

The Rise of the Urban Piety Movement: Jamaah Maiyah as an Urban Spiritualism and Emerging Religiosity in the Public Sphere

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The Rise of the Urban Piety Movement: *Jamaah Maiyah* as an Urban Spiritualism and Emerging Religiosity in the Public Sphere

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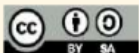
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2 THE RISE OF THE URBAN PIETY MOVEMENT: JAMAAH MAIYAH AS AN URBAN SPIRITUALISM AND EMERGING RELIGIOSITY IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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2 Abstract

Recently, an intense discussion has developed among religion and social issues researchers on the discourse of spiritualism. The existence of spiritualism has changed parts of human civilization, including religious attitudes and expressions that exist in the public sphere. Therefore, in this study, the authors examined the discourse of spiritualism exemplified by Jamaah Maiyah Cak Nun. The model of spiritualism that the authors adopted was different in context from the cultural spiritualism studied by many scientists. This study sought to elaborate and explore the surge of religious spiritualism promoted by Jamaah Maiyah Cak Nun using a qualitative research framework. In addition, this research leads to a social and religious anthropological research model that combines virtual ethnography and fieldwork. The results of this study revealed the existence of spiritualism promoted by Jamaah Maiyah Cak Nun. Meanwhile, the development of various models of different aspects of spiritualism could not be separated from the support of the community itself. The Jamaah Maiyah's interaction also deserved attention; universal religious expressions and egalitarianism were the domains of the community. This research should be a reference for developing religious and social discourse in the future.

Keywords: Spiritualism; Attitude; Expression; Egalitarianism; Community.



A. Introduction

The 21st century is considered by Nurcholish Madjid as the "spiritual century" because there has been an increase in enthusiasm for believing and practicing religion during this period. For *Cak Nur*, this tendency to faith for many people supports the truth of the view about the importance of balancing human life between the material and spiritual (Madjid, 2002).

The *new age movement*, characterized by a critical reaction to rational modernity, has become very popular. This *new age movement* seeks to find a balance between rationality and faith, which they believe modern humans often forget (Ghafur, 2003). People always associate the *new age* with the phenomenon of spiritual awakening in society. The assumption that nowadays, people are increasingly leaning towards spirituality is justified by the immediate attention of people to the mystical-spiritual world (Hidayat, 2010).

Indeed, it is unclear whether the emergence of spiritual awareness today is due to the awareness of providence (divinity), as was the case in the past, or whether the emergence of spiritual phenomena is due to the failure of organized religion (Banton, 2013).

The spiritual tendencies of modern humans arise because, among other reasons, they feel the aridity of life in the modern age, which prioritizes physical pleasure by relying on technological developments, all of which use machines (Campbell, 2010). The alliance between humans and machines has become the basis of global developments and has alienated humans from their world (Haynes, 2007).

This spiritualism emerged as a response to the impacts of modernism, ranging from the negative impacts caused by World War I and II and environmental damage to miserable humanitarian crises. It happens as modernism indulges humans amid a profound social crisis (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 2006).

Among the shifting dynamics of spiritualism and the many people seeking religious identity, there is a humanist named Emha Ainun Nadjib (*Cak Nun*), whom some consider a scholar. Since the beginning of the 70s, he has consistently been present with socio-religious narratives easily understood



by all circles (Kayam, 2015). In every event, his message constantly engages that building and touches the audience's hearts. He does not look patronizing and is never even claimed to be a *Cleric* or *Kyai*; however, various groups in Indonesia (Mustafa, 2017).

Following Mustafa (2007), Cak Nun's actions are the center of attention, with all his ideology that can be seen as a model of urban spiritualism amid the emergence of various religious models today. Part of *Cak Nun*'s image is the *jamaah maiyah*, who always follows him. This *jamaah* is a "faithful follower" of Cak Nun. It indicates he is a figure who has spent his life at the community level and continues to move outside the path of political-bureaucratic power (Sumuranje, 2013).

There are several reasons why it is essential to see the image of urban spiritualism that *Cak Nun* is currently promoting amid the polarization of the people who continue to be distant. *Firstly*, Cak Nun is sensitive to contextualizing problems primarily engendered in Indonesia, such as corruption, religious blasphemy, intolerance, deviant behavior of Indonesian politicians, poverty, and social fractions. All of these problems are always under his preview. In the community context, *Cak Nun* can compose a social narrative combined with religion that not everyone can package, and maybe he is one of the most innovative figures (Hadi, 2011).

Second, *Cak Nun*'s figure is good at expressing himself on paper and practicing his ideas and ideals in the public sphere regardless of social strata. This is undoubtedly something the audience has been waiting for; fresh thoughts and new ideas about social, economic, and religious issues have become "heart-cooling" for spiritual thirst today (Ian Betts, 2006).

Third, *Cak Nun* has attempted to deconstruct the understanding of values, patterns of community life, cultural relations, education, and ways of thinking. These are also sought as a solution to the problems faced by the community by entering into awareness, traditions, and beliefs of the community itself (Hadi, 2011).

Based on these three points, the figure of *Cak Nun* seems to be a role model and a place to complain about the problems faced and to find



solutions with uncomplicated arguments. This is expected to be able to generate positive currents to continue to transform the political regime and grassroots people towards a better life.

B. Method

We use a qualitative approach as a methodological basis. In the current Covid-19 era, it was only possible for us to use virtual ethnographic methods. In this research, we tried identifying patterns of behavior, life, and social relations in the *Jamaah Maiya*.

A virtual ethnographic method is an approach that seeks to explore more deeply the interactions of objects that occur in the virtual world (Carter, 2018). In addition, this research is also carried out with the observation method, which aims to explore the object of research freely.

The virtual ethnographic method is used to investigate the use of the internet, which has meaning for people's social life. At this level, interactive media is understood as both culture itself and cultural artifacts (Carter, 2018). Virtual ethnographic methods allow us to see mediated interactions in both virtual and physical realms. Moreover, the boundary between the "virtual" and the "real" cannot be considered something that exists immediately.

This research was carried out over eight months, allowing us to be involved as participant observers. Looking at the context in this study, with the social networks that exist in *Jamaah Maiyah*, it can be understood as the interrelation of social and religious studies that describe the social phenomena of Indonesian society, especially in studying urban spiritualism in Yogyakarta.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Morality of Spiritualism

Emha Ainun Nadjib, known as Cak Nun, is one of the leading cultural figures in Indonesia. On many occasions, in contrast, he refuses such social status. Cak Nun always refers to himself as an ordinary person who likes to make friends with anyone. Born in Jombang on May 27th, 1953, apart from making art, his other activity is writing many books. He writes poetry books or poems, some of which are song lyrics with the *Kiai Kanjeng* music group.



Cak Nun involves the community in the congregation he holds as *Forum Maiyah*, while those who participate in the recitations are called *Jamaah Maiyah*. The *Maiyah Forum*, which in its free translation means togetherness, is held monthly in several cities. In some locations, these forums have names according to local culture and wisdom. For example, in Surabaya, it is called *Bang-Bang Wetan*. In Jombang, it is called *Padhang Mbulan*, and in Yogyakarta, it is called *Mocopat Syafaat*. In Jakarta, it is called *Kenduri Cinta*. In Malang, it is called *Obor Ilahi*. In Makassar, it is called *Paparandeng Ate*, and so on. *Maiyah* is also often held in other cities. Sometimes the activity is organized as a pop-up event. These affiliates have been around for over two decades (Saputra, 2012). However, the oldest branch of the *Padang Bulan* in Jombang was founded in the early '90s and started with only the Cak Nun family (Mohammad Rozi, 2005). In addition to *Maiyah* activities that are held domestically, *Maiyah's* echoes extend abroad, especially those initiated by Indonesian workers in other countries such as Hong Kong, South Korea, Australia, Taiwan, the Middle East, and the United States.

Maiyah's involvement has often been captivating for sociologists. It embodies significant socio-cultural capital. Is *Maiyah* affiliated with Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama organizations? That question can be answered with two simple arguments. *First*, *Maiyah* is not a formal and political organization with a constitution and by-laws. However, the central figure of Cak Nun is a social movement that does not look at religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds (Bennett, 2014). *Second*, *Jamaah Maiyah* tends to discuss critical and multidisciplinary issues, but all levels of society can still be understood (Mustafa, 2017).

Etymologically, *Maiyah* comes from the word *ma'aa*, which means *together, midst*. The naming represents Cak Nun's idea to minimize and eliminate the community gap by promoting joint discussions. The built togetherness will encourage the congregation to renew their mindset toward all aspects of life through *Maiyah*. This forum is a movement that



engages in light discussions on general issues, such as social, political, cultural, and religious issues (Nadjib, 2015).

The word *Maiyah* also comes from the word *ma'a* (Arabic), which has an ordinary meaning, for example, *ma'iyatullah*, which means with Allah. Cak Nun also described that togetherness in the context of the state is called Nationalism. *Maiya* consists of core values based on a shared ideology; everyone works on something simultaneously and becomes a subject, not an object. Therefore, the *Maiyah* concept aims to strengthen human togetherness to reaffirm equality between humans and the values of justice. Based on that, *Maiyah* is an accurate idea of Cak Nun's humanism (Nadjib, 2015).

Maiyah's discussion format is unique because it usually lasts 5 to 8 hours. Feeling togetherness at *Maiyah*, apart from being guided by Cak Nun, was also enriched by the presence of *Kiai Kanjeng*. *Kiai Kanjeng* is not only a musical instrument but also an addition to articulating an aesthetic and contextual exploration of discussion topics. Aesthetic points are interpreted as an accompaniment to a multi-genre dialogue. *Kiai Kanjeng* often performs multi-genre guitar music such as Jazz, Javanese, Chinese, and even classical and contemporary Western and Eastern music. *Kiai Kanjeng's* position deconstructs the conventional music genre that is seen by the public. It tends to be dichotomous, but with creativity, music is elaborated in such a way without losing the original identity of each tone and rhythm (Saputra, 2012).

Cak Nun's interaction with many people, both the *lower* and *upper classes*, gave dynamics to Cak Nun's life. It has affected the maturity of the mindset and the delivery of ideas at *Maiyah*. Today, the public must seek the spiritual path for themselves in one format or another. Tranquillity and peace become a means of acceleration to the path of God (Hill & Pargament, 2003). In this context, Cak Nun could package the discussion in the direction the public needed. Religion is no longer exclusive but has become public consumption in the form of the nobility of ethics. Religion was born to rationalize the human mind. At the same time, religion has given birth to aspects of humanity that God exemplifies through the holy book.



Globalization cannot be avoided; problems will continue to appear with time. *Maiyah* is part of the model to strengthen the spirit of religiosity in the modern era. *Maiyah* was able to package music into urban spiritualism. The strains of shalawat combined with poetry can captivate the audience. Even the songs sung by Cak Nun and *Kyai Kanjeng* have anesthetized, enabling the public to reflect that this life is a gift from God (Wulan et al., 2018).

The dimension of spirituality is currently popular with the broader community. This interest in spirituality is indicated by the high interest of the community, especially urban communities, to participate in various activities related to aspects of spirituality (Kamil, 2018). The public often likes spirituality-inspired courses and training.

In Indonesia, one of the symptoms of the emergence of the spirituality movement is driven by the fact that socio-economic and political changes are taking place on a massive scale. The implication is that various fundamental human problems arise, such as disruption, disorientation, or psychological dislocation in specific communities (Kailani & Slama, 2020). In addition, its emergence is also driven by dissatisfaction with religious beliefs, movements, or organizations. The everyday mundane realities they witness can no longer accommodate their religious experiences.

Tens of thousands of people have attended the ESQ training pioneered by Ary Ginanjar Agustian. There is also solemn prayer training by Abu Sangkan, *Ustadz Yusuf*, Abdullah Gymnastiar, or spiritual training held by Anand Khrisna. These spirituality-related activities are constantly flooded by enthusiasts (Kailani & Slama, 2020). In addition, books on spirituality were also purchased by many readers. The intense passion for the world of spirituality cannot be separated from the construction of modernity. The paradigm of modernity that offers all the elegance and simplicity of living could not meet the essential human needs. The world is increasingly hedonistic and has lost the most fundamental aspect of life – spirituality (Hoesterey & Saat, 2017).



The location of spirituality is in humans. If psychology examines the area of the soul as the ego, then spirituality touches the soul as spirit. Western culture refers to it as something "filled" by God at the time man was created. Although it is believed that religion comes from God, spirituality is a human area. Spirituality is an attitude that believes in the presence and intervention of God in humans, even though the attitude of spirituality is different (Cheong, 2017).

Cak Nun invites the public always to anticipate modernity so that it is not entirely accepted. Therefore, modernity is not only positively charged but also full of snares of a dangerous negative value. Therefore, the most realistic attitude to develop is to embrace modernity as a reality by promoting critical thought and mindfulness.

2. Inclusiveness of Religion in the Public Sphere

Religion can be interpreted as a set of rules and regulations that regulate human relations with the supernatural world, especially with their God, regulate human relations with fellow humans, and humans with their environment. Therefore, religion can be argued as a bond of understanding between God and humans based on the values of goodness, justice, prosperity, and welfare (Banton, 2013).

Religion has been present in humans throughout their existence on earth; religion is also present based on human needs, at least in human emotions (Azra, 1993). On top of it, religion is consistently interlaced with humanity. Belief is then used as the foundation of life because religion, in the exalted position, is regarded as God's blueprint to solving all life's problems. In this context, the community reveals and adopts religion because it has specific causes and goals. The most fundamental of these causes and goals is the hope of peace, goodness, and safety world and the hereafter (Azra, 2006).

Religion has also been used as an ideology in creating and moving a motivational spirit for humans as a form of self-actualization and a revolutionary movement for self-liberation from tyranny, hegemony, and



social, political, cultural, and economic injustice. It is based on the nature and function of religion that people embrace; besides being religious or having a god, it has become human nature (Nurdin, 2006).

Religion, as a system of universal values, has an appeal to offer to humans. Tibbi (1988) stated that religion has three forms in the disclosure of the value of the universal, namely, a belief system (disclosure of theoretical embodiment), a system of worship, and a system of social relations (as a public relations system). Meanwhile, at the level of religious values, religion has five dimensions, namely; the dimension of belief (ideology), the dimension of practice (religious practice), the dimension of feeling (experience), the dimension of knowledge (knowledge), and the dimension of effect (consequences) (Arkoun, 1999).

The above argument underlies Cak Nun's idea to involve *Maiyah* in displaying universal religiosity. Religion harmonizes differences in society; skepticism and defending the egoism of religious teachings without involving the proper practices scorch the essence of religion itself. The question, then, is how do people perceive religion in themselves, internalize it into an absolute belief, and be able to transform it into everyday life as a worldview, perceiving and carrying out the complexities of life in this secular and ambiguous world? Therefore, *Maiyah* always encourages the practice of religion in everyday life. It needs to be accompanied by knowledge that makes it easier to live and understand religion wisely (Nadjib, 2015).

The phenomenon of religiosity uses identity as a characteristic of *Jamaah Maiyah* by examining the parallel relationship between socio-psychological existence and human experience (Hadi, 2011). It is undoubtedly a constantly developing discourse without having to worry about changes and social inconsistencies in it. In this context, religion becomes a guide for the noble values of ethics and social manners (Y.Lin, 2002).

For Cak Nun, he argued that religious orientation is understood as a person against his religion, in the context of inter-religious relations, can encourage someone religious in two tendencies; being a peaceful person and friends or being personally prejudiced and hostile (Saputra, 2012). This



religious orientation can direct individuals to two attitudes, the first is an inclusive, moderate, and respectful attitude towards different beliefs, while the second is an exclusive attitude. Similarly, these attitudes can affect how people behave in everyday life, including when interacting with others, whether from the same or a different religion (Wibisono, 2012).

A person's religious orientation will affect his attitude and, in turn, his religious behavior. Regarding attitudes, religious orientation determines a morally relevant attitude, for example, in the form of prejudice against others. This morally relevant attitude will motivate social behavior (morally relevant action) (Hill, 1997). Likewise, according to *Jamaah Maiyah*, interpreting and positioning religion in daily life is not merely a doctrine but must also be a behavior.

Firstly, this can be seen by their seriousness in attending the recitation; they try to listen carefully to what Cak Nun says, at least they will learn to understand religion from ritual aspects such as prayer, fasting, and other worship. *Secondly*, ritual religion correlates with attitudes and behavior, namely whether the *Jamaah Maiyah* present can emulate good teachings and behavior and behave well in their daily lives. It can be seen through the prejudices of religion and their involvement in the surrounding social environment (Wulan et al., 2018).

Maiyah people, according to Cak Nun, are living people who face life thoroughly by contemplating, crying, and sometimes laughing. At the same time, Cak Nun always emphasizes the involvement of multicultural attitudes. Of course, this implies acknowledging the reality of cultural diversity, including traditional diversity such as ethnic, racial, or religious diversity that continues to appear in every stage of life (Betts, 2006).

Multiculturalism is an ideology that recognizes and glorifies differences in equality, both individually and socially. In this context, society is seen as having a generally accepted model for developing a national spirit and having pride in maintaining pluralism. Religion is an expression of people's belief in something sacred. The existing culture influences a person's view of religion. It is hard to accept if someone can be



religious without mixing up with the surrounding culture (Tsang & Rowatt, 2007). The cultural environment creates traditions that often intersect with standard religious practices. Another aspect is that religion is a private realm related to transcendence; only God has the right to judge it (Kuntowijoyo, 2001).

Furthermore, in the current Covid-19 era, the existence of the *Jamaah Maiyah* proves to the public that access to religious knowledge can be from anywhere. Also, sophisticated technology can be used by anyone to find various information needed. Today religion is shaped more by the logic of the new media. Scholars refer to this phenomenon as religious mediation, a cultural phenomenon where religious expression is carried out through the internet and online media (Hjarvard, 2016).

The media have become an essential source of information and experience about religion. Moreover, social media is today's society's dominant and primary source of information. It is also the primary source of religious information and knowledge. Instead of being a public space to encourage positive political participation, social media sometimes negatively influences the public sphere (Duelund, 2010), such as spreading fake news and creating 'echo chambers,' gatherings of like-minded users who become isolated from alternative opinions. The internet and social media have become an *arena* for organizing religious debates and discussions (Duelund, 2010).

Deprivatization of religion is one example of disruption in religious life. Initially, factual knowledge of religion is limited and can only be learned by certain people who are experts in the field of religiosity (Casanova, 2009). However, in the era of disruption, factual knowledge of religion has been accessible to the public. Religious understanding has shifted not only based on fatwas or religious advice from religious leaders. Moreover, religious understanding, explored using the internet, is quick and practical in delivering the latest knowledge and religious issues (Banton, 2013). The era of disruption has also caused a shift in the meaning of religious authenticity. Piety is only judged by religious symbols, such as



religious accessories and clothing. Religious symbols such as authentic piety negate such intensity throughout the practices of religious rituals (*Ramallah*) and virtues contained within religious teachings.

3. Social Awareness and Piety Investment

Jamaah Maiyah sees piety as part of the essence of the community, which is currently starting to erode. The term piety has been used here to indicate the quality of religiosity; how people perceive and act by their religious beliefs. However, piety cannot be classified so easily (Hoesterey & Saat, 2017). Occasionally, its presence can be felt in the social space. Most likely, piety has become a meaningful discourse on integrating religious expressions into human barriers (Hoesterey & Saat, 2017). Globalization does not negate religion; in fact, religion has made globalization follow behind it.

Besides that, the understanding of religiosity has shifted from religion, understood as a source of morals, ethics, and norms of life in urban communities, to technological-industrialism (Jones, 2016). In urban society, transcendent values and morality are underestimated. In this case, religion is an obligation for urban society, while religion is necessary for rural communities. People tend to pursue wealth and hedonism, but religion is considered not essential to their well-being. They might have lost the vision of divinity and have no view of the reality of life. Unlimited information penetrates various aspects of life, whether social, cultural, economic, or political, requiring individuals to adapt to changes quickly (Hidayat, 2001).

The 21st century marks a higher interest in the spiritual path. Spirituality has become the alternative when people are looking for an essential answer to the existence of life amid urban dynamics caused by the prolonged crisis and moral decadence that affects their lifestyle. It triggers the emergence of religious congregations in urban areas to represent urban spirituality (Hidayat, 2000). In the *Jamaah Maiyah*, urban and rural societies are united in the nuances of modern spiritualism, which is based on the egalitarianism of human beings. Cak Nun continues to build this awareness



without denying the essence of religious teachings. He has argued that social piety is not only for the sake of individual egocentric interests but must also be able to bring mutual benefit.

Some people consider spirituality a term that intersects with religion and transcendental experience; sometimes, it is understood as something sacred (Pennington, 2018). It confirms that spirituality is an important thing that cannot be separated from the aspect of God. Therefore, humans must obey God's commands to achieve peace in life (Rakhmani, 2017). Humans are conscious creatures, which means that they are aware of all the reasons for their behavior and are fully aware of the meaning of all their actions so that they can actualize themselves (Subijanto, 2011). Spirituality is directed to the subjective experience of what is relevant to humans and about living consciousness and awareness of individuals about the origin, purpose, and destiny (Hidayat, 2010).

Individuals in daily life should do many good deeds to achieve a level of piety because piety is the direct reflection of a good human (Cheong, 2017). Not all diligent people in worship can build relationships or behave well with other human beings. Piety also means a strong belief in a God or religion, as shown by worship and behavior (Banton, 2013).

Piety is obedience and loyalty to the teachings of religion, trying to implement the teachings and avoid all religious prohibitions (Kailani & Slama, 2020). A pious person only hopes for the pleasure of God and does not expect worldly praise or rewards. Meanwhile, some people are often trapped in ritual piety, which could be argued is selfish and individualistic religious behavior. People are more enthusiastic about carrying out some sunnah worship, such as remembrance, prayer, fasting, and so on, than social worship, such as taking care of public interests, staying in touch, helping with neighbors' difficulties, and solving problems of poverty. A person will be more religious than others if only concerned with religious symbols such as keeping a beard and building a mosque. However, they barely care about society's substantive, essential, and quality issues.



D. Conclusion

Jamaah Maiyah, pioneered by Cak Nun, fostered a new alternative to urban spirituality. Its existence has provided an overview of the dynamics of religiousness that is increasing rapidly and becoming part of a social ecosystem; that always teaches clarity when viewing social facts and nationality problems from various perspectives. Cak Nun's life experience was indirectly passed on to the congregations who witnessed his speeches. In various cities, *Jamaah Maiyah* has merged into a unified community that presents intergroup cultural dialectics that can capture social, economic, and political facts without losing their essence as society itself. Cak Nun is a portrait of a figure solving various problems in society. The speeches he delivered became the solution and spiritualism that his congregation wanted.

Through *Maiyah*, Cak Nun has shown that the idea of morality is the main point of his spiritual advice (morality spiritualism); amid globalization, morals always occupy the top level. In addition, amid today's modernity, Cak Nun always reminds his followers not to negate religion as an entity that must be firmly held. Inclusiveness is a construction that must be harmonized with today's various problems. For Cak Nun, social practices that occur in society must reflect a religious spirit built on mutual respect; mutual tolerance by not highlighting the egocentrism of each group. If the religion is good, it will foster social piety. This aspect is needed because attitudes have emerged that perpetuate indifference to others. At the same time, some people only care about religious symbols without caring about groups who are in trouble.

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