contestation.

2) Analyze the process and reasons for Salafi reform influences: To analyze how and why Salafi-oriented Islamic reformism has manifested and developed among the Sangil, and identify agents, transnational networks, and teachings involved in the process.

3) Explore the process and reasons for mechanisms and motivation of religious negotiation and contestation: To comprehend how Sangil Muslims negotiate between adat-based practices and Salafi teaching and/or beliefs, and why these negotiations and contestations occur.

4) Assess implications for identity and social cohesion: To evaluate how negotiation and contestation affect Sangil Muslim identity and community resilience or cohesion. Specifically, we want to understand how these findings relate to broader concepts in the theory of identity, religious pluralism, habitus, and glocalization, while also considering negotiation and contestation strategies that can support cohesion.

1.3. Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How and why do religious negotiation and contestation between traditional and Salafi-influenced Sangil groups exist?
2. How do the Sangil communities manage religious negotiation and contestation while maintaining social cohesion?

1.4. Theoretical Framework

This study uses Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Practice.⁴¹ Its main theoretical framework is to explore the negotiation and contestation of religious practices and beliefs among the Sangil community in Southern Philippines. The theory's core terms, namely habitus, field, capital, and symbolic power, with particular attention to cleft habitus.⁴² These

⁴¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, 16 (Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁴² Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford University Press, 2000).

are helpful ways of thinking about the wide-ranging possibilities in which Sangil Muslims negotiate contrasting orientations of adat-based Islam and reformism shaped by Salafi teachings. These terms frame negotiation explicitly as the practice of navigating competing religious dispositions and contestation as the process of struggle over religious authority and legitimacy which directly address the two research questions: (1) the religious negotiation and contestation between traditional Sangil and Salafi-influenced Sangil groups, and (2) how the Sangil maintain social cohesion amid this negotiation and contestation.

Negotiation through Cleft Habitus is the internalized dispositions that humans use to frame and guide their perceptions and actions.⁴³ Habitus is critical to understanding how Sangil Muslims negotiate their Islamic identity. The Sangil Islamic habitus or disposition includes, and is built upon, the syncretic traditions introduced by Sharīf Masad Akbar that prioritize adat-based practices such as shrine veneration or appropriate customary rite passages as well as local respect for kinship-based leaders (i.e., Imāms and Panditas). This habitus construct predisposes the Sangil to recognize customary adat and its priority not only habitually but also the relational ties within the community. Although born into the Sangil's Islamic habitus, the Sangil ironically also developed a competing disposition informed by Salafi teachings through Saudi-funded madrasahs and scholarships, and on social media platforms like YouTube and Facebook. Salafi ideas, such as emphasizing scriptural purity and rejecting bid'ah (literally, "innovation", albeit in a religious context), introduce competing possibilities of legitimacy in Salafism as a religious disposition. This tension produces a cleft habitus where Sangil Muslims struggle to negotiate traditional with reformist ideologies. As cleft habitus, their inner struggle exhibits itself through selective assimilation or "religious cherry-picking," where some members of the Sangil community take on Salafi practices (e.g., strict monotheism, wearing conservative clothing, etc) in a physical sense but also while keeping adat rituals interestingly enough to maintain their cultural identity. This negotiation sets the stage for the Sangil to create a hybrid cultural religious identity that recognizes their need for continuity against pressures for religious reform; in this way, it is counterproductive, but it also promotes a sense of social unity by incorporating the various sources of influence in the community.

The field concept offers a way to frame the contestation over religious authority in social locations of contestation. The Sangil community operates in two competing fields: a local adat-Islam field, which comprises social sites such as mosques, adat councils, and leaders, and a transnational Salafi field driven by transnational reformist scholars and

⁴³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*.

Islamic global networks. Fields are important locations of contestation over different capitals, including cultural (i.e., entitlement to knowledge claims through the understanding of adat, or Quranic literalism), social (e.g., kinship relations or madrasah connections), and symbolic (i.e., religious legitimacy). Traditional leaders utilize capital based on cultural capital, which was informed by past practices, and the Salafī scholars assert their capital through the communal educational capital they require through a particular set of religious training funded institutionally through Saudi scholarships.

The primary issue with the contestation over forms of religion is the contestation over symbolic power, which is the ability to impose legitimate forms of meaning. Traditional leaders may simultaneously recognize their appropriate authority in the field based on the Sheikh or Pandita role that had prestige encumbered upon it, the level of status power regarding traditional leaders continues; generally, their families are recognized as kinship ties. As the authority of traditional leaders has become more indirect in truce and, in particular, in the leadership of community dispute resolution processes, they now have permission to take a more symbolic stance of authority through their language and a strictly Salafī framework. Traditional leaders would claim their traditional Islam based on history as part of the Sangil identity, which historically built on a tradition of symbolic legitimacy. At the same time, the Salafī-oriented scholars would derogate the same notions of created symbols as a *bid'ah* or *shirk*. The contestation around these issues and practices manifests in some public, languished debate between traditional leaders on the cultural heritage aspects of visiting a grave shrine with Salafī devotees who would find grave shrines to be distinctly un-Islamic. Prevailing on different notions of authenticity, this struggle for symbolic power continues to be a formative force in religious mediating and both groups, while executing their respective points of divergence, illegitimate togetherness that defines and legitimizes authentic Islam to become the normative force for the local community and influence various identities.

Through the lens of cleft habitus and symbolic power, Bourdieu's framework directly addresses the negotiation and contestation dynamics within the Sangil community. The cleft habitus exists to discuss how collectivized and individual assumptions and understandings of negotiated adaptations have and continue to conscientiously engage Sangil Muslim Muslims to purposely and actively select Salafist teachings while simultaneously keeping their original set of adat cultural rituals to uphold colonial narratives around social unity. The authority and symbols of power contestation amplified within competing fields underscores the identified 'political' interests that traditional Islam elicits over nontraditional actors, virtually Salafī oriented ones, and exemplifies how forms

of legitimacy and authority are accompanied by negotiation and contestation - all indicators of a deriving hybrid definition of identity with the Sangil people. Current concepts give meaning and relationship to the overall research goals. This study wanted to document traditional practice (through habitus), reinterpret Salafī influences (through transnational field concept), enact processes of negotiation (through cleft habitus), and identify possibilities for group identity and social cohesion (through symbolic power and field attend dynamics). Bourdieu's social theory fundamentally captures and describes where the Sangil face multifaceted negotiation and contestation along the lines of religion related to their productive strategies; they need to develop to conceptualize ideological tensions while maintaining some resemblance of social cohesion.

1.5. Research Significance

This study makes dual contributions to the anthropology of religion and Islamic studies by examining the religious negotiation and contestation of the Sangil, an understudied Muslim minority in the Southern Philippines, using Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Practice. The ethnographic contribution provides novelty in documenting Sangil's vibrant relationship with traditional adat-based practice, based on Sharīf Masad Akbar's syncretic Islam, alongside Salafi-influenced reformism. This study highlights the everyday processes of religious life that come into play within a marginalized ethnolinguistic community. By demonstrating what the Sangil do, how negotiation and contestation occur, and how the Sangil maintain social cohesion, our ethnography contributes to the ethnographic schema of Philippine Islam and documents how minority Muslims navigate global Islamic discourses while preserving cultural identity.

The study operationalizes Bourdieu's ideas of cleft habitus, field, capital, and symbolic power in a non-majority Muslim context. The Sangil experiences cleft habitus in that they must negotiate their traditional adat dispositions with contested Salafī influences. Under these conditions, a negotiation becomes possible, as we noted, with practical examples related to Soleleng Koraang or Diko So and the Salafis' calls of bid'ah on the one side and defences of the events as communal dhikr on the other. In continuing to track the debates, the competing field (data-based mosques vs. Salafi-influenced madrasahs) and struggles for symbolic power (over competing rituals), we seem to have a dynamic religious authority that is negotiated without devolving into massively rising conflict. In identifying and applying these concepts, the study illuminates the mechanisms and thinking about the reasons for religious change, thereby contributing to religious pluralism and glocalization models. Salafism's localized and mobile forms adapt to the larger Sangil cultural framework articulated in the legal protections, which validate the various adat practices.

This study also has larger implications in framing our understanding of minority relations among Muslims in Southeast Asia in general. The challenges involving *nafsi-nafsi*, dialogue, and hybrid identity formations for the Sangil outline a model of resilience and resistance that will resonate with other groups under reformist pressures. The small-scale ethnography of the Sangil raises the agency and actions of the Sangil groups, instead of structurally framing it as refusing gradual ideological assimilation to contemporary global Islamic movements. In offering the latter option of resisting as people who are increasingly peripheral in the contemporary landscape of Islam, we develop a comparative opportunity for exploring religious negotiation in diverse cultural contexts.

1.6. Research Methodology

This study is grounded in a qualitative, comparative ethnographic approach to capture diverse religious perspectives within the Sangil community. Set in Kiamba, Sarangani Province, the study employs semi-structured interviews conducted in the Sangil dialect, ensuring accessibility and cultural sensitivity. The fieldwork key respondent groups are Mainstream Sangil Imām/Pandita, Salafi-oriented preachers and students, and ordinary community members. Each group provides unique insights into the evolving religious landscape, allowing for generational, gendered, and ideological comparisons. The interview guide follows a consistent structure it begins with respondent profiles, delves into religious practices, explores negotiation and contestation between traditional and Salafi beliefs, and addresses perceptions of religious authority. In addition, community members such as Youth and women are asked about Islamic identity and changing notions of community belonging. The data will be thematically analyzed. It will involve historical analysis and fieldwork. Additionally, archival research will provide historical context for the practices documented in oral histories among Sangil cultural narratives. Ultimately, the design reveals the complexity of religious contestation and highlights community strategies for coexistence and cultural preservation.

The primary data for this study were collected through face-to-face interviews with key interlocutors. In addition to direct interviews conducted by the principal researcher, a research assistant based in the Philippines also facilitated several interviews. Furthermore, digital communication platforms such as Messenger and Telegram complemented and extended the fieldwork, particularly in cases where in-person interactions were not feasible.

Interviews were conducted in dialects of the Sangil language. These responses were subsequently translated into English to ensure clarity and accessibility for academic analysis, while preserving the cultural and contextual nuances embedded in the original expressions.

The sample selection for this study is strategically designed to reflect the diverse perspectives within the Sangil community in Kiamba, Sarangani Province, and is organized around three key respondent groups: Mainstream Sangil, Salafi-influenced Sangil, and the Sangil community. Each group was selected based on its potential to illuminate distinct yet interconnected religious negotiation and contestation dimensions. Traditional elders and ritual specialists represent custodians of indigenous beliefs and practices, offering insights into ritual significance, intergenerational transmission, and responses to critiques of traditionalism. On the other hand, Salafi-oriented individuals were chosen for their exposure to reformist ideologies, either through education abroad or encounters with Salafi preachers, providing a lens into reformist critiques and community dynamics. Including the Sangil community, such as Youth and women, captures evolving identities and the shifting landscape of Islamic understanding within the community, especially among those navigating tensions between inherited traditions and contemporary expressions of Islam. The estimated duration of each interview is 45–60 minutes.

The analysis includes historical contextualization and examination of religious practices. Interview data were transcribed and coded to identify recurring religious negotiation and contestation themes. This study will also utilize personal observations and interactions during fieldwork to support the findings.

1.7. Thesis Outline

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter serves as an Introduction that provides background of the study, aims and objectives, problem statements, Theoretical Framework, Significance, and Methodology. The second chapter offers a comprehensive introduction to the Sangil people, including their history, demographics, geographical distribution, economy, politics, and cultural characteristics. The third chapter introduces and examines the religious practices and beliefs of the Sangil, divided into two main sections: mainstream Sangil Islamic practices and Salafi-influenced practices. The fourth chapter analyzes the dynamics of religious negotiation and contestation within the Sangil community, including comparisons with Salafi practices in Southeast Asia and an examination of specific areas of disagreement between different groups. The final chapter provides a conclusion of the study that synthesizes the research findings, discusses their implications for understanding contemporary Islamic dynamics, and suggests areas for future research.

CHAPTER II

THE SANGIL COMMUNITY

To comprehend the religious negotiation and contestation among the Sangil, the community must be placed within specific social, historical, and cultural contexts. The Sangil community is one of thirteen Muslim ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines,⁴⁴ and as a minority of minorities, often overshadowed by larger Muslim groups, Maranao, Maguindanao, and Tausug.⁴⁵ Like any Indigenous group in Mindanao and the Philippines, the Sangil had a localized demographic of representation, providing an important and unique view into the complex phenomenon of Islam in Southeast Asia. The Sangil is an ethnolinguistic group from the southern Philippines and associated with the island of Sangihe in North Sulawesi, Indonesia. In historiography, Islam for the Sangil evolved as disjointed and localized practices that conflated traditional pre-Islam cultural beliefs and ancestral rituals that had become interpolated with Islam-associated practices. They have undergone a transformation, a transitional religion that is multilayered and consistently transcending itself beyond the historical entanglement, and in addition, the Sangil have been and are influenced by other reformist Islamic movements and experiences, particularly those of Salafi Islam, that has seen social diffusion occurring through engaged Transnational religious networks, Islamic educational institutions, and through social media. The religious contestation emerging within the Sangil communities is more than a separate theological deviation they are about their cultures.

2.1. Historical Background

The Sangil is a small Muslim ethnolinguistic group in the southern Philippines. The Sangil people descend from the Sangihe and Talaud Islands in Indonesia (now Northern Sulawesi). Historical accounts documented that Sangil's migration to Mindanao suggests multiple factors, including commercial, socio-political, or for religious reasons there are differing claims. Some scholars attribute the early stages of Sangil migration to economic opportunity.⁴⁶ While other scholars emphasize the role of Dutch colonial expansion and Christianization efforts in making Sangil Muslims move to the southern part of the Philippines, which was considered religiously tolerant.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the Sangil migration to the Philippines also elaborates that political transitions in Ternate and the greater Maluku

⁴⁴ Mariam Saidona Tagoranao and Alizaman D. Gamon, "Understanding the Religious Rights of the Muslims in the Philippines: A Catalyst for Peace and Justice," *Journal of Islam in Asia International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)* 16, no. 1 (2019).

⁴⁵ Abhoud Syed M Lingga, *Muslim Minority in the Philippines*, n.d.

⁴⁶ Felicitas Sunio Sontohot, "Rites and Rituals of the Sangils."

⁴⁷ Domingo M. Non, "The Odyssey of the Sangil in Mindanao," *Philippine E-Journal*, 2011.

region led to the dislocation and eventual resettlement of Sangil communities.⁴⁸ Currently, their communities are clustered in the southern half of Glan in sitios like Kimanadal, Kimangangayao, Tamparan, Nakolil, Calipagan, Pangyan Proper, and Burias.⁴⁹ In Kiamba, they reside in several purok areas, including Tuguis Darussalam, Bagong Lipunan, Bliss, Szopad, Tambiri, Tabudtod, Pron, Landing, Pansurang, Puago, and Katobao.⁵⁰ Smaller groups are also present in the coastal areas of South Cotabato and Davao del Sur. Balut and Sarangani islands remain central to Sangil settlement and heritage, accessed through General Santos City or other parts of Sarangani Province. On Balut Island, the Sangil communities can be found in Baryo Saging, Baryo site, Kugon, Petonggatang, Kimba, Warowo, Batuganding, Tinina, Kawayan, Boba, Cone, and others. The Sangil population is around a total of roughly 10,000.⁵¹ The relatively small population size of the Sangil community gives limited opportunities for representation in academic scholarship and policy agenda, despite being monumental in terms of cultural and religious diversity in the region. This demographic reality also shapes how they live socially, so their communities are smaller; the religious and cultural practices are shared and strengthened across generations. The Sangil speak a Sangiric Austronesian language (commonly referred to as Sangirese or Sangihe) which can be used as a linguistic bridge between Sulawesi and Mindanao. This language has origins similar to those of languages from North Sulawesi and includes elements of Malay, Spanish, and Ternate dialects.⁵²

Historically, the Sangil have existed as maritime traders, fishermen, and seafarers. During the colonial era, they often acted as intermediaries between Dutch-controlled Indonesia and Spanish-controlled Philippines. They successfully navigated many trade routes and participated in regional exchange networks as a direct function of their occupation. The migration of Sangil to the Philippines was enhanced by new economic opportunities made possible in the southern coastal areas of Mindanao, including Balut Island and Sarangani Bay. Contemporary Sangil people are still engaged in fishing. The Sangil people have a diverse and rich repertoire of traditional approaches to fishing that showcase their strong connection to the sea and their passion for ingenuity and adaptation. One of those approaches is *palanting*. A Sangil locally built torch made from dried coconut leaves or small bamboo poles. Some improvised lighting devices are recycled gasoline

⁴⁸ Amorisa Wiratri, “The Indonesian Diaspora across the Celebes Sea: Territory, Identity, and Citizenship” (The University of Western Australia, 2023).

⁴⁹ Felicitas Sunio Sontohot, “Rites and Rituals of the Sangils.”

⁵⁰ PhilAtlas, “Kiamba, Sarangani Profile.”

⁵¹ National Commission for Culture and the Arts, “Peoples of the Philippines: Sangil (Sangir/Marore).”

⁵² Kenneth R. Maryot, *Sangil Elevationals and the Performative Analysis*.

filled glass bottles and ignited coconut husk. These lighting devices have been used to light the open ocean at night for fishing purposes before there were tools for lighting, such as kerosene and petroleum lights. When Petromax lamps a modern pressurized kerosene lanterns emerged, fishing changed technologically. In recent times, however, Sangil has also used electric bulbs powered by rechargeable batteries and solar panels. This technological change reflects Sangil's responsiveness to change and environmental sustainability. Still, the community's elders often recollect using bamboo and palm torches.

“The palanting we have used since I was a kid. We take one or two palanting with us whenever we go to sea at night. It gives us light, but really, it brings fish. We make it out of old glass bottles. Not plastic, which would catch fire too quickly. We fill it with kerosene or sometimes crude oil. Then, we take coconut husk, or sometimes cotton, and put it in to soak up the oil. Then, we take aluminum to air seal the bottle, and some cotton or rolled-up paper for the wick in the middle. That is what we light. It burns well out there, even when it is windy. It holds light, but it is not just for seeing for us, it is a part of our whole way. The sea knows us, and we know the sea.”⁵³

In addition to lighting innovations, Sangil fishing responsibilities include diving techniques, locally available tools, and basic bodily skills to collect fish and marine life from coral reefs and the bottom of the ocean floor. During low tide, Community members gather shellfish and other seafood along the exposed shoreline. These natural food sources provide nutrients for the household and build kinship and social ties.

“So, when the sea tide is low especially at night when the sea is calm, we go out. We use something we call gasa. We make it by weaving coconut leaves, and sometimes we use a small amount of bamboo. It works like a scoop or small trap. We also bring sharp sticks, too wooden ones. We jab them into the sand to pull the octopus from where they are hiding. Moreover, it is dark, so we need the light. We typically bring bamboo torches. We will dry them in the sun for at least 3 days. After that, they burn well. This is how we can see as we move. You will find all sorts of things—shells, octopus, whatever the sea wants to give us. However, we do not take everything. We have learned how to know when and where to go, always thinking and looking at the moon and the tide. Moreover, we never take the ones that are still small. We let them grow. This is because we will return tomorrow, and there will be more.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Interview, Arsad Mohammad, Tuguis Darussalam, May 14, 2025.

⁵⁴ Interview, Hadidia Rubie, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, May 17, 2025.

They also utilize various types of nets. *Manajap* catches small fish, and *baling* is a larger trial collective fishing net. Many people will be involved in *baling*, either on the beach or out on the sea, emphasizing the values of collective labor and social cohesion among the Sangil. Another traditional tool is the *bubu* - a bamboo fish trap made through weaving, left in the coastal waters, and retrieved to collect fish and crustaceans. The Sangil also uses a fishing rod called a *gurang*, which is made out of a thin, flexible type of bamboo. This localized fishing knowledge of fishing - from hand-made tools to represents the Sangil's adaptability to maritime livelihood and their transnational identity, which includes resourcefulness and biological stewardship.

“Manajap is how we catch the small bangus, made right at the shore. We usually start after Fajr prayer, before the sun overheats the water. Two people hold the net, each holding a bamboo pole tied to the ends. The center of the net is a basin where we collect the fry when we drag it. We do this where the waves begin to break, into the shallow part of the ocean. If the wave and tide allow, we will move slowly from west to east, pulling the net. This is not meant for just fishermen; everyone comes— grandma and grandpa, kids, and women. Each net needs a pair. Families come with food. Eat together and rest under the shade. Sometimes we stay until night, especially if the catch is bountiful. After every drag, we sort and count the fry using another basin. Then come again. That is manajap. That is how we do it here.”⁵⁵

Furthermore, the fishing equipment and methods, as well as the local community practices of the Sangil people, are hybridized (traditional and modern) forms. The Sangil fishermen, prior to the introduction of motors, used to navigate the coastal and open water with small wooden boats powered by paddles, relying on their physical and mental stamina and intimate knowledge of currents and tides created by waves, wind, and water movement. When using the traditional boat, fishermen also relied on their own wave/sea energy to complete their fishing nets and maintain their social relationships as a trade and fishing community in the islands. Some of these boats allowed more productive means of hunting swallows with their nets. For example, some fishermen used motorboats for their fishing expeditions to extend the reach of their fishing trips and spend less time fishing. The motorized boat allowed the fishermen to go to further areas of the sea and sped up the total time spent fishing, but required more fuel. Fishers engaged in medium-scale or commercial fishing may spend less time fishing than paddling. However, paddling is very commonly

⁵⁵ Interview, Abdulwahab, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, May 17, 2025.

used by those who fish for subsistence, and is oftentimes preferable when the fishing trip is in near-shore areas.

Many community members also engage in small-scale upland agriculture (farming) alongside their maritime livelihood as an alternative means of income and subsistence. Upland agriculture entails growing food crops for domestic and trade on the hills above the sandy shoreline. Their crops include sweet potato, cassava, corn, bananas, rice, and vegetables. Some Sangil engages in the planting of coconut trees, which they harvest for local consumption and trade. Agricultural production is on a tiny scale and serves an important role in the livelihoods and economic resilience of Sangil families. However, land ownership has remained ambiguous and contested within the Sangil community. Some Sangil have been able to farm property they claim to own below legal inheritance laws or otherwise, but some Sangil farm property where they do not have secure or formal land tenure, (ones that have a formal title), which is a continuation of earlier settler farmer practices and/or indigenous practices of clearing and cultivating public lands as informal ownership claims. However, with legal land tenure, some families have been able to apply for land title. In contrast, others continue to occupy and use property their ancestors cultivated or regions that fall under "communal lands" with no ownership claim.

"We grow bananas, cassava, corn, and sweet potatoes, so we will still have some food to eat when we do not have rice. Things were good in the old days because everything we planted was organic. Then we never used fertilizers or sprays; you dig the land and clean it up - it is not like today. We also grow soft and other vegetables; we plant some for sale and others for our meals. However, the most important thing is having your land. If you have land, you can plant a coconut. That is what we plant - or anything else we can plant."⁵⁶

In addition, there are still issues of collusive claimants on land and shared usage of family land, as it pertains to close family members who do not individually own that land. In these cases of treaty and aggrieved rights of land use, individual plots are usually not designated, and planting is arranged informally by different kinship networks. This shows how they view claims to land according to customary land tenure and value systems, and remains the case today, and how family members continue to carry on. All in all, land titles were changed, and their rights to ancestral land were disregarded. Many families have suffered ongoing loss of use of the lands that were the foundation of their agricultural and everyday living.

⁵⁶ Interview, Haron Panciang, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, May 17, 2025

“As far back as 1919, the part of Kiamba that we now call Tuguis was once called Tuguis a much larger area in Southern Mindanao. This was during the time of the Commonwealth government. A team from the land authority in Manila had surveyed the area. Between 1919 and 1921, under Commonwealth Act 141, it was with the Tuguis Cadastre 152 number. As we now see, Tuguis was not just some area—it had official standing long before there was even a Municipality of Kiamba. The land claimant Aman Ampar even gave his address as Tuguis, Tuguis, Cotabato in the Lot data computation and technical description. However, then something happened. In 1945, at the end of World War II, a new municipality called Kiamba replaced what was initially known as Tuguis. Gregorio “Goring” Dela Cruz was the first Mayor, and Baltazar T. Caing was the Municipal Trial Court Judge. Moreover, Tuguis was reduced to a barangay. Years afterward, Baltazar's son-in-law Zoilo Amador became Barangay Captain, and he had the council pass an ordinance changing the name Barangay Tuguis to Barangay Tambilil. Then, years later, slightly removed further, Zoilo's son Rico Caing Amador became an elected and appointed official and continued changing Purok Tuguis to Purok Bagong Lipunan. One after another, the original name Tuguis had disappeared from maps and community memory.”

“When we started investigating this, we started to understand how and why. Tuguis appears in the official cadastral surveys, specifically Cadastre 152, from the Bureau of Lands. Somebody wanted to bury the name to blatantly cover up further land grabbing against the Sangil families surrounding Kiamba. We have documents, lots of data computation documents, and technical descriptions with Sangil claims including titles that even say “reconstituted title” and have new descriptions, which should be flagged as suspicious. Moreover, in recent years, some of the T’boli and Manobo filed Certificates of Ancestral Domain Title and claimed to be the only natives of Maitum and Kiamba. They had claimed that there was no Sangil in Sarangani Province, which was formally in Tuguis—of course, they were aware this was a blatantly false claim. This is not otherwise a losing product of history it is an aggressive act against the Sangil.”⁵⁷

Local commerce in the Sangil community is mainly informal and community based. Despite their high underemployment rates, Sangil women are central to sustaining household economies through these small trades. Many Sangil women own sari-sari stores

⁵⁷ Interview, Sultan Basar Kaharudin, Tuguis, Darussalam, Tambilil, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, May 5, 2025.

and accessible neighbourhood shops, and they are the only sources of basic goods and other basic household necessities in some cases. In addition to running sari-sari stores, many women engage in buy-and-sell activities that involve securing fish or seafood from local fishermen and directly selling them through local markets or house-to-house interactions. These activities are also offered for agricultural products, as some women directly buy from farmers nearby and redistribute them into the neighbourhood or at public marketplaces. Sangil women around the region have their biggest day for buying and selling when they go to the market at a designated trading center where vendors sell their goods to the public. These forms of trade contribute to the important intermediary role that Sangil women play in relations of circulation, as intermediaries between producers and consumers. Additionally, Sangil women trade in clothing and culturally relevant items, such as the *malong*, hijab, and other household items. These clothing items are accumulated from the nearest towns or boutiques, where women buy their clothing wholesale and sell it to their neighbourhoods through door-to-door vending or by displaying their items in a home-stalled fashion.

Sometimes, women act as agents for products made within the Sangil community, such as textiles woven in the locality or food items and handicrafts, thereby generating indigenous enterprise and strengthening a local identity. Sangil women not only run sari-sari stores and informally trade in seafood, agricultural products, and clothing but also make and sell traditional local delicacies essential to the local micro-enterprise economy. The food businesses they run most likely operate out of their homes and involve cooking indigenous snacks such as *apang* (pancake), *lupi* (steamed sticky rice or cassava roll), *maruya* (banana fritters), *busa tungka* (grilled banana), *balwa* (dough with coconut), *puto* (steamed dough), *bibingka* (baked rice cake), *patulakang*, and *amik* (sweet snacks)—these are just a few. Generally, Sangil women prepare these snacks early in the morning or afternoon to sell them house-to-house, in community events, or on market day. Some women also take pre-orders for celebrations, like weddings, religious gatherings, or during Eid, with these delicacies also being culturally important. In this case, the tradition assists household income and fosters culinary heritage and cultural continuity, especially with younger generations learning to prepare the traditional food. These economic practices are more than just income generation; they illustrate the social embeddedness of trade in Sangil society.

“We try to sell whatever we can. We have a small sari-sari store here, and because we are near the sea and most people here live by fishing, we buy their fish. It is one of our businesses and a way to help, so they do not have to travel far to sell fish for

what they have caught. We also buy vegetables from farmers around here. We display the vegetables sold at the store, or sometimes, some buyers buy vegetables from us again. Moreover, just like that, we sell the fish and vegetables.⁵⁸

2.2. Islamization of the Sangil

2.2.1 Early Influence of the Sangil

Academic and journalistic publications have suggested that the Sangil entered the Philippines and had already embraced Islam. Several elders have presented a counter-history that the actual start of the Sangil was that they were indigenous to the southern Philippines and that they were not Muslims to begin with. However, Islam was introduced by the missionary activity of Indonesian Muslims, and specifically, a well-known figure, Sharif Masad Akbar. Sharif Masad Akbar, who some believe was a Muslim of Java, Indonesia, is claimed to be the principal actor of Islam for the Sangil people in Kiamba, Sarangani Province.

“What we understand to be true and what our elders have told us is that Sharif Masad Akbar was the first to bring Islam to our people. He came to Tuguis, the place was called Tuguis because it meant sovereign or kingdom by the sea, a long time before there were written records here. Some say the Sangil were already Muslims when they arrived in the Philippines, but a majority of us today believe that Islam came later. Sharif Masad Akbar arrived in Tuguis and encountered Sangil, T'boli, B'laan, and Manobo, who were practicing their customary beliefs, predominantly animism. Sharif Masad Akbar introduced something new, Islam, and a new way of life. He saw a land that was a nation facing Qibla, and there was a spring. That was a sign for him. He did not come to the land by force, but by kinship and marriage. He married Buki Laminang, King Tuguis's daughter, and Boi Takbu, a T'boli princess. He was then able to slowly introduce Islam through those family unions, all while at the same time introducing a new way of life. When Masgit Pusaka was built here (our old mosque), it became the location of prayer, learning, and gathering for the Sangil people. When Sharif Masad went to Mecca, he left his daughter, Sultana Mawira Kaharuddin, in charge of his mission.”

“Moreover, when he returned, he brought back Zamzam water and Qur'anic manuscripts. He buried the Zamzam water here. Today we say it is alive - ake kandi, which means water from the kettle in Sangil. We used it for spiritual purposes. His grave is here in Tuguis, which we call Tempat Karamat, a sacred

⁵⁸ Interview, Arbaiya, Facebook Messenger, June 20, 2025.

place. Here, it is Little Mecca for many Muslims who cannot visit Mecca. Islam is here not just through trade or imposed through conquests, it arrived to us through the auspices of Sharif Masad, through guidance, interdependency through intermarriage, and an intention to carry out a spiritual mission.⁵⁹”

The narrative suggests that the Sangil primarily practiced animism before Islam and had indigenous spiritual systems. The arrival of Islam represents a distinct moment in Sangil's history regarding their social, cultural, and religious identity. Oral narratives also suggest that the arrival of Sharif Masad Akbar had special significance for the Sangil because of the cultural and linguistic connections with other peoples of the Sangir islands in Indonesia, contributing to the view of Islam as not just a spiritual inheritance, but also genealogical or ancestral. Furthermore, it documents the political position of Sharif Masad Akbar and his brother Panurat, who were sent to Mindanao to be in charge of their father Sultan Muhammad Takumang of Ternate, to strengthen relations with the Maguindanao Sultanate.⁶⁰ While Sharif Masad Akbar settled in Tuguis, Panurat settled in Balut Island. These figures maintained trans-regional connections and invited cousins and kin to migrate and settle. Those who migrated, like Ibrahim and Burham, went on to resettle in Glan and Jose Abad Santos, respectively. Others, like Putri Burhama, married into native communities in Davao del Norte, contributing to the diasporic Sangil community in Southern Mindanao. These figures represent the start of Islamic practice among the Sangil sect. They also created a legacy of Sangil loyalty to Islam elders have narrated that from the arrival of Masad, the Sangil community has viewed itself as people of the faith, and has been proud of their status as Muslim people even when they have been isolated from other Muslim constituents. Sangil is known to be very loyal to their religion, because they believe in Islam.⁶¹ Over the decades the Sangil were absorbed into the Maguindanao Sultanate, along with other Moro people.

2.2.2 Syncretism and Local Integration

The initial Islam presented by Muhammad Masad (also called *Islam Masade*, which originally means *Masad's Islam* or Old Islam) is not the same as standard Sunni Islam. Masad's teachings mixed Islamic beliefs with Sangil traditions. For instance, followers of *Islam Masade* pray in community only once per week (on Fridays) instead of five times each day, deploy local languages and rituals (like incense, coals, and others) side-by-side

⁵⁹ Interview, Sultan Basar Kaharudin, Tuguis Darussalam, Tambilil, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, May 5, 2025.

⁶⁰ Amorisa Wiratri, “The Indonesian Diaspora across the Celebes Sea: Territory, Identity, and Citizenship.”

⁶¹ Felicitas Sunio Sontohot, “Rites and Rituals of the Sangils.”

with Arabic prayers, and enact different traditions (like using bells instead of drums to call to prayer).⁶²

“When I was a kid, we did not have microphones, and we did not have electricity. We used a drum after the adhan--one beat to tell people the time to pray. It was complicated, especially since most of us did not have watches. We relied on the sun for time, which was also difficult (especially in the rain). The drum made it easy: one sound and everyone knew it was time to get together to pray. This was not just our practice. Our ancestors before us had this same way of doing things.”⁶³

Historically, Sangil correlated with Indigenous traditions and local ritual practices. The Sangil community venerates ancestral burial sites, such as the Tampat in Tuguis, which is believed to be one of the earliest Sangil cemeteries in the Philippines. These residual traditional elements show how Sangil religiosity is a syncretism - one that fused Islam, but combined with pre-Islamic cultural expressions.

“Historically, even still today, Sangil and other devout Muslims, like those from Palimbang, Sarangani Province, Davao, Buluan, and Maguindanao, commonly visit Tampat Karamat. They come to pray - specifically, for miracles. They bring their hopes, concerns, and worries. For example, couples who had sometimes experienced impediments to conceiving due to illness would visit Tampat Karamat after praying for barakah, and later, would subsequently conceive. This demonstrates how deeply they believe in the efficacy of those sites. Some of them from places like Malita or Balut may visit Tampat Karamat before setting out on their journey by sea. When they arrive, they may collect moss from the wall of Tampat Karamat to use it when the waves are large during their journey, and speak about throwing it into the water, which will calm the sea, according to them.”⁶⁴

The ancient Sangil also strongly believed in many spirits of nature and ancestors, the ritual worship of inanimate objects, and magic. There is a class of Shamans who are distinguished people among the Sangirese people. Shamans act as mediators between the world, humans, and spirits, and can provide protection to patients and children and perform miracles.

“There is a strong belief in magic and the spirit world among the ancient Sangil. When someone becomes ill, people offer rituals and perform ritualistic behavior to

⁶² Amorisa Wiratri, “The Indonesian Diaspora across the Celebes Sea: Territory, Identity, and Citizenship.”

⁶³ Interview, Haron, Tuguis, Darussalam, Tambilil, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, May 5, 2025.

⁶⁴ Interview, Dalandas Kaharudin Sama, Tuguis Darussalam, Tambilil, Kiamba, Sarangani Province.

harmonize with spirits. People go to big trees, beach areas, rocks, caves, or any place considered a dwelling site of an unseen force. People visit cemeteries because they believe the spirit has offended them or was trying to send a message. Some visit shrines, reciting prayers, while others sought out shamans for healing. As of now, some still do to this day, though not as many as previously, and sadly, more community members held these beliefs than today.⁶⁵”

Among the many aspects of Sangil spiritual culture that have endured, one belief system is agimat or talismans - physical objects that the Sangil use either as clothing to wear or objects to be kept on the body to provide protection, healing, or luck. Agimat is connected to Sangil's ancestral beliefs.

“In oral recounts offered by elders, there was a story during the time of Martial Law about a Sangil civilian who was tortured mercilessly, but never physically injured; from what I learned from the elders, the military burned him with gasoline, but his body did not burn. The military is said to have dragged him a few times behind the vehicle, and he did not have any injuries. The military tried to cut his body with a chainsaw, and witnesses said it did not work. The man defeated the military, so they buried the man alive. The elders believe he had a very strong agimat or protection that protected him from their damage. The elders also emphasized that it was remarkable as the belief held that he was a relative of Sharif Masad Akbar, the first Islamic missionary who introduced Islam to the Sangil - and some will say he was a sultan for the Sangil people in Tuguis. Although the spiritual beliefs of the agimat will never be written, the story demonstrates an enduring belief in spiritual protection, ancestral power, and the unseen forces that contribute to Sangil's historical memory.⁶⁶”

By the mid-20th century, there was a decline in the traditional Islam Masade practices of the Sangil, replaced by the Sunni Islam that came from other Moro ethnoreligious groups, further strengthening the emerging Bangsamoro identity with Sangil actors entering trans-local Islamic networks in military, education, and commerce. Memories of colonial oppression under both the Spanish and Americans accelerated the coming to terms of inter-Moro forms of coalitionalism, particularly in Mindanao, reflecting an ever-increasing socio-political consciousness of Islamic and religious solidarity. The Sangil were each capable of producing their identities within a singular Islamic front by claiming a collective identification with Bangsamoro unity.

⁶⁵ Interview, Rolly, Tambilil, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, May 16, 2025.

⁶⁶ Interview, Potria, General Santos City, May 8, 2025.

2.3. Socio-Political and Cultural Structure

2.3.1 Leadership and Religious Authority

Traditionally, Sangil society has had a hierarchical social and political structure comprising three main classes. The hierarchy looks something like this: Colano (ruling class, which includes sultans), Rajah Muda (nobility), and Lang (commoners or formerly, servants).⁶⁷ The Colano was responsible for governing, leading in religious matters, and dispensing justice. The Rajah Muda was a noble class that assisted decision-making and succession, while the Lang were formerly associated with servitude and are no longer viewed hierarchically. Class has become less important as a functioning social structure in contemporary times, and class distinctions are more symbolic than actionable. Hereditary institutions no longer govern us; we now have democratic processes and civil institutions.

In the town of Kiamba (Sarangani Province), the cultural memory of the Sangil aristocracy is still alive, particularly through the family of Kaharuddin. This dynastic family asserts their claim to be of direct descent from Sharif Masad Akbar, the Islamic missionary charged with propagating Islam to Sangil. Their line of descent displays an astonishing continuity from the 14th century to contemporaneous society, which suggests that ancestral leadership still possesses significant social currency. The first Sultan, Mohammad Kaharuddin II, began his reign in Tuguis Darussalam in the 14th century until, upon his death, he was succeeded by Mangantang, who was directed to expect that his other sons would exponentially enter into encroaching provinces and perpetuate the Islamization journey. This consequential appropriation of political and religious power was continued through successive generations. Each person who ruled invoked political power and acted reasonably within their religious and ceremonial capacity while affirming the legitimacy of the Sultanate as the vehicle for the growth of Islam within the community. By the 17th and 18th centuries, dynastic succession within the family also began to include daughters, who were called Sultan Bandara Kaharuddin to include South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, and General Santos City (SOCCSKSARGEN) and Davao. The introduction of elite titles of Tuan Muda, Papong Meygang, and Kapita Ratu entrepreneurs continued the Sultanate leadership models and fluidly introduced localized or adapted leadership processes, while allowing (open) kin-based governance processes. Their intermarriage with other ethnolinguistic families that included other 19th and 20th century settlements of people, most notably, T'boli, enhanced the power base for the Sangil. Sultan Sapar Kaharuddin and many others maintained political independence while likely contending with increasing influxes of non-Muslim settlers in their areas.

⁶⁷ Felicitas Sunio Sontohot, "Rites and Rituals of the Sangils."

Later challenges for the Sangil were usually linked to the ongoing confusion of no education on land statutes related to Commonwealth Act No. 141, which compromised their title on existing land. The family lineage of Sultanate leadership was further disrupted by the disorganized and chaotic reign of Sultan Dulahing Kaharuddin, who was killed during Martial Law. In so doing, the family line of succession was disrupted, but the structures of Islam created continuity in the family line structure. For example, in 2004, Sultan Basar Sama Kaharuddin was a legitimate revival of individual dynastic authority. Kaharuddin is a descendant of the Talawan and ultimately Mati (Papong Meygang) timeline that continues to create historical consequentiality and continuity in cultural practice. Political representations of the Sultanate may change, but are important symbols of formalized authority based on political, economic, social, and religious power. The symbolic structure of the Sultanate community representation continues to be relevant to the Sangil, especially in representing identity, as a customary adjudicator of customary law, and as a customary ceremonial life presider of Tuguis and surrounding areas.

Historically, the Sultan has been at the forefront of ensuring peace, harmony, and moral righteousness in the Sangil community. As the supreme authority, the Sultan was the principal decision-maker and custodian of customary and religious law. All the community's actions - from mediation in a dispute to enforcing community norms - required the Sultan's knowledge and support. Regarding misunderstandings or disputes, the Sultan acted as the principal mediator alongside religious leaders (the Imām, Pandita, and Ustadz) and family and community representatives. Over time, the Sultan also heard complaints of legal and moral infractions, such as consuming alcohol and illicit sexual relations. The punishment for some moral infractions, like zina, was based on the teachings of Islam. Public lashings would occur during community observation of Friday prayers as a social punishment and/or moral lesson for the community. Similarly, if questions arose over community members' observance of Islamic dress, such as mandates on women wearing hijab, again, the Sultan had the authority to decide to sanction and, if needed, impose consequences for non-observance. In terms of divorce, the Sultan had defined structures in place. He called upon leaders of organizations, particularly spiritual authorities, to implement and develop guidelines to ensure fairness in proceedings, while nudging a debate for reconciliation, benefitting from integrating Islamic law with customary processes. In this realm, the Sultan's function extended beyond judicial, but also into the social and spiritual life of Sangil. In practice, the Sultanate exists among the Sangil people; however, its authority is significantly reduced. While some in the community respect and recognize the Sultan as an institution and hence a source of cultural and moral

authority, not everyone does. State structures no longer recognize the formal political and legal role of the Sultan. Therefore, the Sultan's role has mainly become ceremonial and symbolic, and the Sultan then serves a primarily ceremonial role as a cultural connection to the community's precolonial Islamic heritage, rather than a continuing institution within a modern legal and political structure.

The role of the Imām and Pandita has always made-up integral aspects of communal life for the Sangil people. In a traditional Sangil sense, although it is often functionally indistinguishable from the Imām, the Pandita is considered the most knowledgeable person in prayer (du‘ā), dhikr, and spiritual or ritual practices. They lead communal prayers and have ceremonial duties primarily relating to healing, spiritual cleansings, and blessings for the community. Furthermore, they are described as teachers of Qur'anic reading and recitation for younger ages, transmitting the practices and discipline of reading and reciting the Qur'an. The Pandita and Imām are traders of Islamic orthodoxy and cultural heritage. The Pandita and Imām lead a precarious process of religious negotiation: interpreting Islamic principles through the lens of adat (customary law) and the lived experience of the Sangil. They provide meaning, expression, and continuity for their people through the development of ritual and practice. For these reasons, the traditional Imām–Pandita continues as a critical religious leader in articulating a continuous, doctrinally, and locally focused form of religiosity. More recently, yet within the last three decades, a different kind of religious authority has emerged. Due to the increase of a global Islamic education presence and the opening up of the educational madrasah systems in the Philippines and elsewhere, many Ustadh, Ustadza, and ‘Ulamā have recently emerged as prominent authority figures in the Sangil context. Some of these figures have been trained primarily as scholars in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and the study of theology (‘aqidah). They claim a more polarized educational, legalistic orientation than the traditional approaches to Islamic practice of some of the earlier rites and rules that come from the practices of the Pandita and Imām. Their influence, particularly in religious ruling, moral conduct, and matters of Islamic education, has grown tremendously. This newly developing ecology of religious authority in Sangil society, where traditional ritual specialists continue to coexist alongside formally educated religious scholars, represents a complicated layering of religious authorities—an indication of the continued presence of indigenous religious forms and the increasing influence of global Islamic developments. This also signifies the fluid and negotiated nature of religious life among the Sangil of the Philippines, comprising a phenomenon of convergence of tradition and endorsement, albeit both harmonious and contested.

2.3.2 Communal Rituals and Practices

Sangil's communal life revolves around an Islamic festival cycle that is only displaced by already established local customs regarding the five rituals of prayers, two Eids (Islamic celebrations), weddings, and funerals. All gatherings include prayers, particularly Friday prayers and Taraweeh prayers. A prayer gathering is conducted in the mosque, where prayers, Quran recitation, and listening to the Quran will be held.

Prior to Eid al-Fitr, which is the last three days of Ramadhan, many sangil perform a transitive banquet *diko so*, which is where candles are lighted at ancestral gravesites and sacred shrines called *Tampat* to offer prayers, supplication (*du'ā*), and remembrance of deceased family members and revered figures such as the *Karamat* (spiritual ancestors and religious pioneers). Eid al-Fitr has a gathering to sacrifice livestock, and people will feast on it collectively. Although very few sangil individuals in the elder classification have a *Qurban* for Eid al Adha, they sacrifice meat before prayers. They will prepare it collectively so the community can gather to eat after Eid prayers.

Weddings and funerals are also occasions for Sangil to socialize with family and the community through ritualized engagements. The marriage process can take several days as elders/relatives negotiate to establish the wedding, have the maid contact the bride's house, and celebrate with feasting that has singing in the Sangil language. Elders engage in *kulintangan* night and day. The bride will sleep with her girl relatives, covering the long, then the groom will find out where the bride is by looking and guessing where she is, as he cannot see because it is covered. Following the wedding ceremony, the bride, groom, and guests ask for *dua* and prayer, dance *Juntra*, and *pakiring*.

Funerals blend Islamic funeral prayers (*salat al-janazah*) with prior mourning customs. One of the most unique and spiritually significant mortuary acts is the practice of *Turking*, conducted both during and after. This practice exemplifies how the community syncretically comprehends death, combining Islamic values and prayer with the customs of their ancestors to support the soul's progression in the afterlife. The first component of *Turking* is at the grave. Before closing the grave, the *Imām* will do the *Adhān* for a male deceased person or do the *Iqāmah* for a female deceased person, and then, the people in attendance will recite *Surah Yāsīn* together. The body will be placed in the inner section of the grave, called *turning faso*, along with certain symbolic ritual stuff like the tuning job (purifying water) in a container called *Katya Allah* and through the grave opening called *Quran Allah*. The *Imām* will recite the invocation. *Turking* is not limited to the day of burial. Symbolic re-creations are practiced at home during the seven intervals of the mourning period: 7 days, 9 days, 40 days, 100 days, 1,000 days. In each mourning period

observance, a wrapped pillow wrapped in white cloth symbolizes the departed, along with personal belongings, Qur'anic recitations, and collective prayer. The following burial observances preserve the family's spiritual connection, confirm unity in the power of the family, and affirm that ancestor spirits remain alive in family life. The Turking practice represents Sangil's holistic approach to mourning, where Islamic eschatology aligns with local cosmologies. It shows the role of the religious specialists, the Imām and the Pandita, in guiding the journey of souls through spiritual transitions and ensuring cultural continuity. Thus, Turking signifies how Sangil adat is the culture of memory, but also the culture of memory as living theology mediating the living and dead, the communal and eternal.

2.4. Impact of Globalization, Migration, and Transnational Networks

The Sangil, similar to other Bangsamoro groups, are increasingly embedded within transnational social and religious movements in recent decades. Economic migration, broader access to modern education, and digital connections have created new ideas, disciplines, and ideological orientations in many Sangil communities. Sangil youth have new access to and are somewhat normative in their pursuits of higher education—often in urban centers like Davao City, General Santos, and occasionally abroad. They return home exposed to urban lifestyles and foreign orientations. Furthermore, many of the Sangil migration to the Middle East as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) directly engages the global turn of Islamic discourses as they participated in religious spaces within environments infused with Salafi teachings. Returning, these individuals often share and what they deem to be new interpretations of Islamic practice that affect the community, particularly on ritual observance, gender, and the subject of religious authority.

The experience of urbanization is also transformative. Many Sangil migrate to urban areas to seek out better economic opportunities. Here, they participated in ways of life that sometimes contrast with home values and forms of daily routine. Another contrast with their parents' generation is that, previously, younger Sangil faced some stigma and avoidance towards formal education as their parents feared Christianization; whereas, younger/modern teachers of the Sangil community increasingly join in modern education opportunities and social activities. This generational dynamic demonstrates Sangil's views of tradition and reform are apparent.

At present, digital media plays a significant role in this dynamic. The availability of smartphones and participation in social media sites, mainly Facebook and YouTube, has raised the existence of Islamic and Muslim content.

“I follow several Facebook pages of prominent Salafi preachers, and have then listened to their khutbahs and read their posts, with particular interest in posts on

their fatwas and accounts that deem certain Moro rituals as bid'ah. Some video presentations from respected Salafi preachers are readily available, making it easier than ever to learn about these teachings. Nevertheless, I always check in with my local 'ulamā before accepting the idea. When they comment that the content is acceptable and consists of an understood Islamic discourse, I know I can accept this teaching method into my practice.⁶⁸”

I have outlined a clear trajectory: Sangil youth are increasingly engaging with global Islamic movements—creating the adoption of Salafism—as they remain cautious of it and are mediated by local religious inputs. The influence of Salafism in the community has been slow and intentional. Instructional changes to traditional consistency and customs in other, more urbanized spaces are rarely observed amongst many Sangil groups. At the same time, they participate in Salafism or more conservative attitudes (e.g., the diko so ritual, clan-based leadership hierarchies). The emerging Sangil religiosity demonstrates what scholars call the glocalization of Islam. Glocalization describes the active process of filtering, adapting, and altering global ideas or practices to fit local realities.⁶⁹ In the case of religion, the Salafist religious ideology takes a local form when communities in the Philippines filter and adapt it to original traditions. It involves local communities actively and creatively working to re-formulate an imported idea. The Sangil identity is deeply embedded in their local custom or adat, but increasingly shaped by global Islamic ideologies. The impact and effect of inherited traditions with contemporary reformist movements will continue to reproduce continuity and contestation, representing the Sangil as a notable example of negotiated religious modernity.

⁶⁸ Interview, Musa, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, May 2025.

⁶⁹ Muhammad Muhammad Nasir, “Politics, Proselytization, and the Glocalization of Salafism in Post-9/11 Indonesia and Nigeria.”

CHAPTER III

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND BELIEFS

This chapter explores the religious practices and beliefs of the Sangil Muslims in Kiamba, Sarangani Province, focusing on the interplay between their traditional adat-based practices and the emerging influence of Salafi reformism. The Sangil, a small ethnolinguistic Muslim minority in the Southern Philippines, embodies a unique syncretic Islamic tradition rooted in the historical legacy of Sharīf Masad Akbar's Islam Masade, which integrates Qur'anic principles with pre-Islamic animist and customary rituals. This chapter is divided into two primary sections: the first examines mainstream Sangil Islamic practices, characterized by rituals such as *Soleleng Koraang*, *Manunjong*, *Manuwak*, *Diko So*, *Ganding*, and *Kanduri*, which reflect a localized habitus deeply embedded in cultural and kinship structures. The second section analyzes the rise of Salafi-influenced practices, driven by transnational networks, local actors, and digital da'wah, which emphasize scriptural purity (*dalīl*) and challenge traditional rituals as *bid'ah* (innovation). By presenting ethnographic data from interviews, participant observations, this chapter provides a nuanced understanding of how the Sangil navigate their religious identity, balancing global Islamic discourses with local cultural continuity, and sets the stage for analyzing the dynamics of negotiation and contestation in Chapter IV.

3.1. Introduction to Sangil Religious Practices and Beliefs

This section introduces the core religious practices and beliefs of the Sangil, focusing on their traditional rituals, such as *Soleleng Koraang*, *Manunjong*, *Manuwak*, *Diko So*, *Ganding*, and *Kanduri*, which serve as cultural and spiritual anchors for community cohesion and identity.

3.2. Mainstream Sangil Religious Practices

The Sangil people, an ethnic group in Kiamba, Sarangani, express a unique Islamic worldview that results from the intersection of their adat (customary laws), Islamic orthodox beliefs, and local political realities. In this case, it can be better understood as a habitus, a term outlined by Pierre Bourdieu as a system of durable, transposable dispositions that organizes social practices and is a product of the conditions of existence of a particular historical moment.⁷⁰ The habitus of the Sangil people is now understood as the incorporation of their value system as embodied practice that exists as a structure of practices that interconnect between adat and Islamic practice, thus reproducing a group

⁷⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

identity through ongoing rituals based on their heterogeneous historical episodes. The rituals that we are examining in our research include *Soleleng Koraang* (the Qur'ānic procession), *Manunjong* and *Manuwak* (shrine supplication and beach supplication), *Diko So* (Ramadan remembrance), *Ganding* (newborn induction), life-cycle rituals, communal prayers, and burial rituals. None of these come close to an ideal of normative Islamic practices, but are meaningful expressions of faith, connected directly to the historical legacy of Sharīf Masad Akbar, recognized as the Karamat, a local saint.⁷¹

The Sangil people perform these rituals actively and continuously by both imāms and their local elders. These are not static elements of a ceremonial past, but are dynamic traditions that connect them to the past and are still responsive to the contemporary global Islamic discourse they generate. For example, *Soleleng Koraang*, which is the performance of the ceremony for the Qur'ān Arab, reinforces the complexity of their communal identity through a shared performance during a collective ritual. In contrast, the supplications of *Manunjong* and *Manuwak* incorporate Islamic practices of *du'ā'* and *Sūrat Yā Sīn*, and are performed at sacred geographies such as *Tampat Karamat*. The Sangil people's religious field can be understood sociologically in Bourdieu's description of religious fields, where agents compete for legitimacy and spiritual value through symbolic action.⁷² The Sangil People's habitus, created through the interconnection of both adat and Islamic teachings, generates religious capital that is incorporated as legitimacy and spiritual value in the rituals people perform, such as *Diko So*, which is intended to honor the deceased and to seek barakah. This habitus is challenged and contested by global Islamic reformist movements, specifically through the influence of Salafī movements, which advocate a purifying scriptural approach that inhibits, and sometimes delegitimizes, the role and value of adat in ceremony.

The tension between local habitus and the pressures of global reform is an important mechanism of glocalization in which the universalist teachings of Islam can be modified for that specific location. The Sangil people's notion of communal prayers and their blending of *Jumu'ah* and *Duhr* within the context of a communal prayer space serve as an example of how they negotiate their habitus with global discourses while maintaining most of their cultural identity, up to and for the time being. In performing the rituals, the Sangil people continue to reproduce their collective identity in a religious field informed by their

⁷¹ Heidi K. Gloria, "The Tampat at Tuguis: Oral History among the Sangil of Sarangani," *The Journal of History* 54 (2008).

⁷² Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

historical legacies and the significance of contemporary global pressures. The scene is set for an analysis of their ongoing negotiation and contestation with Salafi reformism.

3.3. Quranic and Communal Rituals

This section explores how these Quranic and communal rituals sustain the Sangil's religious habitus, navigating tensions with reformist pressures while preserving their unique Islamic identity.

3.3.1 Soleleng Koraang (Quranic Procession)

Soleleng Koraang is one of the most prominent Sangil rites; it is an annual multi-day Qur'ān procession representing the community's guardianship of the Islamic text. The ceremonial procession involves the care of a large Qur'ān text (Qur'ān Arab, an Arabic text codex brought by Sharīf Masad Akbar) that is ceremonially paraded between villages and returned to the Mosque with a public recitation of the Qur'ān. The ritual lasts three days (Wednesday–Friday), and there are parades west and east of Tuguis. It culminates at Masjid Pusaka with the congregational worship of the Sangil and a kanduli (communal meal). In the ritual, the Qur'ān is placed on a bamboo platform and raised by elders, who symbolize the spiritual weight of Islam, our Qur'ān, and the transmission of the Karamat. The participants made an offering to the Qur'ān; an act of faith they performed to remember the profound event of Islam's arrival in the Sangil lineage. Soleleng Koraang may be construed as a *bid'ah* (religious innovation) in the modern context by certain critics, but traditionalists recommend that it acknowledge and remember the Karamat's contributions. Soleleng Koraang enacts a Sangil habitus as a ritual: it re-sacralizes inherited cultural practices (moving the Qur'ān toward a sacred location). It aligns the villagers in a shared experience with *du'ā'* and *dhikr*.

“Soleleng Koraang began with the Karamat in Tuguis; as children, we were told by the elders that we must do it. It was part of our adat, and our elders insisted it would help us. Our family came from another village and went to Tuguis with the group, among other villagers, to support the rite. Others are from Balut Island and other places. Even from other Muslim tribes, some of the Maguindanaon joined in this ritual. If they heard we were celebrating Soleleng Koraang, they came to Tuguis Darussalam for the rite. After we returned from the massacre in 1974, Soleleng Koraang ceased. New ustādh (preachers) have banned the traditions, not just the Sangil but other people, saying it was bid'ah. That is why our people have

*stopped. We do not know much about Islam or our culture. So, people just followed what was taught to arrive.*⁷³”

This account demonstrates how Soleleng Koraang was remembered as a sacred obligation in a past habitus, and its discontinuation represented a rupture in the Sangil's religious memory. The fading of the ritual as a direct result of the Martial Law period and having to endure Salafi influences reflects the Sangil field's susceptibility to reformist pressures from elsewhere. The final comment by the imām, "we did not know much about Islam or our own culture," demonstrates a weakening of the Sangil habitus; when it disappears and the younger generations do not undertake the inherited practice, the memory and cultural understanding are weakened. However, the account suggests an ongoing selective retention; at least the Qur'ān procession is meaningful, and even less of the Sangil's Islamic identity.



As shown in Figure 1, the two Qurans (Arab and Wati) were brought back from Mecca by Sharīf Masad Akbar. These sacred texts have been preserved through generations and remain crucial artifacts in Sangil's religious history. (Photograph by Sultan Basar Kaharudin).

These sacred manuscripts, the Qur'ān Arab and Qur'ān Wati, are of considerable religious and cultural importance to the Sangil Muslim community. While considerably larger than the Qur'ān Wati, the Qur'ān Arab is written only in Arabic. Many Muslims take

⁷³ Interview, Imām Mansot, a mainstream Sangil Imām, Katobao, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, June 19, 2025.

both Qur'ān texts forward during the annual Soleleng Koraang ritual. They not only took the Qur'ān as a spiritual act of devotion, but as a form of elevated presentation for public performance and proclamation, much like how Islam was conceptualized as it was brought by Karamat, Sharīf Masad Akbar, who elevated the Qur'ān and carried it around while proclaiming transformation. The Muslims would ceremonially display the Qur'ān Arab for people in their journey; the Qur'ān Wati is typically small (and although Arabic text, it is noted in local features), and used almost daily as it was read both in instruction and recitation in the domestic or togetherness with the community.

Presenting and giving the Qur'ān means more than devotion, but it helps define Islamic scripture as an authority, presence, and centrality, as part of a ritual system for Sangil Muslims. These important Qur'ān documents represent the heavenly command or call, and simultaneously continue to make the history of Sangil Islam tangible. However, the breakage in tradition and ritual, particularly during and after the Martial Law events, the loss or disappearance of these documents, removes the meaning of the Soleleng Koraang and contests the frameworks of agency by traditionalist and reformist practices and actors in Sangil.



As shown in Figure 2, the Holy Sword (Pedang), used by Sharīf Masad Akbar, is a sacred artifact that survived the 1976 Martial Law period. This sword represents an important physical connection to the Sangil tribe's Islamic heritage. (Photograph by the author, April 27, 2023).

The sacred sword (pedang), illustrated in Figure 3, is usually thought to have belonged to Sharīf Masad Akbar, the figure credited with bringing Islam to the Sangil

people, and as a material object, it represents spiritual authority and historical continuity. The sword is a part of the cultural-religious heritage and emerged as one of the few remaining objects that survived the tumultuous upheaval of the 1976 Martial Law period, when other heritage items and manuscripts were lost or destroyed.

The sword in Sangil's narratives of their oral history and religious memories not only represents the Karamat's authority but also serves as an object of Islamic defense and propagation in the region. The perpetuation of the sword is also intricately linked to the community's feelings and emotions around Islamic identity, legitimation, and resistance to cultural replacement. The sword is an object that the Sangil community identifies as worth displaying and designating in ritual practices and narratives, while emitting metaphorical functions to affirm Sangil Islamic heritage, confronted with increasing foreign presence and transformative interpretations of its past.

3.3.2 Manunjong Bute Manuwak (Shrine and Seashore Supplication)

The rites of Manunjong and Manuwak are complementary Sangil ceremonies bound up with sacred geography and a local cosmology. Manunjong is typically a collective du'ā' (supplication) ceremony, usually performed when disaster or misfortune is felt, such as with storms or disease. The ceremony begins at the Tapat Karamat (the shrine of Sharīf Masad) as a procession, then proceeds as a group towards the shoreline, which might be regarded as a sacred site. There is drumming, rhythmic chanting, dhikr, and offerings (incense and yellow rice). It has different forms and is typically done at the seashore, most often on Wednesdays and, according to consensus, as many as three times a month. Manuwak primarily involves Qur'ānic recitation directed towards Allah, without intermediary spirits. Both rituals combine Islamic elements (reciting Sūrat Yā Sīn, for example, and prayers) with symbolism meaningful within the local context. During Manuwak, for example, food is offered (wrapped in coconut leaves), fed out, or shared among the participants. Everything that was brought must be left there, and the community is sacrificing worldly goods with an expectation that this will relieve or divert calamity. Food that was either not consumed or shared during Manuwak is deemed as relinquished, signifying the community left behind misfortune.

"I remember 1996, we were doing Manuwak. We made swabay and yellow rice. Then we went to the seashore, spread some coconut leaves onto the sand, and placed all our food offerings on them. I clearly remember we recited Sūrat Yā Sīn three times. After the prayer, we shared the food, but everything we brought to the ceremony had to stay with us. We could not take anything if we did not finish our

*food. That was just how it was done, Manuwak. We also offered items directly into the sea. All this was intended to relieve us of calamities, disasters, and bad luck.*⁷⁴

This illustrates how Manuwak performs the Sangil habitus through embodied performance. The coconut frond "altar" of the seashore and the traditional recitation of Yā Sīn are both formalized dispositions of habitus that learned people through the community. Manuwak and Manunjong affirm Bourdieu's "embodied" memory in that the gestures and acts performed by the villagers (food offering, throwing things away) are ways of performing the villagers' faith. These gestures together also convey meanings in theology: throwing objects (i.e., food) into the sea, as in a performance of surrender to misfortune; a recitation that is the product of a community as a form of collective reliance on verses of Qur'ānic mercy. In Bourdieu's terms, Manuwak and Manunjong together produce "religious capital" for the Sangil, to enact constructed performatively, entailed a public devoutness, but more particularly, we can also call it "barakah" as an irrevocable religious performance. Rituals also serve a cultural purpose; similar shrine processions are found among other Moro groups (i.e., Tausūg and other Moro tribes). However, the shrine processions of Sangil are distinct; in the same way, they may be found in other Moro societies/customs (i.e., yellow rice, seashore altar).

A significant site for Sangil rites is the tampat (shrine or tomb) of Sharīf Masad Akbar at Tuguis Tambilil. The sacred place was marked by a coral-covered tomb, with natural plantings (a tradition of the Malays), and is venerated as Karamat's burial site. After the death of Sharīf Masad Akbar, pilgrimages to the Tampat have emerged within the Sangil community. Pilgrims (from among the Sangil community and non-Sangil Muslim visitors) seek barakah; infertile couples may pray at the site; similarly, some travelers in the village collect moss from the shrine to cast off into the sea as a remedy. Such performances evoke a belief rooted in the Karamat's sanctity to mediate a divine grace. The Manunjong and Manuwak rites frequently commence at the tampat, and any blessing ceremony may also involve incense or sacred water sourced from the shrine. The tampat serves as a material/object-based locus of memory and a cosmological anchor for Sangil Islam; it symbolizes the historically animated continuity of Islam among the Sangil, where the customary and explicit religious practice (adat) incorporates that of a holy person intermingled within a grave. Salafism discourages pilgrim veneration at tombs. Although Sangil's interlocutors indicate that visiting the tampat does not violate their faith, they resist

⁷⁴ Interview, *Imām Rolly Panciang, mainstream Traditionalist Sangil Imām, Szopad, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, May 13, 2025.*

pilgrim veneration; as an example, due to a notion of loyalty to the Karamat's religious teachings.

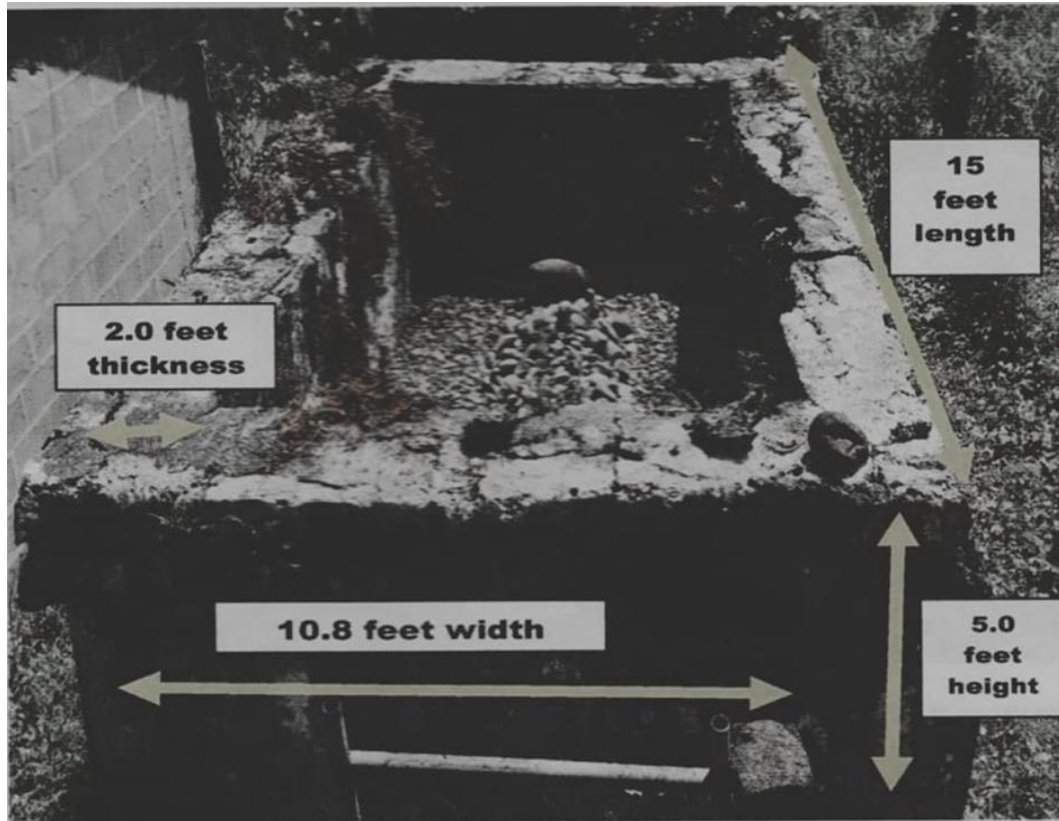


Figure 3 shows *Tampat Karamat* (shrine) at Tuguis Tambilil, Kiamba, Sarangani Province. This sacred site holds significant cultural and religious importance for the Sangil community. (Photograph by the author, May 16, 2025).

The Tampat Karamat is a sacred place of great religious and cultural importance to Sangil Muslims. It is believed to be the burial site of Sharīf Masad Akbar—the Karamat—who played a crucial role in bringing Islam to the Sangil people. This temple is a place of physical and spiritual significance for the Sangil Muslims. A focal point for many traditional rituals and ceremonies, such as Manunjong and Manuwak, a place of personal and community supplication (du‘ā’). The existence of the Tampat Karamat is a physical reminder of the historical existence of Sangil Islam, where aspects of adat (customary law) co-exist with Islamic faith and practice in a person's daily religious activities.

The tomb is 5 feet high, 1.5 feet long, 10.8 feet wide, and 2 feet thick and represents a collective and growing accumulation of burial stones made over the centuries. It has been said to have existed since the 14th Century and has constantly been rising with each new story added. The Sangil and other devout Muslim pilgrims from Palembang, Sarangani Province, Davao, Buluan, and Maguindanao have been visiting Tapat Karamat for miracles and barakah blessings from their intentions and for their troubles since it was established. For example, a couple may have infertility issues from a pre-existing medical condition. The couple may then journey to Tapat Karamat to request barakah from the tomb; the result is that the wife, previously unable to conceive, conceives. Other manifestations of barakah may include harvesting moss from the tomb's walls. Pilgrims and travelers with difficulties while travelling on these rough waters would throw the moss into the water; in belief systems, it was intended to seek calm in these seas.



As shown in Figure 4, the "Manuwak ritual" was performed by the Sangil tribe. This ceremony at the seashore involves Quranic recitations and communal prayers. (Photograph by the author, 2022).

3.3.3 Diko So

Diko So is a Sangil ritual to remember the dead and to supplicate to Allah. It occurs during the last three nights of Ramadan. The central act of Diko So is lighting candles at the Tapat (or ancestral shrine) and cemetery. The ritual is meant to commemorate the spirits of the dead relatives and family members, as well as to show respect to elderly family members, and to commemorate the Karamat (Sharīf Masad Akbar), the one known to introduce Islam to the Sangil people. The ritual provides an occasion for family members

and members of the broader community to collectively pray (du‘ā’), and engage in dhikr (remembrance) of Allah and Qur’ān recitation.

The ritual begins at the Mosque, with the Maghrib prayer, where participants light a candle, offer supplication to those remembered by them, and eat. When the ceremony continues to the cemetery or Tapat, candles are placed on/near the graves. Hundreds of candles may be lit on or around the graves in some villages, such as Tuguis and its surrounding villages. These candles show the community's memory of their deceased loved ones; the cemetery was transformed into a communal display of memory and spiritual unity. When Tapat access is impossible, people go directly to the grave of loved ones and the Karamat to conduct the ritual.

Before lighting the candles, candles are shortened or ritually prepared, and ritualised prayers often accompany candle lighting. The pandita or imām does the rites and leads the prayers, recitations, tahlīl, and other supplications. Children and youth are visible assisting in the cleaning and setting up the cemetery. Ritual objects, such as kamaniyang (incense), are used in the ritual space.

In Sangil's belief, Diko So is symbolic and has spiritual connections and benefits. Lighting a candle and offering a prayer for the deceased, the symbolism of barakah (blessings) will reach the mercy of the dead and provide a spiritual means of connecting the living with the deceased. Traditionalists believe that changing the stones on a grave is similar to fixing the roof of the deceased's house, a metaphor to show that you still support and care for them even in death. The tradition of Diko So is recognized in the last three days of Ramadan. The family visits the gravesites, cleans the grave area, and lights candles at night. This activity is a time of reflection and remembrance of deceased family members.

“Diko So is a tradition we do during the last three nights until Eid al-Fitr. We do it after the Maghrib prayer at the Mosque. At this time, we burn kamaniyang and read things like tahlīl, du‘ā’, and dhikr. After that, we go to the tapat - our ancestors' shrine, or the cemetery, and light candles. People especially do this if they have loved ones at that cemetery. Before that, the children had even been cleaning the cemetery! For each candle, you must prepare. You cut the wick, you say certain du‘ā’, it is usually we, the elders or the imām, who prepare and distribute to the people. It is about showing remembrance and unity - we will not see it as bid‘ah - it is adat, doing something that connects us spiritually and communally, with meaning. Some would say this is innovation, but most will have let it die without knowing it had value. What we do is not against Islam. It is a

*remembrance of the dead through the Qur'ānic prayer and a recognition of the community, which is ibādah.*⁷⁵”



As shown in Figure 5, the "Diko so" ritual is observed on the 27th day of Ramadan. Sangil families clean graveyards and light candles while performing Islamic prayers for their deceased loved ones. (Photograph by the author, 2022).

3.4. Life-Cycle Rituals

This section examines how these rituals sustain communal solidarity and intergenerational continuity while navigating challenges from Salafi reformism, setting the stage for further analysis of religious negotiation in subsequent sections.

3.4.1 Ganding

Ganding is a traditional Sangil initiation ritual intended to welcome a newborn into the community and spiritually strengthen the beginning of the child's development. The ritual lasts three days, including Islamic prayer, local healing, and community gathering. The ritual is considered mandatory (wājib) and a form of adat, a customary practice passed down from the Karamat (Sharīf Masad Akbar), the esteemed man who brought Islam to the Sangil. The Ganding ritual has similar structures and signifiers to other indigenous Muslim groups in the southern Philippines, like the Tausūg and the Maguindanaon, who have similar rites of passage for infants.

⁷⁵ Interview, Imām Danny, Tuguis Darussalam, Tuguis, Tambilil, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, May 7, 2025.

The Ganding ritual usually begins at Maghrib time. The ganding is conducted by burning nanawngang, a preparation made from aromatic herbs or leaves, in the direction of Qiblah. The infant is placed in the middle of a circle of the parents, the pandita or imām, and family members, and the people walk around the baby, in a clockwise direction, three times, which is intended to situate food, health, and protection from harm in the baby. The ritual objects include kurintang (gongs), wooden objects, and leaves selected for that purpose, which are gently rubbed on the edges of the forehead to prepare the baby spiritually and bodily. Sometimes, these are also rubbed on the elders to acknowledge blessing and healing.

After three days of conducting ritual undertakings - such as prescribed prayers (du‘ā’) and dhikr - the infant's hair is ceremonially, and overtly, cut in a designated manner, marking a concurrent acknowledgement so left Ganding. The Ganding is frequently concluded with a communal gathering typically involving food and other celebrations, reinforcing the social aspect of the rite as an important symbol and evidence. It also establishes familial relationships, especially when the families collectively agree to do the ritual together, sometimes treating it as spiritual adoption or sponsorship.

The Sangil has a ritual for a newborn baby of seven days old. They call the ritual the Ganding ritual. The parents will invite their family circle and relatives to Kanduri (celebrations) to baptize the newborn. The parents of those with newborn babies will approach each other to celebrate. The arrangements for this wedding will take place over seven nights. At night, they will have a dance affair; every parent of the baby boy/baby girl will dance to ensure that the baby walks as quickly as possible according to their beliefs. On the seventh day, the last day of the affair, the parents will parade with their baby, and the guests will be asked to dance with Karis and Padang.

“In our Sangil tradition, ganding is an ancestral adat, a ritual we do for newborn babies to ensure they are mentally and physically healthy. If Ganding is not done, especially about infants, we think the child can grow up mentally ill or sick forever. We commonly refer to this as "charged by the adat"—the idea that the liturgical omission is administered to the child. However, when done correctly, it is the opposite; the infant is healthy, whole, and protected. The Ganding is a happy affair—for example, it is more of a similar event; we celebrate the kulintangan and the gong, the traditional percussion instruments and instruments of local pride. Instead of logging a khutbah al-nikāḥ, which is usually done in the Islamic marriage ceremony, we recite a Ganding invocation. A ritual aspect is pouring water from a young coconut onto the child: the act of purifying and blessing. We

also prepare piris—rice placed inside coconut shells—and carry the piris and the young coconut offerings. After completing a segment of the Ganding ritual at home, we take the offerings to the seashore. This is how we do it in Katobao, and if we have several newborns in the group, we complete the Ganding, normally three to five. After we agree on the time, we come back together and complete the Ganding.”

“There is no date on the Islamic calendar—the time agreement is made through consensus. Ganding is celebrated over three nights, mostly among pure lineages of Sangil, although it may be condensed down to one night. Some will say this is bid’ah or a new religious practice. I say this may be bid’ah for the people who do not carry this adat, but for us, Sangil, it is our heritage, and to reject our heritage is to reject who we are. The real bid’ah is when a Sangil rejects his adat. To do so is a "refugee" status, severing the thread of ancestral knowledge. It is fine that other Muslim communities do not perform this practice; that is not their heritage, but ours. However, that is why we continue to conduct ganding. We do it in fear that if we stop, we will harm more children, because the adat will take what is overdue. It is imperative to protect all Sangil adat.”⁷⁶

3.4.2 Burial and Post-Burial Practices

3.4.2.1. Burial Practices

Historically, in local communities, the death of a community member is quickly communicated to community members, commonly done using a large gong, similar to many Muslim communities in the region of Southeast Asia. For example, Bajau similarly utilize acoustics to announce the death of a member who belongs to royalty. In the same way, many societies in Indonesia will use the passing of a Sumbinese gong during funerals. Also, male relatives and their neighboring connections to the deceased would walk the neighborhood to notify other community members of the deceased. Nowadays, more communities even announce using the microphone system in the Mosque to notify and/or gather the community, or family, to express their condolences and support for the family and circumstance of mourning. The family will receive announcements to family members from the family unit, who live from a distance outside of the local community, via text, call, and using social media on Facebook, and other forms of media. The community would unite and support the family of the deceased in their time of mourning, share mourning processes, share finances, labor, and emotional support. The responsibilities of members

⁷⁶ Interview, Imām Mansot, Katobao, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, July 19, 2025.

once again are divided into tasks; men would involve themselves with supporting the grave tasks, while other family and neighbours remained inside the home supporting the corpse and also unplugging in the hope of survival from the grieving family situation, but still visiting guests. Society mourns together, and as a community, moral values and habits, all members actively engage with the grieving family to show support for the grieving situation. For example, in communities, happiness is not so easily displayed, as there is respect and honour for the event of fate. This is how all members can engage, share the burden of the mourning, and execute the proper farewell procedures for the deceased.

The corpse must be thoroughly washed. The body's spouse, or if the deceased has no spouse or the deceased is a same gender family member, washes at least three times. If it is still unclean after washing three times, it has been washed as often as needed, which will always be an odd amount. There is a specific way to wash a body; you start with the upper right, upper left, lower right, and lower left sides. There are alternative ways to wash and shower a dead body in Islam. Before the ghusl begins (the washing of the corpse), the one cleaning the body needs to recite some recitations (prayers) before he starts to wash the body. When cleaning the dead body, the first step is to recite Surah and other prayer recitations when touching it. Then, he washes the head of the dead body, and he recites all prayers when washing the body. He washed his body using soap when he finished doing Salawat to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The dead body is washed of all filth and smells, along with being cleaned, while it also stays clean. After it is clean, the individual responsible for doing the ghusl will wudu the corpse. This is what is covered here, and is what he will do with the body; he puts some water in the mouth of the body, recites with water to the mouth, and pours water on the head of the dead body. He will turn the body to the correct radius of the Qibla, and the person doing the ghusl will do the shahada for the corpse, reciting, in the manner of Islamic recitations and prayers. Water is also poured over the face of the corpse, over the left hand, the head, and the feet of the corpse. After the cleaning ritual, a white cloth is placed over the corpse to signify its preparation for burial. This represents an appropriate and respectful farewell to the deceased with the assurance that the community will be there to honour one's death; all of which are consistent with Islamic belief and practices.

The shrouding is done with three sheets of white cloth. The three sheets are laid out on top of each other. The shrouding happens after a deceased body is positioned in the shrouding sheets. The left hand is placed on the chest with the right hand on top of the left hand. The first sheet is put down, next the second, and finally the third, until the body is completely shrouded. The waxed string is tied at the upper head and feet, with one or two

strings tied around the middle. Typically, men and women sit separately, with women traditionally in the back.

The next step is to take the body to the Mosque for the funeral prayer (Salat al-Janazah). The planning stage of the funeral should take place immediately because there needs to be time for other family members to pray for forgiveness for the deceased according to Islamic beliefs. The body is interred at 'shrouded' and at this point a procession walks the body to the Mosque, and during this time the Surah Ikhlas is recited until they reach the Mosque.

The Sangil Muslim is a believer in an afterlife and has beliefs that when the soul leaves the body, it waits for a reckoning account of the previous lives. Therefore, funeral and burial rites in the Muslim community take place in very short order so the soul can be freed from the body. Family and acquaintances will usually accompany the procession to the grave and offer sympathies and a degree of assistance or support for the grieving immediate family. Emotional grieving should be focused and limited, sympathies are short, and usually guests leave after they say a few words to the family. Thus, a sombre fellowship of "carriers" of grief is gathered together to see the deceased properly and respectfully off to remain in line with Islamic practices and beliefs. The Sangil community allows women to participate in burials.

The Sangil do not consider prohibiting women from attending the cemetery and attending the process of burial, which contradicts the different Jurist opinions about women's participation in funerals. There may be elements of emotionalism in the observations about women in funerals and funeral processes. In other Muslim community manifestations, women are allowed to participate in and express their grief at funerals.⁷⁷ In the past, complete segregation of men and women has been practiced in some Muslim communities in Pakistan for funeral programmes for women, because of respect for women's agency in expressing their grief. There have not been many Sunni articulations that disallow women's participation in funerals from traditional Islam's early practices. At the same time, there have been Shi'ite articulations that have relatively few obstacles to women at funerals.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Lila Abu-Lughod, "Islam and the Gendered Discourses of Death," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 2 (1993): 187–205, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800058487>.

⁷⁸ L. Halevi, "Wailing for the Dead: The Role of Women in Early Islamic Funerals," *Past & Present* 183, no. 1 (2004): 3–39, <https://doi.org/10.1093/past/183.1.3>.



Figure 6 shows the wilakeng town ritual among the Sangil tribe. This post-burial ceremony involves displaying the deceased's belongings and performing Quranic recitations. (Photograph by the author, 2022).

3.4.2.2. Turking

Turking is a post-burial ceremony performed by the Sangil Muslim community of southern Philippines, taking place immediately after the body has been placed inside the grave and covered. When the time for the Turking ceremony has come, the ritual is said to consist of a symbolic sprinkling of water—*Tunang ujud*—that has been ritually prepared, over the grave, using a vessel called *Qatya Allah*. The grave site on which the water is poured is called *Turking Faso*, while the treated passage is called *Qurin Allah*. The ceremony is usually done by an *imām* or a person appointed. When they pour water over the grave, they also recite Qur'ānic verses, for instance *Sūrat Yā Sīn* and other supplications that are performed for easing the deceased from this life into the next. Sangil elders respect it as an important part of *adat*—the customs from their ancestors. There is a belief that it can help give the deceased spiritual relief, particularly should they suffer in the grave. This practice embodies the Sangil worldview, which is rational in its attempt to honor Islamic piety and localized cosmologies of care, healing, and continuity between the dead and the living. The additional activity of planting flowers or trees over the top of the grave and the tradition of Turking lends to this theme of continuity, through an action that embodies respect and renewal. The body is placed inside the grave, and then, when the head is covered, Turking is done. The *imām* then regularly recites additional Islamic prayers, also faithfully observed by the sector of elders who assert that doing Turking in the grave can

only help the deceased. After some rituals of sprinkling holy water, family and relatives of the deceased will plant flowers, or a tree over the head of the grave, thereby tying some beauty to the final resting place. When the process is complete, the family or relatives leave the grave and cemetery and begin reconciling. In northern countries such as Israel, people also have the sustainable planting of plants in the cemetery. Apart from the beauty of the grave and cemetery, it is part of the cultural aspects of the community.⁷⁹



As shown in Figure 7, the Turking ritual was performed at a Sangil grave. This practice, believed to aid the deceased in the afterlife, involves sprinkling holy water and reciting Islamic prayers. (Photograph by the author, 2022).

3.4.2.3. Kanduri

After the body has been buried and the service concluded, mourners leave the cemetery. During the Islamic funeral, mourners can openly grieve to some degree, but not to extremes and within prescribed limits. For instance, mourners cannot wail as this would violate the standards of decorum. Crying, on the other hand, is acceptable. Islamic funeral protocols are also clear; mourners are prohibited from taking pictures or filming any part of the funeral prayer. Once the prayers and burial of the deceased have taken place, mourners cease dressing their neighbor's or a friend's body. Mourners may condole and

⁷⁹ Amots Dafni et al., "Ritual Plants of Muslim Graveyards in Northern Israel," *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 2, no. 1 (2006): 38, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1746-4269-2-38>.

provide support for mourners at the residence of the immediate family, grieving their loved one, in the days and weeks following the burial. Commonly, the immediate family hosts visitors for one whole day, and food is typically served. Socializing during this time is believed to assist the family in coping with their loss. On the first night following the burial, a ritual involves laying a pillow (covered with white cloth) down to represent the deceased. This ritual includes putting out all the possessions of the deceased: the mirror, facing the head, the Qur'an on the upper part of the white cloth, and the deceased's cap are all included. This ritual with the white cloth on the pillow is typically performed again, on the seventh night following the burial. During this time, the rituals may involve multiple people reciting the Qur'an and offering prayers (Dua) for the deceased. Food is prepared for guests, and the deceased person's possessions are given to other people after the rituals. The family and relatives traditionally have gatherings on the 7th, 9th, 40th, 100th, 500th, and 1000th days after the death of their loved one. When the family visits the gravesite during these gatherings, they have *Turking* in which the Imām recites some Islamic prayers at the graveyard, hoping that their frequent visiting during their lives will ease the deceased's suffering in the grave.

Through the Islamic worldviews, Muslims think of death as just a transitional moment, as they believe that after death, one is taken to a different life or afterlife state, and so where one goes after transitioning is determined by how much they followed the religious codes during their life. Muslims generally believe the good life consequences in attained individual going to Paradise, while a life not lived among the goodness separate the person from goodness, and so funerals in the Islamic faith are designed to ease the suffering of grieving, and also ask Allah for mercy on the deceased, and lastly reflect on their death and the afterlife so that the grieving family may find comfort as Muslims. Within 3 days of a particularly grieving tradition, visitors traditionally bring food for the grieving family for the 40 days. However, modern Muslim communities are beginning to observe a reduced mourning process typically last days, donations of food and drink is generally considered, nevertheless the grieving family and community are greatly aided in practice by the multitude of people that visit the family and even aid in practical contribution through the preparation of ritual food eaten by the living and prayers recited, and/or verses that they recite from the Qur'an.

Traditional belief reinforces that the deceased's money should be used for the expenses of gathering during mourning periods, either from a wealthy family sacrificing a goat or cow, or the normal family preparing the normal meats like chickens. The families will return to the gravesite weeks or months after burial, and begin the permanent structure by marking

it; they would generally add cement, names, and white stones, while corals may be planted at the base of the grave. Also, cleaning the grave, community unity, feasting, and valuing the disease are all customary elements of another Muslim community.

“Within our society, the rituals performed immediately after burial carry a spiritual significance equal to, or even greater than, that of the burial itself. Following the funeral and communal prayers, we meet at home again that evening to perform a ritual of remembrance. The ritual generally involves preparing a white cloth, shaped like a cushion, to represent the deceased person. We place the Qur’ān at the head of the cushion, along with a few personal items belonging to him/her, such as the deceased’s kopya (or Muslim cap), a mirror, or sometimes the deceased’s clothing. This is then set in a private room, and reciters of the Qur’ān and people who know which du‘ā’ is appropriate for the dead are invited to attend. We pray, remember, and share a meal the family cooked. We repeat this on the seven of, nine of, forty of, one hundred of, five hundred of, and then thousand days after the death. Each event has meaning and is connected to our adat and understanding of the afterlife. Prayers and readings send blessings to the soul, and at the end, we distribute the deceased person’s belongings to his or her close relatives or community members we trust. If relatives come from far away and are present at the burial, we may often start turning immediately. This ritual act, which was composed of symbols and gestures of ritual action, serves to help guide the spirit towards peace in the hereafter.”⁸⁰

3.5. Congregational Worship Practices

3.5.1 Congregation Friday Prayer

Sangil mosques maintain a unique tradition around the Friday congregational prayer. Most interpretations of Islamic law interpret Jumu‘ah (the Friday prayer) to replace the regular Duhr (noon) prayer. However, many Sangil imāms practice a Duhr prayer after Jumu‘ah for the same congregation. Their premise is oral tradition from the Karamat tradition: in the Sangil conception, Duhr is one of the five obligatory prayers that cannot be skipped even for Friday prayers. Meaning attendees first pray the congregational Jumu‘ah prayer with a two-raka‘ah, and subsequently perform their full four raka‘ah Duhr with Iqāma for the same congregation.

The process also has local ritual actions. For example, prior to the sermon, the Mu’adhdhin (caller) hands a device that also historically has ritual-teaching elements

⁸⁰ Interview, Danny, Tambilil, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, April 11, 2025.

significantly (misbaha or kortil) to the Khatīb (the preacher), who holds this device for the sermon (It should be noted, this cane is not provided as act of charity, but as part of their Karamat practices). Then, two Adhān/Iqāma are given: one for Jumu‘ah, and one for Duhr, and therefore to treat them both as separate services. The khutbah is provided in Arabic, which then conforms to Qur‘ān and ḥadīth. Conversely, additional extended religious exhortations (often utilizing vernacular) occur outside the Mosque in communal huts. This separates exclusively formal prayer space from informal 'cleansing' of a communal experience and scripture space. After the Iqāma for Duhr, an additional meeting may also occur following a recitation of the sermon: but the gathering after; the gathering following the separate service is optional. These Sangil practices include dual prayers, good omens, and etiquette distinction (Arabic only sermon recitation; separate experience spaces for vernacular sermons).

Likewise, these ritual norms are part of Sangil's religious habitus: congregants readily accept the dual prayer practice as normative because it was "how we learned from our elders", reinforcing a sense of group identity as Sangil Muslims instead of Muslims from the Philippines.

“We pray five times daily, including Dhuhr - it is never in question. The Duhr existed before the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) became a Nabi. When Jumu‘ah came, it was not, and we did not see it as a replacement; we just added another thing, because it was special now. I have always practiced Jumu‘ah followed by Duhr because it is what I learned to do and how I lead their prayer at the masjid. I believe Duhr is still wājib. If the other people do not perform Duhr after Jumu‘ah - that is on them - but they should not prevent their fellow Muslims who do regularly practice it. They have no basis for saying it is harām.”⁸¹

⁸¹ Interview, *Imām Nasib*, mainstream traditionalist *Imām*, interview by Esmael K. Pada (research assistant), Szopad, Tambilil, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, Philippines, June 19, 2025.



As shown in Figure 8, A traditional Sangil khatib delivers the Friday sermon (khutbah) while holding a ritual cane, Masjid Pusaka, Tambilil, Kiamba, Sarangani Province. (Photograph by the author, April 14, 2023).

3.6. Salafi Reformism: Challenges to Traditional Practices

In the past few decades, the Sangil Muslim community in Kiamba, Sarangani Province, has been experiencing a rise of Salafi-oriented religious reform, and this has caused changes in the transmission, understanding, and practice of the components of its Islamic knowledge. The Salafi conception of Islam represents a departure from the mainstream Sangil religious tradition, derived from oral tradition and local rituals and customs (adat). It presents a call to return to what Salafi Muslims desire to call the purest form of Islam, based on strictly following the Qur'ān and authentic Sunnah, and avoiding acts which were innovations. The rise of Salafi-oriented Islamic reformism among the Sangil in Kiamba, Sarangani Province, is mirrored by broader Islamic revivalistic trends across the southern Philippines.

The introduction of Salafi influence among the Sangil people who sought education in regionally based madrasahs, primarily in Cotabato City and adjacent areas, and with exposure to religious scholars who had trained in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Salafi influence escalated in the decades following the return of Ustādh Salim Tial

(d.1990). This early Sangil scholar returned to Kiamba in the early 1980s after studying in a local madrasah and began a da'wah program in his hometown.

His insistence to teach aqīdah (the Islamic creed) and to critique the traditional Sangil rituals led the elders to set up a separate masjid for traditionalists and Salafi-inspired Sangil. His teachings began to influence a broader spectrum of Sangil followers over time, as the younger generations increasingly entered formal Islamic education and were influenced by the Salafi framework.

The momentum gained valuable support from other figures such as Ustādh Usman Colano of General Santos City, and later, more credible figures such as Mufti Muhammad Shu'ayb Abedin (d. 2019), who played a prominent role promoting Salafi thought in Mindanao. His lectures, Friday sermons, and Islamic symposiums - particularly in places such as General Santos City and Lumatil - resonated with many Sangil searching for a more authentic Islamic practice. Mufti Shu'ayb's position regarding bid'ah, shirk, and strict legalism became the benchmark for advocates of Salafi ideals.

More recently, the impact of non-Sangil Salafi scholars has rapidly advanced using digital technology such as Facebook. Ustādh Abdurrahman Cadera, a Shari'ah graduate of Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University in Indonesia, and now the Director of the Madrasa Comprehensive Development and Promotion Unit (MCDPU) in Davao City, represents a new wave of Salafi educators. Even though he is not Sangil, his lectures in aqīdah (theology) and fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) have taken root due to the Sangil youth and professionals attending his public lectures and spreading his teachings in their communities.

Many Sangil practitioners of Salafi teachings rely not only on formal education to access these themes but also on self-education through these lectures and symposiums. Upon returning from symposium events, local ustādh have taken advantage of their Friday khutbah platform to introduce this set of beliefs to their congregation. This has facilitated the slow acceptance of a larger set of Salafi positions, particularly by the youth or urban migrants, in urban contexts, which are increasingly critical of the Sangil adat-based practices.

Salafi preachers will give their Friday sermons in locales with multiple mosques in mainstream Sangil mosques. However, in these cases, traditionalists often enact their beliefs through Duhr prayer separately after the Jumu'ah, observing their custom of understanding prayer obligations.

Furthermore, religious realignments have occurred in rural and urban Sangil contexts through marriage alliances, migration, and generational inheritance. Some younger Sangil,

who have been exposed to Salafi teachings through their time in cities or online, have been slowly breaking down the ritual practice of things they also label as bid'ah. Conducting organized lectures at the barangay and municipal levels, often inclusive of broader Muslim audiences, further normalizes these reformist teachings.

Salafi Influence takes the opposite view, influenced by scriptural literalism as they hold that no rite lacking clear textual proof was practiced by the Prophet SAW, his companions, and must be rejected and not encouraged. Salafi criticism of local rites—like the veneration of Tapat Karamat (shrine), the manunjong and manuwak rites, and the communal Ramadan ceremonies (diko so) has generally created tension within the community. Sometimes this criticism is conveyed through the Friday sermon, and sometimes it might have a softer tone and emphasize that the practice is outside of religious correctness and supported by scripture. Bonds of reformist construction of Sangil traditionalism continue to grow, creating religious authority and community relations in Kiamba and beyond, although sometimes at odds with one another.

The hallmark of Soleleng Koraang, or parading the Qur'ān, or carrying the Qur'ān about, is not promoted by the Salafi since this is contrary to using and respecting the Qur'ān. According to Surah Al-Baqarah, the Qur'ān was revealed as a guidance for (all) humanity, not for display or to be carried out in public rituals. Accordingly, it does not adhere to the Qur'ān in its essence as an existing function, which is to learn, understand, and memorise the Qur'ān, not to parade it. The Companions (of the Prophet (SAW)) would not have endorsed this way of showing regard for the Qur'ān: it is the engagement of loving the Qur'ān that would have been the most significant valid engagement, whereby the engagement of valuing the Qur'ān involved committing it to heart and intellect.

A narration of the Prophet Muhammad SAW likens a person who does not memorize or recite the Qur'ān to a ruined house, highlighting the significance of engagement with its content rather than its physical representation. Manuwak and Manunjong. These practices involve seeking barakah (blessing) from sacred sites and objects, which Salafi discourages due to the potential gateway they pose toward shirk (associating partners with Allah). Historical precedent, such as what took place in the time of the Prophet Nuh (A.S.), when people began by remembering genuinely good acts of remembrance, and it transformed into idol worship. First, people displayed images of virtuous ancestors, and then statues, which were later worshipped by future generations. It is the same rationale for the disapproval of, for example, Manunjong, and other practices which fundamentally mean to reference a tomb or shrine, which could easily be misconstrued as a positive form of

remembrance, and lead to shirk, the gravest sin in Islam. The principle is precautionary, aiming to protect the community from theological deviation.

Diko refers to the lighting of cemeteries during Laylatul Qadr, based on ancestral beliefs that doing so helps angels locate homes and graves. From an Islamic standpoint, this practice has no basis in the Qur'ān or Sunnah, and the Sahaba of the Prophet Muhammad SAW did not practice it. The Prophet Muhammad SAW taught that the night of Laylatul Qadr should be spent in worship, primarily through acts like tahajjud and increased righteousness. Lighting cemeteries is not among the prescribed ways to observe this sacred night, nor was it practiced by the Prophet or his Companions. Angels, by their nature, do not require visual signals to perform their tasks.

Ganding is a customary Sangil ritual to ensure a child learns to walk and be healthy. However, there is no Islamic basis for this belief. Instead, Islamic tradition upholds Aqiqah, a prophetic Sunnah, where a goat is sacrificed seven days after a child's birth—one goat for a girl, two for a boy. The ritual comes with guidelines comparable to those for Qurban. Emphasizing Aqiqah helps preserve a Sunnah while distancing from unsubstantiated ritual practices like Ganding.

The obligatory rites for the deceased—washing, shrouding, and burial—are grounded in Islamic teachings. Men are shrouded in three layers of cloth, women in five. However, certain customs such as Wilakeng Tow Nate—which includes creating and vigilantly watching over symbolic bedding for the deceased—lack basis in Qur'ān and Sunnah. The fear of supernatural entities, such as aswangs, if the bedding is left unguarded, has no basis. This practice resembles Christian wake rituals (lamay) and is often associated with discouraged behaviors such as mixed-gender mingling and recreational card games. Moreover, the recitation of the entire Qur'ān (khatm) for the deceased, as commonly performed during these gatherings, was not practiced by the Prophet SAW or his Companions. Instead, the Qur'ān was emphasized as a source of guidance and personal intercession for those who engage in it. Turking, as understood by the Sangil, is a distorted form of Talqin, where the deceased is believed to be prompted by an Imam to answer the questions of the grave. In Islam, authentic Talqin involves prompting a dying individual to pronounce *La ilaha illallah* as their final words, which, if sincerely uttered, is a sign of Paradise. There is no Islamic evidence to support the tradition of reciting over the deceased to assist with answering the questions of the grave, which is learned through a lifetime of faith; postmortem acts do not, in any sense, replace this learning experience.

Kanduri - feasts that enable cooperative social interaction and present low-income families with socio-economic changes- are usually encouraged. The authentic Sunnah

forbids celebrating special events (e.g., birthdays; the seventh day after death) on specific dates, unless something indicates (daleel) that the associated event, people, or groups have something special supporting these events. Kanduri is a type of ibadah, or worship, and requires a legal basis from Allah. Celebrating only birthdays, birthdays of the deceased, or holding a recognition-based day event should not be aggravated where there is no legal basis.

The community is advised to avoid divination and reliance on soothsayers or charms. While herbal remedies may be employed alongside Islamic healing methods such as Ruqyah, the use of traditional magical practices to prevent spirit possession or misfortune is not sanctioned in Islam. Protection should be sought through Islamic means, which the Qur'ān and Sunnah establish.

Mawdi (Maulid al-Nabi). The Prophet Muhammad SAW birthday celebration is not encouraged by Ahl Sunnah Wal Jama'ah. The Prophet (sallallahu ' alayhi wa sallam) warned against being exalted in how Christians venerated Jesus (Isa A.S.). Furthermore, the celebration of Maulid was absent during the Prophet's lifetime, and the three generations considered it the best in Islam. The principle underpinning this view is that acts of worship, including celebratory rituals, must have explicit support from the Qur'ān or authentic Sunnah to be considered valid.

3.7. Negotiation and Contestation: Community Responses

Mainstream Sangil Muslims express their carefully measured type of resilience against the emergence of Salafi-inspired religious reforms in their communities. While acknowledging theological divergence between them, primarily over certain practices associated with the term bid'ah, they defend the rituals as inherited practices of Islam from the Karamat. They should not be dismissed out of hand. Traditionalists assert that their religious practices should not be seen as arbitrary cultural holdovers, but rather as communal memory and values grounded in the Qur'ān's values of dhikr, duā, and unity. They also argue that innovation questions are raised without elaboration, usually on the more problematic aspects, and their traditions are said after, which can threaten their cohesion. While disagreements are present, traditionalist actors prefer to emphasize nafsi-nafsi, an appeal for individuals to accept the responsibility of faith, and sometimes refrain from confronting information, and can echo or accept specific tolerances as both religious and ethical obligations. When viewed as traditionalists, the real threat they face is not religious opposition principles, but the decline of Sangil identity due to a loss of adat of ancestors without a clear meaning. They critique Salafi ideologies as opportunistic or varying structural interpretations, where they are easily adaptable, especially when made

without community/resource consultation, or in ignorance of the history of Sangil Islam. However, traditionalist leaders remain open to dialogue, provided that dialogue does not look like a denial of the religious heritage. They take the mosque, in this case Masjid Pusaka, Tuguis, to be the sacredness that must be defended from the ideology that fractures them, and at the same time, permit the coexistence of different forms of interpretations, sometimes vaguely expressed, sometimes in the spirit of respect for each other.

The Salafi influence in Sangil States that the negotiation has not risen to violence. Salafi influence, the ustādh observed that the dissent is primarily expressed in verbal disagreement, and building of separate institutions, such as groups engaging in two mosque projects to avoid any concession of their theological stance. They observed a degree of religious pluralism emerging under Sangil Islam, defined by clear boundaries separating groups that diverge morally. Notably, they communicated a sense of hope surrounding the possibility for reconciliation in terms of prevailing commitment to Islamic education, and commonly the imagination of a future when traditional rituals might be reconsidered and shared or revived about Salafi-informed understandings, even wherein the reconstitution of a mutually respectful unit could flow from da'wah, youth involvement, and educational engagement with Islam.

How the Sangil Muslim community responds to evolving religious norms documents the dynamic engagement between traditional adat practices and reformist interpretations. Interviews with local religious Imām offer a nuanced story of adaptation, meaning-making, and selective appropriation that influence Sangil's religious life. While some Islamic reform movements, most prominently those taking a Salafi position, have contested the authenticity of some inherited ritual practices, there is still a significant number of Sangil Muslims who endorse these practices as integral to their expression of religious and cultural identity.

Sangil Muslims indicate how mainstream Islam essentially endorses this adaptation process through their logic of continuity and integration with the teachings of Sharīf Masad Akbar, the Karamat. For example, regarding the Soleleng Koraang ritual, the traditionalist Imām has observed that it is not simply a practice initiated by the elders but was based on an original Sangil adat started at the time of the Karamat. In his own words, "the elevation of the Qur'ān", the designated routes from west to east, and the shared reading on a Friday all represent the burden of Islam that must be carried and honored. Although he had not seen the ritual before its practice during the Martial Law period, when it disappeared completely, he emphasized how widely practiced it was by ancestors and that it held social commonality. Even with the decline of practice, he does not regard Soleleng Koraang as

bid'ah (innovation). However, he stated, it stresses the sanctity of the Qur'ān and is considered meritorious in the eyes of religion.

“Through the newly instilled Islamic practices introduced by outsiders ustādh, there was a denouncement of the Sangil traditions, which ustādh labeled bid'ah (innovations in religion). This classification of Sangil customs affected the Sangil and other regional Muslim communities across the region. The elders from the community, who had no formal religious understanding, slowly departed from these customs and performed the new teachings instead, which increasingly pushed out many aspects of Sangil Islamic identity, traditions such as Maulid, Ganding, Turking, and others. In my opinion, I believe we are wrong to label these customs bid'ah. I do not believe that these are bid'ah, as these are customs that people have performed conscientiously and passed down the generations. Instead, what is becoming bid'ah could be the ideologies that new conceptions of Islamic ascribe to customs that displace the performing of culture and are detrimental to the performative legacies of knowledge systems. Suppose an ulama or scholar has a critical doubt on Qur'ānic adab that cannot be found. In that case, I encourage him or her to come to our community to discuss their reasoning and theological meaning with us, particularly the elders. The reason and logic of our ancestors, which was believed in the name of worship to Allah and expressed through the adab of Islam, is preceded by adab--the courtesy and desire for respect for the Qur'ān. Soleleng Koraang symbolized that adab is not a performance contrary to Islamic creed but a local Islamic piety. The current conversation of Islam and worship often neglects these impressions and subsequently claims adat-based practices to be ignorant or superstitious. Moreover, tangible cultural aspects and elements such as the Tapat in Tuguis that were once open for the community to perform rituals have now been described as property, which removes and alienates Sangil culture access from all Sangil youth. Although recently in Katobao some people reference Soleleng Koraang, their apprehension is emboldened by people's conception that such customs cannot or are not recognized, particularly that we have no collective access to the Tapat unless extraordinary or communal access. Regardless of the uniqueness of this circumstance, the Tapat is a spiritual barakah (blessing) with physical presence and change that persists with the best memories and auspicious moments. While the physical form of the Tapat has changed over the years from a small mound to a slightly larger mound site, it is a strong shared impression of its presence and importance, of shared memory. I am

sure that only Allah (SWT) can ultimately judge the authenticity of their beliefs and practices. Labeling or branding customs and practices of the community as bid'ah, which are most often referenced without any local forms of recognition (appeared to have been dismissed/delegitimized as a means of distancing the idea of bid'ah from local forms of religious practice), does significant harm. To a point where it alienates and dissipates any notion of what cultural expressions of Islam could be. Mutual respect, dialogue, and understanding should replace judgment to acknowledge the practices we all have performed and describe them as a respected dimension of spiritual and communal identity for the Sangil.⁸²"

Similarly, the Manunjong and Manuwak rituals are understood as intentional spiritual acts of change grounded in Qur'ānic dhikr and du'ā'. These rites are initially done in response to an impending catastrophe or to implore collectively for protection, healing, and restoration, but are ultimately nested in Sangil cosmology. Mainstream Sangil Imām had remarked that these kinds of rites were encouraged, but being part of these rituals was not compulsory. It is up to the community to be united. We see a ritualized way of providing spiritual care that ultimately politically protects a member of a collective ummah, and ethnocultural cohesion that transcends and supersedes individualism. As he said, tuwak Bala is not just for our family but our ethnicity, religion, and community. Such statements speak to an undoubtedly rooted and sacred understanding of collective conditions as theological rather than political.

"Contemporary Sangil do not practice Manunjong and have ceased to do so due to changing circumstances and external religious pressures. They are ustādh and scholars who label these rituals as bid'ah (innovation). My feelings are, how can a practice provide to us by the Karamat who brought Islam to our people be considered a bid'ah? We do not introduce innovations. These rites are not bid'ah; they are registry pathways of worship and remembering. I do not see the practices of our traditions as ḥarām. We do not violate the Islamic, instead we do dhikr and du'ā' following the instructions of the Qur'ān. Dhikr is allowed in Islam. These practices are important to me, and as a Sangil, I can not see them as customary practices; they are our adat and spiritual capital. The real damage is for us to allow these customs to die off due to misunderstanding. Just like with Manuwak, both intend to seek protection through du'ā'. I have done Manuwak before. The term bala refers to calamities and misfortunes, personal or collective. By not wanting bala, we are asking Allah to lift it from ourselves, our children, our people,

⁸² Interview, Imām Mansot, Katobao, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, June 19, 2025.

our land. The ritual can take place either at the tampat or at the shore, although we do address Allah, not the deceased.”

“There is no shirk; our process is aligned with the cultural structure. Manuwak takes place up to three times a month, primarily on Wednesdays, but only based on the need and consensus within the community. The only impermissible thing is based on ḥarām sources, whether wealth based on theft or deception. However, if the du‘ā’ is intended sincerely, and the provision is based on ḥalāl, there is no sin. Manuwak can be and has been done even if Manunjong has not been performed in advance. Ultimately, what matters is the determination and the agreement of the community. Islamic discourse will undoubtedly change over time, which is not unexpected. Nonetheless, I continue to practice with Karamat, which is our Islam. I see no point in changing what is of value, for those who believe, alhamdulillah, and those who do not, ṣabr. Let people practice the value of their beliefs, as long as it is harmless. These rituals are valuable for the next generations. If they understand the importance, they will surely protect it. Moreover, if we share views or debate vitally, let it be dialogue, not judgment. Only Allah SWT may judge.”⁸³

The Diko So observance is an act that occurs during the last three nights of Ramadan, is a candle-lighting event at cemeteries and the Tampat, and is recognized as an act of remembrance and intercession for the dead. As Bapa Sad noted, candles, kamaniyang, and Qur’ānic recitations reflect their solemnness and the continuity with ancestral practice in a ritual form. The concrete belief that changing the stones on a grave is reminiscent of fixing a (living) relative's roof represents the way metaphors of kinship and domesticity infuse Sangil spiritual thinking. To him, to say this is bid'ah neglects the community, moral, and spiritual aspects they all embody in shared actions. Rather than being considered new religious innovations, they are viewed as extensions of the Karamat's religious instruction.

“While some have recently claimed that diko so is bid'ah, I respectfully disagree. These are often frames of reference from people who have already scaled back (from the original rites) and distanced themselves from the tradition. The ritual itself does not hurt people or disturb others. It is located in a space of community decision and solidarity, which makes it compulsory and morally enhancing. Even if the diko so is performed, there is no sin, but you accrue blessings and rewards if it is done. As long as there is no face or it does not go against the Islamic religion, it becomes one of the legitimate cultural dimensions as part of our religion. Though

⁸³ Interview, Imām Arnold, Tuguis Darussalam, Tambilil, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, July 18, 2025.

there may not be any direct mention in the Qur'ān as to the legitimacy of lighting candles and the rituals that come with it, as there is with farming and fishing, those activities are embraced as they enhance a community's well-being, as our rituals do. For those who take issue with it being harām, consider the range of cultural and spiritual values. Such actions are still actionable towards the persistence of our peoples and Karamat. That is what keeps me practicing and preserving.⁸⁴

When addressing Salafi critiques, which regard rituals like Bidah (the innovation of religion), mainstream Traditionalist Sangil often refer back to interpretive pluralism and respectful dialogue. For instance, a Traditionalist Sangil Imām pointed out how bid'ah charges should be rooted in Qur'ānic principles, rather than being polemically levelled. The Traditionalist Imām emphasized against condemning entire communal practices as bid'ah without first articulating those rites' meaning and historical function. The call for epistemic humility is part of a broader ethic of religious coexistence behind Sangil's responses to reformist pressures.

This pragmatic and pluralistic attitude is also evident in attitudes towards Friday congregational prayer, or jumu'ah. While Mainstream Sangil Muslims engage in both Jumu'ah and Duhr prayer, engendered by oral traditions of the Karamat, they did not denigrate those who did not engage in Duhr prayer. Instead, they emphasized Nafsi-nafsi—each to his approach to understanding. This ethic of mutual respect and non-interference allows for diversity within a standard attachment to Islamic devotions.

Ultimately, the Sangil communities' response to reformist Islam demonstrates what scholars call glocalization, the localized interpretation of global norms of religion. The rituals of Soleleng Koraang, Manunjong, Manuwak, Diko So, etc., are not static monuments; they are active and continually reconstructed actions through memory, experience, and changing forms of Islam. Though some practices may wither under external pressures, competing influences, or favourable or unfavourable economic climates, vestiges of the moral and symbolic logic remain, leading to a sustained Islamic tradition with a distinctive Sangil Islamic habitus that remains resilient amid change.

Traditionalist Sangil Islam engages practices as dimensions of a lived piety and a rubric for social life. While they engage with ritual activities more than their critics acknowledge, they experience ritual activity not as a passive observance of custom or tradition, but as an active rehearsal of religious meaning amid ever-evolving modes of Islamic discourse. Their encounters with and responses to reformist critiques reveal their attempts to respond to claims about their inherited religious forms and reconcile any claims

⁸⁴ Interview, Imām Danny, Tambilil, Kiamba, Sarangani Province, July 18, 2025.

to orthodoxy with their spiritual goals. The Sangil relies on genealogies of practices, ethical intention, and communal continuity. These contestations reveal how ritual actions are understood and utilized as venues for worship and ways to assert local religious authority and resistance regarding epistemic marginalization within broader Islamic debates.

3.8. Legal and Cultural Frameworks Supporting Sangil Practices

According to the Philippine legal basis, such as the Republic Act No. 8371 – Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA), Chapter VI, Cultural Integrity, section 29 states:

“Protection of Indigenous Culture, traditions, and institutions. - The state shall respect, recognize, and protect the right of the ICCs/IPs to preserve and protect their culture, traditions, and institutions. It shall consider these rights in the formulation of national plans and policies.”⁸⁵

This foundational law establishes the fundamental right of indigenous communities, including the Sangil, to preserve their cultural and religious practices.

Moreover, official recognition of Maulid as a Muslim holiday in the Philippines supports their traditional celebratory practices. The 1977 Philippine Muslim code officially recognized Maulid as a Muslim holiday in the Philippines. Article 169 in PD 1083 states:

Official Muslim holidays. The following are hereby recognized as legal Muslim holidays:

- (a) ‘Amun Jadid (New Year), which falls on the first day of the first lunar month of Muharram;*
- (b) Maulid-un-Nabi (Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad), which falls on the twelfth day of the third lunar month of Rabi-ul-Awwal;*
- (c) Lailatul Isra Wal Mi’raj (Nocturnal Journey and Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad), which falls on the twenty-seventh day of the seventh lunar month of Rajab;*
- (d) ‘Id-ul-Fitr (Hari Raya Pausa), which falls on the first day of the tenth lunar month of Shawwal, commemorating the end of the fasting season; and*
- (e) ‘Id-ul-Adha (Hari Raja Haji), which falls on the tenth day of the twelfth lunar month of Dhu l-Hijja.⁸⁶*

⁸⁵ Republic of the Philippines, "Republic Act No.8371: The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997," October 29, 1997.

⁸⁶ Philippines, *Code of Muslim Personal Laws of the Philippines*, February 4, 1977.

The Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) is a landmark in legal pluralism in the Philippines. It recognizes Islamic traditions and institutionalizes cultural autonomy within a constitutional framework. Republic Act 11054 states in the Preamble:

“Imploring the aid of Almighty God, in recognition of the aspirations of the Bangsamoro people and other inhabitants in the autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao to establish an enduring peace based on justice, balanced society and asserting their right to conserve and develop their patrimony, reflective of their system of life as prescribed by their faith, in harmony with their customary laws, cultures and traditions, within the framework of the Constitution and the national sovereignty as well as territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines, and the accepted principles of human rights, liberty, justice, democracy, and the norms and standards of international law. Moreover, affirming their distinct historical identity and birthright, to their ancestral homeland and their right to chart their political, future through a democratic process that will secure their identity and posterity, and allow genuine and meaningful self-governance, the Filipino people, by the act of the Congress of the Philippines, do hereby ordain and promulgate this Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.”⁸⁷

Republic Act No. 9997 – National Commission on Muslim Filipinos Act of 2009, Article 1, Section 4 states:

“Mandate The Commission shall preserve and develop the culture, tradition, institutions, and well-being of Muslim Filipinos, in conformity with the country's laws and consonant with national unity and development.”⁸⁸

There are some Sangil Non-Government Organizations, such as Southern Mindanao Sangil Tribe Association Inc., which are dedicated to empowering and uplifting the Sangil people in Southern Mindanao by promoting cultural preservation, education, livelihood, and indigenous rights, ensuring a stronger and more self-sustaining community. However, it was located in General Santos City, and most of the projects are there, which has hindered the Sangil in the Province from joining. This NGO promotes cultural preservation among the Sangil in Southern Mindanao. At the same time, they also joined programs and activities such as Lectures and Daawa from the City Mayor's Office- Integrated Cultural Communities Affairs Division (ICCAD), mainly the speakers are graduates from the Islamic University in Madinah, K.S.A.

⁸⁷ Congress of the Philippines, *Republic Act No. 11054*, July 23, 2018.

⁸⁸ Philippines, *Republic Act No. 9997: National Commission on Muslim Filipinos Act of 2009*, February 18, 2010.

In contrast to the legal pluralist approach adopted by mainstream traditionalist Sangil—who ground their claims to cultural and religious legitimacy in state-sanctioned legal instruments such as the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA), Presidential Decree 1083 (Code of Muslim Personal Laws), Republic Act No. 9997, and Republic Act No. 11054 (Bangsamoro Organic Law)—Salafi-oriented actors derive normative authority from scriptural sources. These include the Quran, the authentic Hadith, and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

3.9. Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the beliefs and religious practices of the Sangil Muslims of Kiamba, Sarangani, by exploring the negotiation and contestation between traditionalist and Salafi groups to understand the nature of these tensions and the means of sustaining social cohesion. Using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, the analysis shows how the Sangil's religious habitus, rooted in adat practices surveyed above, such as Soleleng Koraang, Manunjong, Manuwak, and Diko So, generates religious capital through community cohesion and spiritual barakah, situating traditionalists in a contestable religious field. These practices are closely tied to Sharīf Masad Akbar's legacy to the Sangil, which constitutes the Sangil collective identity along with its cultural memory, that is challenged by Salafi reformism, which critiques it as *bid'ah* (religious innovation) and emphasizes scriptural capital.

The degree of negotiation and contestation is evident in the Salafi rejection of the conscious practice of religion in the performance of traditional rituals like Soleleng Koraang's Qur'ānic procession or Manuwak's recitations to the sea as an innovation without a Qur'ānic basis. Traditionalists cite these rituals as legitimate forms of Islamic piety, building on their place-based locative history of the collective (*adat*) and their practice of spirituality. Contestation within the religious field is displayed through distinct prayer habits and practices (e.g., Jumu'ah/Duhr at different mosques), as well as disagreements over the legitimacy of the rituals, displaying the interaction of competing bodies (*habitus*) and forms of capital (religious).

Despite these contestations, the Sangil sustain social cohesion through pluralistic strategies, particularly *nafsi-nafsi*, which permits traditionalist and Salafi practices to coexist without clashing. Dialogue as espoused by community leaders like Imām Arnold creates a culture of respect, and statutes like the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (RA 8371) and Bangsamoro Organic Law (RA 11054), which together give meaning to the existence of indigenous as symbolic capital, legitimate practices or elements of *adat* while nurturing communal differences. All of these mechanisms exemplify the resilience of the Sangil, who

are managing their religious habitus within the Islamic normative framework while foregrounding their local traditions. This process of social glocalization allows them to emerge as an identity in the wake of reform forces.

The Sangil's openness to dialogue and legal frameworks could foster opportunities for revitalizing practices like Soleleng Koraang, which has been inactive since the 1974 massacre, through youth and educational activities. The Sangil's navigation of the religious field using pluralism and adaptability suggests a model of coexistence that could be used to inform broader discussions of negotiating religious identities and practices through engagement with diverse Muslim communities. This chapter concludes by introducing Chapter IV, where ethnographic findings will expand upon the analytical framing of this chapter, providing the unfiltered voices and practice of the actors engaged with contested ritual, and providing space for additional theoretical writing.

CHAPTER IV

NEGOTIATION AND CONTESTATION

This chapter examines the dynamics of religious negotiation and contestation among the Sangil, a Muslim ethnolinguistic minority in the Southern Philippines. It addresses two central research questions: (1) How and why do religious negotiation and contestation between traditional and Salafi-influenced Sangil groups exist? (2) How do Sangil communities negotiate and contest religion while maintaining social cohesion? Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, the analysis utilizes the concepts of habitus, field, capital, symbolic power, and cleft habitus to explore the interplay between the Sangil's syncretic Islamicate tradition rooted in adat practices like *Diko So*, *Manunjong*, *Manuwak*, *Soleleeng Koraang*, *Ganding*, *Kanduri*, and Salafi-influenced reformism. Based on ethnographic interviews with elders (Imām, Pandita), ustadz, youth, and community members, the findings are organized into three thematic areas: (1) The negotiation of Islamic identity among the Sangil reflects how youth selectively assimilate Salafi elements such as strict monotheism (Tawhid) while preserving cultural rituals to sustain both spiritual depth and communal belonging. Framed by the concept of cleft habitus.⁸⁹ This dual engagement parallels the glocalization of Islam in Southeast Asia as observed by Geertz.⁹⁰ (2) Contestation of Islamic identity, this theme examines the tensions and conflicts within the Sangil Muslim community as they contest the legitimacy of their Islamic identity, driven by competing traditional adat-based practices and Salafi-influenced reformist movements emphasizing scriptural purity (dalīl). (3) Strategies for Maintaining Social Cohesion Amidst Negotiation and Contestation.

4.1. Negotiating Religious Identity

This section addresses the "how" of the negotiation aspect by examining how Sangil Muslims are negotiating competing dispositions of a religiously cleft habitus through individual and communal practices of selective assimilation.

4.1.1 Adat as Cultural and Spiritual Anchor

The traditional habitus of Karamat, syncretic Islam founded by Sharif Masad Akbar, of the Sangil community, provides a cultural and spiritual grounding that both embeds Islamic practices into a communal, kinship and moral context, and relies upon Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Practice where the habitus expresses itself through adat

⁸⁹ Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby, eds., *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, Second Edition (Routledge, 2016).

⁹⁰ Geertz, Clifford, *The Religion of Java*.

(custom) rituals, that uphold Sangil identity. The fieldwork from the Kiamba Mosque, coupled with interviews with Iman/Pandita Arnold Acop Bpa Mansot, Bpa Dila, Bpa Nasib, and Rey, demonstrates that the Soleleng Koraang, Manunjong, Manuwak, Diko, turking, Kanduri, and Ganding rituals provide the Sangil community with unity, generational continuity, and resilience. This section will identify and explain these rituals, both about the actions of traditional leadership and the traditional community's engagement in response to the Salafi reformist challenges, while explaining how the Sangil community is negotiating its religious identity and social bond.

The Sangil's ritual-saturated habits represent their traditional habitus, which contains internalized dispositions combining Islamic practice and the local cosmology. Soleleng Koraang is one of the important community cultural rites, traditionally held before Ramadan. The processional route was done two times on Wednesday and Thursday, and then the last rites would take place on Friday with readings from the Quran at the Masjid Pusaka in Tuguis. According to Imām Danny, Soleleng Koraang is not bidah but a reflection of Quranic Devotion. Soleleng Koraang exemplifies an Islamic principle while reformulating cultural identity affiliation in Islam, as the ritual develops community and group identity. They also pay supplication to Allah through the rituals, Manunjong and Manuwak, which associate dua (prayers) of dhikr (remembrance), and can be held at shrines (Tampat), or the seashore using yellow rice as a symbol of purity. In these practices, the potential of a Manuwak ritual is supposed to connect us, supplicating Allah for protection for the people. The Sangil Diko So, or cemetery rituals, takes place at cemetery sites in the last three nights of Ramadan, where a candle lighting would be used to signify prayers, or supplication, for the ancestors, as Bpa Mansot describes, similar to fixing your relative's roof. It is suggestive of a kinship position for remembrance (or supplication). Ganding is a ritualized support for newborns, reflecting a similar tradition with coconut water and traditional ritual items (nanawngang, kurintang) to support health, with similarities to the Tausog and Maguindanaon practice for newborns. The Sangil's ritual repertoire confirms an engagement with a Karamat past that reflects Sangil's habitus, while permitting a normalized social practice connected to spiritual or religious practices.

4.1.2 Embracing Reformist Dispositions

The Salafi-oriented among the Sangil have become increasingly active, indexing the influence of transnational Islamic networks, and broadly the phenomenon of digital da'wah. This habitus is increasingly moving away from the habitus of the prior data-based network embodied in Kiamba. Bourdieu's habitus as, a system of embodied dispositions is the product of social experience, helps us to address this in the context of a competing

religious field where Salafi-oriented actors challenge the syncretic Islam it is naming through the reconstitution of the Sangil's religious dispositions that embodied the Islam, introduced by Sharif Masad Akbar (the Karamat). Respondents like Ustadh Ali, Abu Bakr deepened and formalized the Salafi teachings in Kiamba, emphasizing *dalil* (the purity of scripture) over custom. Ustadh Ali said, Practices like *mamila tow nate* [post-burial gatherings] or *turking* [pouring water at graves] are *dalil* free; they are not the Prophet's way. The invalidation of the customary practices named *Manunjong*, *Diko So*, and *Ganding*, identified as *bid'ah* (innovation), creates tension with those Sangil naming the practices as sacred activities, either understated or as relics of Islam, as taught by the Karamat. Beyond the free media and education, the madrasahs in Sarangani provide, including digital media like YouTube, where Sangil youth are watching Salafi sermons, have activated a *habitus* of reformism. Sayadi (23-year-old ustadh, interviewed 2025), a society supporting abandonment of *adat* practices, condemning customary practice to violate Islamic dispositions unless these were in the Quran and Hadith, while condemning rites such as *maulid*, as traditions. This is characterised by Salafi-teaching education capital from formal training in a Madrasah.

The Salafi influence focuses on scriptural purity, and this limits its compatibility with traditional Sangil practices and creates social divisions, even though the Salafi influence is compatible with negotiation and coexistence within a dynamic religious field. Ustadh Ali explained the problem as follows, "Mainstream Sangil see *adat* as true, we follow *dalil*... how can you drink clean water if it's mixed with dirty water?". (I.e., clean water and dirty water cannot go together). He highlighted the Salafi notion of seeing *adat* propagation as theological impurity, which led some families to construct separate mosques in village sites such as Puago and Tuguis to avoid a clash from ideological stance. However, peaceful coexistence is demonstrated in mixed circumstances as Salim noted various youth during Friday sermons, can remain to hear the *khutbahs* at traditionalist mosques, who incorporate Salafi-inspired Sangil leadership, while traditionalists usually pray *duhr* afterward because they participate in *Jumah* as *sunnah* and not *fardh*. This selective participation indicates how cleft *habitus* works in practice; youth like Fatima are both Salafi pious (i.e., *hijab* and *madrasah*) and have reduced engagement with *adat*, e.g., attending weddings (traditionalist), while avoiding activities like *pande flaglets* or *kulintang* music adequately rejected by Salafis as un-Islamic.

4.1.3 Youth and Selective Assimilation

Sangil youth have developed a cleft *habitus*, as they are the primary actors in the religious life of their community and readily adopt practices infused by Salafi Islam with

intentional cunning while also continuing to practices that they see as essential to the survival of their cultural identity, illustrated by April 2025 fieldwork at the Kiamba Mosque. Bourdieu's concept of cleft habitus, as some internalized conflict across social fields, provides insight into the various ways youth navigate globalizing reforming discourses and local practices. For example, during a Diko So ceremony, 19-year-old Hassan engaged in communal dhikr in honour of the ancestors, yet he also wore a Salafi-inspired jubah. Hassan's Salafi-inspired Islamic practice, which he performed side by side with an adat-based Islamic practice, is an indication of his hybrid identity, which synthesizes both reformist forms of piety with tradition. When youth talked about their religious practices in interviews, they acknowledged a process of negotiated religious cherry-picking, adopting Salafi perspectives on tawhid (monotheism), adopting women's clothing (abaya or niqab), men's clothing (jubah), and the practice of growing out beards. But they were clear that adat-based rituals, such as Diko So rituals, maintained a significance based on the lived dependency of the families. This process of selective assimilation also embodies agency, which Bourdieu would predict to be the outcome of the cleft habitus, as it is the quality of dependency difference between the competing demands of transnational branding and local, historically constructed representations of culture. Hassan explained, I wear the jubah as a demonstration of my faith, but when I participate in Diko So I connect to my family and our history. In this way, hybridization enables youth to live with cognitive dissonance as they maintain the custom of piety that is central in Salafi views, while equally recognizing that the Salafi focus on individual piety is fundamentally based on how they can integrate the togetherness of family based on an adat. The youth's Islamic discourses from transnational origins, experienced through various media that they consume, and social media texts, can also shape youth religiosity, and in extreme cases, transcend contextualization of negative stigma of local religious practices using Salafi terms of innovation. What youth cannot deny is their public participation in a ritual such as Manunjong - to establish their own public ritual life, but meet the individual criteria of practice between their community, family, and the historically constructed field of Sangil Islam. Ultimately, the Sangil youth can negotiate these new hybrid forms of religiosity while still maintaining the cultural flows of continuity in the Sangil region, while managing their simultaneous adaptation to advancing modernities and social changes, allowing them to enact a more fluid set of identities as actors in the Sangil's religious field.

The generational habitus tracks back to the syncretic Islam that was practiced by Sharif Masad Akbar (the Karamat) as well as the social (adat) rituals associated with Soleleng Koraang, Manunjong, Manuwak, Diko So, Ganding, and others, which are sacred

tasks in the Qur'an and, more significantly, from their ancestors, and the legacy of the Karamat. For this study, the rituals that were engaged while doing the fieldwork do not originate from formal Islamic education but from experience, activity, and collective Remembering, and from the example of ancestors; embedding Islam into Sangil cosmology, and sacred spaces, such as the Tapat, which have been endowed with barakah. For example, because Manunjong action was reported by us, a dua of supplication requesting protection, and Manuwak, a ritual of prayer that is done monthly, are engaged by youth and elders in conjunction. These rituals will help to circulate barakah for the families and kinship, and provide strength to their hearts internally. Pandita Muhammad commented that Rituals are our identity and help teach our youth to respect Allah and the past. About Sangil youth, the generational habitus also includes engagement with modern institutions, like madrasahs, and various forms of Salafi-influenced teachings and scholarship, yet patterns of engagement with adat still leverage family construct. For example, one female participant, Aisha (22), stated that, I go to my madrasah to learn proper ways of doing salat, but at home we still do Ganding for niece and nephew - it's in the family. The interplay of being flexible enough to allow youth to absorb their movements of experience, with better reformist knowledge based on activity, can maintain presence for the generational habitus for youth. Ganding is, for example, an adat social practice, with coconut water, to assist newborns to be healthy. There are families, like Bpa Mansot, who used Ganding as an opportunity to continue the inheritance of action across generations, stating, it is important for our youth to know adat so that we keep our dunya and ākhirāt together. The generational habitus is described as an ethical-moral system of resistance to the generations of families of Salafi critique who label dealings with adat as bid'ah. Importantly, Mansot argued, that the real bid'ah is trying to take away our inherited rituals, which came from the Qur'an. This, and other examples of resistance, are based on symbolic capital, which allows youth to manage the movement of reformist opposition to their lived culture and also allows the Sangil community to exist intergenerationally together.

4.2. Contestation in the Religious Field: Struggles for Symbolic Power

This section addresses the “why” of contestation, using *field* and *symbolic power* to analyze the structural and ideological factors driving struggles over religious legitimacy.

4.2.1 Competing Capitals: Traditional vs Salafi Authority

At the heart of these disputes lies a contested process of defining orthodoxy within the Sangil community, where competing actors, traditionalists and reformists assign religious authority to different criteria and figures. For traditionalist Sangil elders, and

Sangil elders in general, religious legitimacy is situated within their lineages and familiarity with local ritual traditions. Authority is situated in the figures of the imam and pandita, who are not necessarily recognized for formal Islamic education, and instead demonstrable knowledge of the Quran, dhikr, supplication, and (du'ā') prayers. The relevance of their authority is that they possess an embodiment of the Sangil religious legacy that is also charismatic, based on orally transmitted religious knowledge, ritual skills and practices, and connection to their ancestors. For traditionalists, the epistemology of their religious tradition does not confer legitimacy through certificates and institutions but through practices that build relationships and provide lived experience and intimate engagement with the community's moral and spiritual lifeways. This legitimacy cannot only be a functionalist or doctrinal religious practice; it is also a performance and embodiment of norms and values based upon historical and inherited knowledge, together with ritual proficiencies that make ancestral faith genealogies relevant.

In contrast, the rise of Salafi-inspired religious movements within the Sangil groups in Kiamba, Sarangani Province, has highlighted the intra-community vulnerabilities regarding recognition of authority and the legitimacy of religious authority. For the Sangil, the legitimacy of local religious leaders has always related to Adat, and the possession of an inherited local position of respect. The Salafi-inspired movements bring with them new legitimacy created by a system of Islamic credentialing, which, as a way of establishing legitimacy, reflects formal Islamic education, access to scriptural sources, and following the pure Islam of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his companions.

Field data obtained from ethnographic engagements suggest that proponents of Salafi orientations regard 'ilm (religious knowledge) as the sole basis of religious authority. This group's authority does not reside in a person's age or lineage, but instead resides in showing degrees of scholarship ('ilm) and the ability to credibly cite religious texts, specifically the Qur'an and Hadith, within a reliable knowledge framework. The Salafi experience emphasized that it is unnecessary if you are an elder; what matters is that you have studied Islam. If not, what will you teach? This statement illustrates the broader discursive pattern of privileging textual fidelity and scholarly training over experiential or genealogical claims to the prerogatives of religious leadership. This degree of privileging reflects a broader process called scripturalization, whereby religious authenticity is understood based on whether it contains dalīl (textual proof) from reliable narrations, ultimately leading to a serious conversation about re-evaluating, if not outright rejection of, long-standing Sangil practices. Salafi supporters assert that without any form of dalīl,

Sangil practices are bad bid'ah, thereby recontextualizing Sangil practices as not only rejected theologically, but as rejected forms of religious authority.

The tension is considerable because Sangil has historically relied on local leaders or elders who, while located within the community and cultural memory, are usually trained in Quranic recitations. The introduction of external scholars, mostly educated in Salafi institutions, has broken apart the local structures of authority. While followers tend to see these scholars as authoritative in their theology, it often clashes with the local leaders' situated cultural capital and social legitimacy and authority. The effect has been the fragmentation of communal Islamic life, as evidenced by the establishment of separate mosques to accommodate diverging ideologies.

Nonetheless, traditional Sangil leaders - namely, elders and ritual specialists - are protected indirectly through legal frameworks. The law affirms the significance of cultural traditions, indigenous practices, and places of historical significance, and offers both symbolic and juridical recognition of localized forms of religious expression. In this way, the authority of traditionalist Sangil actors was not enforced by a religious institution, but through cultural legitimacy from national legislation.

Alternatively, those Sangil actors with a Salafi influence establish their legitimacy within the Sangil community through the authority of written texts, and more specifically, through the legitimacy of Islamic theology. Their stress on 'ilm (religious knowledge), dalil (textual evidence), and manhaj (methodology) is a transnational religious orientation whose emphasis is on doctrine rather than customary practice. These actors are, at a local level, powerful (influence) actors who cannot engage with or assert legitimacy through state legal systems, and who do not have the means to formalize 'religion' (regulate) or convert religious norms into law.

4.2.2 Transnational and Digital Field

Transnational networks and digital platforms have changed the Sangil religious field, increasing contestation between traditionalist and Salafi-influenced groups and addressing why religious contestation happens. This sub-section uses Bourdieu's concepts of field and symbolic power to explore the introduction of Salafi-oriented discourses through Saudi-funded scholarships and digital da'wah on platforms like Facebook and YouTube; the ways that Salafi-oriented discourses challenge traditional cultural capital and opportunities for ideological contestation over adat practices. My fieldwork in 2025, including content analysis of online sermons and interviews, illustrates how these transnational and digital fields create new possibilities and arenas for struggles over symbolic power, particularly amongst Sangil youth.

Transnational networks and forms of assistance from Saudi Arabia (in the form of funding of madrasahs and scholarships) stimulated Salafi teachings. They introduced the Sangil to prioritize *dalīl* (scriptural evidence, cases from the Qur'an and hadith) over customary rituals. An early influence on Salafi was the Sangil scholar Ustādh Salim Tial (d. 1990), who studied religion at a madrasah in Cotabato City, before returning to Kiamba in the early 1980s to develop da'wah programs focusing on aqīdah (Islamic creed) while denouncing Quranic and Islamic traditions with rituals such as Diko So as *bid'ah* (innovation). This led to elders creating separate mosques to accommodate beliefs. This was noted in fieldwork in 2024 (see 4.3.3). Tial's teaching started to seriously take off with other scholars such as Ustādh Usman Colano in General Santos City and Mufti Muhammad Shu'ayb Abedin (d. 2019), a Madinah University graduate whose lectures in General Santos City and Lumatil denounced shirk (polytheism).

These contemporary transnational networks produce this influence through individuals such as Ustaz Ali, who was interviewed in July 2025. He studied at a madrasah in North Africa and Almaarif in Baguio, Philippines. He contends that *dalīl* is significant while adat rituals are less favorable. Likewise, Ustādh Abdurrahman Caderao is a non-Sangil studios who graduated from the Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University in Indonesia and is the Director of the Madrasa Comprehensive Development and Promotion Unit in Davao City, who extends influence to Sangil communities through public lectures on aqīdah and fiqh in Sarangani. We interviewed youth who stated Caderao's words and teachings were shared on Facebook and influenced the community in Kiamba.

Those Salafi discourses can be magnified through these digital platforms, being a sociotechnical field of contention.

4.3. Strategies for Social Cohesion

This section addresses how the Sangil maintain social cohesion amidst contestation, focusing on strategies rooted in *habitus* and *capital*.

4.3.1 Kinship and Ritual: Anchor of Community Solidarity

Sangil's traditional rituals are more than mere religious ceremonies. They are sets of practices to establish, maintain, and affirm kinship, respect, and social identity and establish culturally and socially anchored ways of codifying community life as moral and spiritual. The Sangil cohort created a model whereby kinship, intergenerational respect, and ritual traditions are inextricably linked. Various ritual practices such as Soleleng Koraang, Manuwak, Manunjong, Ganding, and Diko So are multifaceted, in that they are spiritual events and practices, grounded in family and community identity.

Tradition and kinship are key supporting and conjoining components of rituals, as they are typically performed with the intention of honouring elders, ancestors, and recently deceased relatives in both the future and the past, and honouring and recognising respect for kin that maintains continuity to future generations. The Diko So ritual, for instance, is an important ritual performed during Ramadan, in which participants establish and honour a sacred pathway to kin that fosters recognition and connection to dead kin.

Elders hold a position of respect in the Sangil worldview. Traditionalists worry that millennia of traditional ritual knowledge and practice are waning among youthful generations, partly due to the rise of reformist Islamic notions of Bid'ah (innovation). When ritual practice is downplayed or seen as inappropriate, the status of 'knowing' tied to traditions diminishes or downplays the traditions. At the same time, the role of elders as custodians of 'sacred' knowledge is also compromised.

The performance of rituals is spiritual, social, and a confluence of multiple meanings. Participating in rituals collectively, like with Manuwak, provides the means for the community's solidarity in reaching the same spiritual end, invocation of blessings, protection from curse or misfortune, and community health.

Furthermore, Sangil's rituals are an unfolding ground for kinship, respect, and collective identity to be continuously reaffirmed. The rituals are mechanisms for cultural persistence, promulgating the morals and spiritual elements of the clan. Rituals like Soleleng Koraang, Manunjong, Manuwak, Diko So, Ganding, and Duhr after Jum'ah demonstrate the extent to which kinship and background were paramount for Sangil. These practices are more than piety; they are also processes through which intergenerational ties are reproduced and membership in the collectivity is affirmed. Ritual participation is intergenerational and open and includes elders, youth, children, and even people who respect the Sangil, such as non-Sangil. Such comprehension acknowledges the reality of a communal being of shared purpose in mutual respect. Ancestral knowledge and the Ilm derived from the Karamat are honored and respected as a knowledge system, even if many Elders have no formal experience in academic Madrasah or Islamic theology. In this case, they derive authority from their embodied knowledge transmitted through oral traditions. Usual kinship figures, such as the Imam and Pandita, are often community instrumentalists in the rituals. These figures and the ritual leaders embody the Sangil epistemological commitment to leaders knowing things and demonstrating as senior moral authority figures. Ritual events, e.g., Diko So, lighting candles, or Ganding, also represent public affirmation of familial and tribal allegiance: they are spiritual actions with social significance to signal belonging. The enactment of rituals is related rather than individual.

Action is done for the tribe, for the ancestors, or the children, and it is a collective identity rooted in blood, Adat, and commitment. When considering Salafi Influence, interviews affirm that kinship and community identity are central to the Sangil ritual life. Even rituals like Mamila Tow Nate, Mag-turking Umat Nate, Ganding, and Maulid had significant participation spanning generations based on respect for Elders and ancestral ways. Rituals are not only spiritual; they are seen as acts of familial and collective duty, affirming belonging to the Sangil ethnic and religious identity. When Salafi beliefs were introduced to the community, these rituals were among the first to be scrutinized and disputed, primarily due to a lack of *dalīl* (textual basis) used in the scripture of the Qur'ān and Sunna. Thus, further conflict developed, and traditional rituals that were previously unquestionable were suddenly unseated. This previous questioning demonstrated that Sangil's traditional practices were so anchored in their moral and cultural customs that they were being questioned unwillingly. However, the responses by the community, particularly from the Elders, illustrate how embedded ritual participation was in representative familial respect and historical continuity. Sangil Elders were resisting change, and therefore, not uniquely preserving ritual, but providing support for kinship, relational, and customary values in inherited practices of religion. Even with converts to Salafi, the transitions occurred in spaces where ritual is still key and important, explaining that ritual space is kinship. Frames of reference from movement between ritual and kinship space can symbolize solidarity or rupture of familial and communal ties.

4.3.2 Dialogical Negotiation: Fostering Mutual Respect

Interactions embedded in mutual respect are fundamentally social strategies for working out how to live together as a community of Sangil Muslims in the context of a contestation between the traditionalist Muslim community and the Salafi-influenced. Following from Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus', this work examines how Sangil Muslims negotiate different religious identities through inclusive engagement at communal worship sites, such as the Friday prayer congregation, where the Sangil Muslims all pray together. A primary activity is that Salafi-influenced preachers sometimes enter the traditionalist Muslims' mosque in Kiamba to give the Friday sermon (khutbah), with the possibility of more intrusive dialogue with traditionalist Muslims because traditionalist Imams could express a variety of responses to the khutbah. This was a specific interaction that I noticed in my fieldwork in 2024-2025, most likely because the preachers have a pragmatic habitus that supports the stability of the community by safeguarding and aiming for harmony. Ultimately, this addresses my research question: how do the Sangil negotiate contestation while maintaining social cohesion?

In Kiamba, Muslim traditionalists, Sangil, and Salafi-inspired groups maintained their separate mosques to accommodate their different beliefs and practices. This was evident from 2000 to the present, 2025. On Friday, however, the Salafi preacher, Ustaz Ali, who was trained in Madrasah in Almaarif Education Center in Baguio and International Islamic Call College, Tripoli, Libya, in North Africa, would sometimes give the khutbah in the traditionalist mosque, because he was trying to share Islamic principles. Interviews in 2025 with Ustaz Ali, where he explained that Salafis must teach authentic Islam, while allowing the communities to decide for themselves. Moreover Ustadh Abubakar, A Salafi preacher trained in Madrasah in Almaarif Education Center in Baguio and Sarangani have different way of khutbahs, as roughly two-thirds of the khutbahs I observed in 2025 were focused on universal Islamic values, such as charity and umma unity, and one-third criticized adat practices (for example, Diko So, as *bid'ah*). This represents some potential for tension.

Traditionalist Imams, exhibiting a cleft habitus, experience varied responses to competing religious dispositions. Some Traditionalist Imams, like Imam Rey and Imam Haron, have a meeting on March 28, 2025, and are situated within the mosque, listening attentively to what the Salafi ustadh has to say, wanting to know more, and engaging in the two-rakat Jumu'ah. Rey responded, " We listen to learn, but our traditions will always lead us. Rey's statement symbolized a willingness to engage as a Traditionalist Imam without possibly abandoning Adat. Others, like Imām Danny, joined another Traditionalist Masjid during my fieldwork on March 28, 2025, and left his Masjid, where he is the Imām of this Masjid, to avoid different views. His departure from the Masjid he had administered and later decision to join another traditionalist mosque appear to have responded to contradictions within the doctrinal terrain. Instead of wrestling with differing interpretations of religion or trying to reform the institution, Imam Danny's departure indicates a re-spatialization effort to preserve both faith position and the obligations to reconcile conflicting interpretations. This movement seems consistent with a practice I suspect is more common within contested religious fields, in which actors (especially those with symbolic authority) negotiate diverging beliefs and perspectives to shift their situatedness across more ideologically aligned space. In this circumstance, his exit from the original Masjid (congregation) and integration into that of another traditionalist congregation is an effort to reconcile, at least ideologically, religious unity and mitigate conflicts in judgment implicit in his immediate space. Such re-spatialization resonates with Bourdieu's religious field, where historically the boundaries of symbolic power and legitimacy have been tense. Imam Danny's exit may be seen as a refusal to engage in

symbolic struggle inside a fragmented space by merely affirming a position within a space that is more symmetrical to his religious habitus. The dynamic above draws on an interplay of the collective and subjective in the face of contestation, while attempting to facilitate unity and community. Elder Daina, interviewed in June 2025, explained that "some of our Imams leave to protect our customs and adat but return as we will always be together." After Jumu'ah, there are occasions when these Imams are returning for the Asr, Maghrib, and Isha prayer sequences. Our observations reveal that the Salafi/Jama'a Imams find their footing in their mosque for these prayers. We have seen this repeatedly, 9 Fridays in 2025, that the Sangil have examples of preserving communal harmony with other forms of Islam.

This interaction demonstrates dialogical negotiation in a shared habitus that privileges affiliation instead of ideological purity. Salafi preachers draw on educational capital based on scriptural evidence to preach khutbahs in the Sangil dialect, with the cultural context taken into account. Traditionalist Imams draw on cultural capital based on adat traditions to continue their practices regarding staying for Jumu'ah or praying. There was no coercion because Salafis left peacefully without being forced or physically coerced, and Imams freely choose where to pray. The core of the conflict does not exist because there is no conflict to be had. This negotiation demonstrates implicit contestation of symbolic power. Salafis exercise scriptural authority through the khutbah, but traditionalists claim legitimacy based on the values of authority, which allows them to navigate ideological tensions.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study illustrates that Sangil's religious life is produced by interacting locally inherited customs (Adat) with transnational sources. The Sangil community participates in a habitus, a structure of embodied dispositions formed over centuries of being Muslim and in concert with Adat, which can be dynamic and contested.

I will further argue that the Sangil, as a small historically Malay-descendant Muslim people, practice an Islam, which is supplemented through Adat as it is passed down from one generation to the next. Their distinct rituals exhibit this reality, but how they practice them evolves. For instance, some Sangil preachers believe that the way they engage in these rituals is an expression of authentic Islam. At the same time, reformist Sangil, influenced by Salafi teaching, has labelled it as *bid'ah* (innovation). This contestation of practice and meaning can be articulated utilizing Pierre Bourdieu's terminology. The Sangil religious domain is a structured domain organized into a field with traditional and reformist actors vying for legitimacy. The Sangil elders possess an Islamic habitus that has been passed down from generation to generation, and consider that Islamic habitus to be sacred; in doing so, they maintain a foundation within the Sangil community based on the perceptions of habitus as symbolically continuous and of value in moral actions. They represent a particular field of symbolic capital that Bourdieu suggests is based on collective belief and lineage credit, having germane authority concerning the use of consecrated power in the religious field.

Nonetheless, this traditionalist capital is now being attacked by new forms of capital through the Salafi-oriented Sangil. Reformist preachers centre their authority on *ilm* (religious knowledge), which is evidence-based, *dalil* (or textual evidence). So, in the Sangil field, we have a tussle between two forms of cultural capital: ancestral and academic (education in Islam; knowledge of scripture). Neither group controls the state control of religion in the Philippines, so their rivalry creeps into the arena of discursive control. It is pertinent to emphasize that if the Sangil case brings credence to the point made earlier that forms of habitus should not be understood as fixed but dynamic: the younger Sangil privy to global Islam, develop hybrid dispositions and ways in which they embrace Salafi concepts and at the same time, appreciate aspects of local Adat. Furthermore, as scholarship on habitus has demonstrated, habitus is a history of history and change. Following on from this and what generally occurs is that most Sangil juggle two opposing diachronically (ie, elders can accept limited forms of reform, such as public piety, if sanctioned, but adat ceremonies and observances have a duty to the community).

These observations are echoed by the dynamics more broadly across Southeast Asia. Salafi Islam has become globalized through a process of glocalization, but with local interpretations within the region. Salafism has entered the Philippines through transnational religious networks, Saudi proselytization, Islamic education institutions, digital daawa, labor migration, and study-abroad programs. However, transnational connections exist between the Middle East and Philippine Islam in Mindanao. Beginning in the 1970s, these scholars established Prince Sultan Scholarship and madrassah programs that brought Salafi discourse to Mindanao, like in many other parts of the world. However, Sangil Muslims have not just imported foreign Islam: they have made it work within their field. There are parallels to be made elsewhere.

The findings are comparable with the broader context of Southeast Asia. Salafi Islam is localized in this region; it originated globally but is locally interpreted. Salafism has reached the Philippines, as it has in Indonesia and Malaysia, through diasporic connections, Gulf-subsidized schools, and the Internet. Labour migration and foreign education create transnational links between the Middle East and Philippine Islam. The entry and rise of Salafi discourse in Mindanao, from the 1970s, can be traced to Saudi state-sponsored scholarships and madrassas, as it has elsewhere. However, even the Sangil Muslims do not simply import and transplant a foreign Islam into their situation. They adapt it to their circumstances. We have seen similar reconceptualization elsewhere. In Indonesia, there are Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) traditionalists, for example, who conduct maulid celebrations and tawassul in the face of Salafi accusations of bid'ah. The Sangil, like NU leaders, establish the context of these practices within the community and the communal memory of the Prophet. Traditionalist movements share support for the fundamental tenet of monotheism with opposition to reformist interventions threatening syncretic practices. These parallels suggest that Sangil's situation could be symptomatic of the global-local dialectic (or dialectics) in Islam: local habitus and symbolic capital are continually being interrogated against the framework of the globalized discourses, but a hybrid, discordant space emerges.

Legal and institutional contexts also play a significant role in the Sangil experience. The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of the Philippines is one of the laws that unequivocally establishes that communities have a right to express their culture and religion. Likewise, the Bangsamoro Organic Law recognizes the Islamic practices that belong in Mindanao. This means that these laws offer the Sangil elders a certain symbolic power: that is, the senior's practices are tolerated, accepted, embraced, and placed in the national heritage. Bourdieu's terms would indicate that the Sangil receive some form of institutionalized symbolic capital - the Sangil are included in a reckoning with the defenders of a conserved

native Islam. The reformist Sangil receives their power based on a transnational institution, and expects the focus will only be on doxa coming out of the scriptural. Nevertheless, no power is negotiated through force, but with the sanctity of concepts and individuals.

A second important insight is the shift made almost exclusively by digital media and generational change. In fieldwork, it was found that many younger Sangil use Facebook, YouTube, and the Internet as their religious advice. It mirrors a more general phenomenon of celebrity Islam, where social media stars and charismatic preachers define youth identity. The Internet can then be regarded as a space of conflict, because Sangil users contested the correctness of practices. The stark differences between posts and comments clearly show the divide between traditionalists who invoke Adat and benevolence and reformists who invoke dalīl and purity. This struggle, which is a cyborg struggle, hastens change and reduces the unquestionable legitimacy of the elders. On the other hand, it enables younger Sangil to engage in synthetic counter-narratives that conveniently share foundations with more general Muslim practice. Thus, the Sangil agency may be seen in both offline (as part of daily ongoing negotiation) and online (as collective reinterpretation) senses.

The Sangil case illustrates broader trends in contemporary Islam. Like the early takeover of Islam in Mindanao by Arab traders and then, secondarily, Sufis, today, it is being renegotiated again through globalization. The Sangil shows us how a minority of Muslims respond to global trends while claiming to be local. Their faith negotiations reflect how 'glocal' Islam is not as easy as it may seem. Although they respond to new forms of teaching, they are not relinquishing local culture. What the Sangil 'mean' is both religious and practical. Sangil Islam, in this sense, indicates the more general lesson that Muslim communities everywhere are working on re-(de)constructing their meaning of Islam in their embedded fields of social relations and history. The Sangil syncretic rituals, which have been both contested by reformers and defended by traditional practitioners, represent the real debates still present in most Southeast Asian contexts. Therefore, when the story about Sangil is put together with Bourdieu's theory and research on that region, the research concludes that in the Islamic lives of Sangil and others, negotiation and contestation will always occur in some fashion, wherever local habitus intersects global trends.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Research Questionnaire

Interview Guide for mainstream imams/panditas

Name of Interviewee: _____

Interviewee Number: _____

Place of Interview: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Start of Interview: _____

End of Interview: _____

A. Socio-demographic profile of the respondents

1. May I know your current age?
2. May I know your current civil status?
3. Kindly tell me the highest level of education you have attained in Madrasah?
4. Have you studied Islam outside of the community? (Yes/No; where?)
5. Do you actively participate in religious rituals, events, or da'wah?

B. Traditional Religious Practices

6. What are the important religious rituals or ceremonies practiced by the Sangil community (e.g., *Manuwak*, *Suleleng Koraang*, *Tampat Karamat*)?
7. What do these rituals mean to you and your family?
8. How are these rituals passed down or learned in your community?
9. How do you feel about practices such as shrine visits or praying at ancestors' graves?

C. Negotiation and Contestation

10. In your experience, how do Sangil Muslims respond to Salafi criticisms of traditional practices?
11. Have you seen examples where both traditional and Salafi practices coexist peacefully? Can you describe them?
12. Are there cases where conflicts or divisions arose between followers of traditional Sangil Islam and Salafi-oriented believers?
13. How do leaders or elders try to resolve these differences?
14. Do you think it is possible to combine traditional practices with Salafi teachings? Why or why not?

D. Religious Authority and Legitimacy

15. Who is considered a religious authority in your community (e.g., elders, Imams, Salafi-trained ustadhs)?
16. What gives them religious legitimacy? (e.g., knowledge, family lineage, Arabic fluency, overseas education, adat?)
17. Do people prefer to follow leaders from their community or from outside (e.g., Salafi scholars from Davao or abroad)? Why?

E. Conclusion

18. What is your hope for the future of Islam in the Sangil community?
19. How should religious teachings be preserved or reformed to fit local life?
20. Is there anything else you would like to share about religious life in your community?

Interview Guide for Salafi-oriented ustadhs

Name of Interviewee: _____

Interviewee Number: _____

Place of Interview: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Start of Interview: _____

End of Interview: _____

A. Socio-demographic profile of the respondents

1. May I know your current age?
2. May I know your current civil status?
3. Kindly tell me the highest level of education you have attained in Madrasah?
4. Have you studied Islam outside of the community? (Yes/No; where?)
5. Do you actively participate in religious rituals, events, or da'wah?

B. Salafi Influence and Change

6. When did you first hear about Salafi teachings? From whom or where?
7. Have Salafi preachers visited your community? What did they preach?
8. What changes (if any) happened in the community after these teachings were introduced?
9. What religious practices were criticized or rejected by Salafi-oriented scholars?
10. How did the community react? Were there tensions, acceptance, or indifference?

C. Negotiation and Contestation

11. In your experience, how do Sangil Muslims respond to Salafi criticisms of traditional practices?
12. Have you seen examples where both traditional and Salafi practices coexist peacefully? Can you describe them?
13. Are there cases where conflicts or divisions arose between followers of traditional Sangil Islam and Salafi-oriented believers?
14. How do leaders or elders try to resolve these differences?
15. Do you think it is possible to combine traditional practices with Salafi teachings? Why or why not?

D. Religious Authority and Legitimacy

16. Who is considered a religious authority in your community (e.g., elders, Imams, Salafi-trained ustadhs)?
17. What gives them religious legitimacy? (e.g., knowledge, family lineage, Arabic fluency, overseas education, adat?)
18. Do people prefer to follow leaders from their community or from outside (e.g., Salafi scholars from Davao or abroad)? Why?

E. Conclusion

19. What is your hope for the future of Islam in the Sangil community?
20. How should religious teachings be preserved or reformed to fit local life?
21. Is there anything else you would like to share about religious life in your community?

Interview Guide for youth, and community members

Name of Interviewee: _____

Interviewee Number: _____

Place of Interview: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Start of Interview: _____

End of Interview: _____

A. Socio-demographic profile of the respondents

1. May I know your current age?
2. May I know your current civil status?
3. Kindly tell me the highest level of education you have attained in Madrasah?
4. Have you studied Islam outside of the community? (Yes/No; where?)
5. Do you actively participate in religious rituals, events, or da'wah?

B. Negotiation and Contestation

6. In your experience, how do Sangil Muslims respond to Salafi criticisms of traditional practices?
7. Have you seen examples where both traditional and Salafi practices coexist peacefully? Can you describe them?
8. Are there cases where conflicts or divisions arose between followers of traditional Sangil Islam and Salafi-oriented believers?
9. How do leaders or elders try to resolve these differences?
10. Do you think it is possible to combine traditional practices with Salafi teachings? Why or why not?

C. Islamic Identity and Community Boundaries

11. What does be a 'Sangil Muslim' mean to you?
12. Have you noticed any changes in how younger Sangil Muslims understand or practice Islam?
13. Are there cases where people are excluded or judged because of their beliefs or rituals?
14. Do you think the community is more united or more divided today because of religious differences?

D. Conclusion

15. What is your hope for the future of Islam in the Sangil community?
16. How should religious teachings be preserved or reformed to fit local life?
17. Is there anything else you would like to share about religious life in your community?