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# MOCOPAT SYAFAAT: FROM NEO-SUFISM TOWARD A NEW CIVILIZATION

Muhamad Supraja and Nuruddin Al-Akbar  
Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

Often theologians and academics overlook very important popular religious movements. They fail to appreciate their significance, the way they have adapted themselves to changing realities, answer peoples needs, or contribute to significant society reforms. One such movement is the neo-Sufi movement of Emha Ainun Najib called the Mocopat Syafaat Emha Ainun Najib. This essay will show the significance of this movement in comparison to earlier neo-Sufi movements such as the Nurcholis Madjid neo-Sufism movement. What they share in common is both try to cultivate the self-autonomy of their followers, and emphasise that with this self-autonomy, anyone can access God directly without having to go through the intermediaries of a *murshid*, as in the order of the *tarekat*. But the Mocopat Syafaat movement has advantages not possessed in the Nurcholis Madjid neo-Sufism community, namely its more egalitarian and mass dialogue. This is why it is overlooked by academics, but it is why it can play a larger role in society. Mocopat Intercession can be seen as a new civilization movement reviving the character of

Islamic civilization that once triumphed in the golden age of Islam.

**Keywords:** Neo-Sufism, Emha Ainun Najib, Mocapat Syafaat, popular religious movements, Islam

Although not always appreciated by academics, Emha Ainun Najib's ideas have spread throughout his various works which span a variety of forms, whether literary works, social, cultural, political, and religious. This has inspired many people, not only the middle class, but also the lower classes and those who have been marginalized due to state policies. Sharpness, honesty, criticism and analysis is one of the characteristics inherent in Emha's thoughts about a wide variety of phenomena.

Emha's ideas or statements are often fatalistic, in the sense that the social damage in Indonesia is very difficult to fix without the intervention of God. The thought of involving God is often regarded as a form of fatalistic understanding, but it is common in Islamic philosophy, especially the *Jabariyah school of thought*. In addition, the basis of this fatalist thinking was also developed by a great Islamic philosopher of the eleventh century named al-Ghazali, who is famous for his work titled *Ihya'ulumuddin*. One of the important ideas in the book is the concept of "God's omnipotence" which is free to act outside the law of cause and effect. The idea of al-Ghazali's thinking was then severely criticized by another Islamic philosopher named Ibn Rush (Avicena) in his book titled *Tahafut-at-tahafut* which emphasizes the importance of the principle of causality in the development of the sciences, because without the law, there the sciences could not develop. The debate of these two Islamic philosophers can be succinctly found in a book entitled *Ancangan Metodologi Alternatif*.

Emha's lectures that lasted for many years in various forums, such as Maiyah, Mocapat Syafaat, Banbang Wetan, Kenduri Cinta whose themes varied, ranging from politics, religion, economics, culture

and often indirectly illustrated how important God is in human life and the universe. As a culturalist, religious figure, artist, activist, it cannot be denied that Emha is indeed a phenomenal figure in Indonesia. The contribution of political thought and action has a high urgency in order to develop an independent attitude both in the scope of individuals, social and nation in the midst of the flow of dominant political culture that is feudal, manipulative, corrupt, oppressive, and dominating. All Emha's movements are simply based on the basis of political thought and action that is distanced from power, be it formal power (state, political parties), economic power and the media. At least the consistency of the Emha movement is still maintained to this day. The Macapat Syafaat Forum, Banbang Wetan, Kenduri Cinta, etc. all continue to this day.

Neo-Sufism is a concept introduced by Fazlur Rahman, a historian from Pakistan, to explain the Sufi renewal movement in the early 18th and 19th centuries. He noted that some Sufi orders (derived from Arabic with plural forms of *turuq*; singular forms of *tariqo*; in Indonesian known as *tarekat*) gave importance to the teaching of religious law and moral education to the community at large. A number of new orders formed during this period, such as Sanusiya from North Africa, and Muhammadiya in India, both aimed at replacing what they called the Sufi bankruptcy of religious orthodoxy<sup>2</sup>

Many people consider the movement around Emha as a neo-Sufism or new Sufism movement which is diametrically different from Sufism a few centuries ago which emphasized a strict distancing from the Sufi against various social, political, aspects of culture. The basis for this distance is the concept of "uzlah", namely self-seclusion to focus attention on worship (dhikr and tafakur) to Allah.

But the term above is also used by a group of Muslim scholars in Indonesia, where one of the main figures is Nur Cholis Madjid, who is also often called 'Cak Nur'. He received a traditional Islamic education (pesantren), but also received his tertiary education from the State Islamic Institute (IAIN). He became known as a 'Neo-Modernist' figure and promoted a contextual interpretation of Islamic law (fiqh). Because his

approach develops a contextual interpretation of Islamic law that had implications for the relationship between the state and religion, scholars often give him the title ‘liberal’<sup>3</sup>

To balance the neo-modernism movement, Madjid tried to make a counterweight that was known later as neo-sufism. That is a new way to develop spirituality, in this case Islamic law (sharia and fikh) with the challenges of modern life. Neo-Sufism Madjid is defined as an effort made carefully to balance inner life with the outer dimension. As Howell explained that modern Sufis inspire Muslims to be fully involved in all aspects of life, and contribute based on all the talents that exist for the good of society. Madjid even encourages Muslim communities to develop their inner spiritual life independently so that they are not bound by a spiritual direction that binds and impedes their critical capacities<sup>4</sup>

It was alleged by Howell that the movement carried out by Madjid had actually been developed by his predecessor, Hamka, in the 1930s, who wrote a book titled *Modern Sufism*. However, as one researcher explained, that Madjid’s movement generally targets the upper middle class and university campuses, although some activities are carried out with other intellectuals. Examples would be the study institutions under the Paramadina Foundation, such as IIMaN. This was done with Haidar Bagir, Najib Burhani, in the 1990s. In addition there is the ICNIS (the Intensive Course and Networking for Islamic Sciences) which was founded by Nasaruddin Umar.<sup>5</sup>

The path taken by Emha reflects the modesty and independence of a life chosen, and whose independence is reflected in the management of the study communities or better known as the *sinau bareng* (learning together) forum without answering the power of sponsors. These study communities are established throughout Indonesia, such as The Maiyah community in Yogyakarta, Gambang Syafaat in Semarang, Banbang Wetan in Surabaya, and Kenduri Cinta in Jakarta. The entire recitation community or “learning together forum is always managed independently, and are open to anyone, not only Muslims, but from any religion, social backgrounds, ethnicity, and education. It even welcomes atheists. There

is no obligation to pay to become a member. Emha, both individually and together with members of his community (such as Cak Fuad, Sabrang, Kyai Muzamil, Totok, and Kyai Kanjeng music crew who are always present in almost all “learning together” activities with Cak Nun) always take part to solve various problems that exist in the community, such as the defense of farmers in Kedung Ombo in the New Order Era, helping shrimp farmers, dealing with entrepreneurs in the Lampung area, embracing the interests of the people affected by the Lapindo Mudflow in the era of the Government of Susilo Bambang Yudoyono (SBY), the deradicalization program in Jokowi’s National Leadership Era. All the problems faced by this community are of course not only seen from the nationalist perspective. Emha and his group also often address various global entities which influence social events in Indonesia, such as the United Nations, the IMF, the World Bank, and international corporations.

In the community formed by Emha, both in the Mocopat Intercession, Maiyah, Banbang Wetan, etc., the murshid intercession is not known, because what exists is the concept of a “love triangle”, namely love that is built up between God, the Prophet Muhammad, and humans as His servants. In this formulation, if someone wants to be close to God, and have their prayers heard, then one must not forget to remember the name of the “lover” of God, namely Muhammad, in every request and prayer. This idea is a formula that is often emphasized by Emha. Anyone who claims to be a Muslim must know that Muhammad was the last Prophet who was blessed with a holy book directly from God through the mediation of the angel Gabriel. Even in one verse of the Qur’an, Sura al-Ahzab 56 is said that: “Verily, Allah and His angels worship for the Prophet. O you who believe, you pray for the Prophet and say hello to Him”<sup>6</sup>. The verse, according to Emha, indicates that special Muhammad’s position was before God, to the point that Allah and his angels offered him blessings.

The interpretation of the relationship between Allah, the Prophet Muhammad and the human community is an example of Emha’s unique creative understanding. This also illustrates a creativity in the manner of

establishing “intimate communication” with God. However, not everyone understands Emha’s thoughts, as well as academics who are accustomed to thinking using mainstream views and logic, so it is not surprising that many intellectuals find it difficult to accept Emha’s way of thinking.

Emha also uses dialogical methods, so that it differs from most religious lectures that are delivered by scholars or clerics, who are accustomed to a one-way delivery model. This allows for opportunities for confirmation, cross-checking, criticism and deeper explorations. Unlike other study forums that only approach various issues only from the perspective of *fiqh*.

From the various descriptions above, the recitation forum organized by Emha implicitly reminds the writer of two elements of the golden age of Islamic civilization, namely Sufism (esotericism) and Science. The sufism component emphasizes the importance of the dimension of depth or essence, in contrast to the Islamic symbol movement which often undermines the spirit of Islamic teachings aimed at bringing mercy to the universe. For example, invoking the name of Allah Almighty is often aimed at marginalizing others who have different beliefs and views. The science component, recognises the absorbing by Islam of many of the great ideas of world civilization, one of the most important is the Greek mind through the translation of a number of important philosophical works of Greek philosophers, such as Plato, and Aristotle. This led to the flowing of Islamic science and philosophy through such figures as al-Ghazali, Suhrawardi, Ibn-Sina, Ibn-Arabi, as well as the philosophy of existence in Mulla Sadra that transcends the previous philosophical ideas of existence.<sup>7</sup>

In various Emha *Learning Together* forums there is no strict plan concerning what philosophical material is discussed. As mentioned above the forums are conducted with openness and dialogical discussion. Such discussion is related to life and the study of science, truth, and wisdom. In this point of view too often Emha’s thinking is not easy to understand in academia, because knowledge is given priority over wisdom.

Why does the scholarly world sometimes have difficulty

understanding Emha's thoughts? The academic world is the heir to the Aristotelian thought and Western logic. Yet this emphasis on logic is also sometimes a weakness. As Eric Fromm writes:

Since Aristotle, the western world has followed the principles of the logic of Aristotelian philosophy. Logic This is based on the law of identity which states that A is A, the law of contradiction (A is not non-A) and the law of no middle ground (= the excluded middle) (A cannot be both A and non-A nor A nor non-A).<sup>8</sup>

Emha's Learning Together forum also encourages those present to think about issues, not just to take them for granted. Therefore, such study forums have the potential to produce people who not only value multicultural differences, but are also critical thinkers and live a reflective life. The various elements mentioned above are of course very much needed for a very diverse Indonesian society, and to increase creativity, innovation, togetherness, vitality and optimism about the future. This is indicated by the statements of several informants who actively participated in the "sinau together" forum collected in a survey conducted by researchers.

One study was conducted at the Department of Sociology-Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Gadjah Mada University. Here the researchers interviewed a number of informants, where the first informant, "AA" worked as a teacher at the Vocational School (SMK) who teaches arts performance. As a teacher, he always teaches in a way that is very accommodating to the opinions and imagination of students. He is also willing to provide free consultations about the problems faced by their students. He also felt that each child is unique, since to generalize would hamper the child's character development. He also introduces and instills in students the values of life such as how to deal with parents who often quarrel, and overcoming family economic constraints that inevitably affect learning. Mr. "AA" believes that he should always be able to benefit the

environment he occupies.

Another informant is Mr. “Amin”, his job is a pedicab driver. He strongly believes that what is *sung will definitely be useful*. Pak Amin is unique, because in delivering his pedicab service user to a destination, he never charges a rate for the services he has provided. The pedicab service user is given the freedom and flexibility to determine what he can afford. In addition, every Friday he offers his service for free. The third informant, named “Iz”, since joining the recitation of Maiyah, he has increasingly established himself in his neighborhood. He was also moved to make recitations with a concept similar to Maiyah.

A second study, was conducted at the Sociology-Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, UGM.<sup>9</sup> In this study there were several informants who were interviewed in depth.

One involved Astutics. In such an approach, humans are animalized and animals are humanized. In addition, Astutik is a figure for helping to take care of a patients in a hospital in Solo who have no family relations.

The next informant who interviewed was Mrs. Asia, who was a trader. She had been trading for decades. However, since she followed the Mocopat Syafaat, she began trading with the intention of serving, in a way beneficial to others. For her to trade is not merely to pursue maximum profit, but to establish brotherhood and promote charity.

Another informant named Fauzi claimed that since attending the Mocopat Syafaat he was inspired by the idea that repaying the good deeds of others is good, but it is better to do good for its own sake. As a result, he became the distributor of Mocopat Syafaat merchandise. Fauzi provides the needs of Maiyah worshipers, such as Emha’s books, special screen printing shirts, stickers, audio and video recordings, skullcaps and caps, calendars and so on. Being a distributor means that he has the opportunity to serve the needs of the Jamaah Maiyah followers.

Another informant, Totok, was one of the founders of the music group Shalawat Kyai Kanjeng. For Totok, the recitation of Mocopat Intercession at best provides awareness to the congregation. This inspired him to create the Salam School (Sanggar Anak Alam). He applies a

curriculum based on nature to his students. At the school there is also a parent forum which is a medium of communication between students' parents, facilitators and Salam organizers. He also formed the Salam community to promote the importance of basic education for positive change. This community facilitates children of the community around SALAM. It develop productive economic ventures, or helps build networks for the distribution of organic SALAM products, such as rice, breadfruit flour, sweet potato flour, soap, etc.

From the various explanations and secondary data stated above, we can affirm that the Mocopat Syafaat forum, or *Learning Together* (sinau bareng) was able to encourage social cultural transformation at the individual level. This happened at the level of individual professional lives, whether pedicab drivers, teachers, or traders. They conduct their activities with the attitude of sacrifice, sincerity, and service to others.

Why can such transformation occur in the informants? Because in the Mocopat Syafaat forum the informants receive not only religious lectures, they get religious understanding in a deep and broad sense, which involves a combination of exoteric dimensions such as religious law, and the esoteric or inner dimension, the appreciation of values. This integration results in a more comprehensive religious understanding. In Mocopat Syafaat, as mentioned above, religion does not only mean *fiqh* or religious rules, but everything in life has a relationship with religion.

In this Mocopat Syafaat forum people are also free to ask anything, ranging from everyday problems, politics, economics, culture, to philosophical issues, in short there is no limit on the themes of the conversation. In addition, this forum may be attended by anyone from any social, religious background. In addition, this Mocopat Syafaat recitation or forum is always held in an open place, such as a field or the like, because of the high number of participants.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the Macapat Syafaat forum initiated by Emha ultimately has very basic differences when compared to the neo-Sufism movement carried out by such figures as Nurcholis Madjid. In terms of the social basis, the Nurchilis Madjid neo-Sufism movement

only targets the upper middle class, while Mocopat Intercession is mostly followed by the lower middle class. And its base is not just the world of the university, but the community as a whole. Thus, the Nurcholis Madjid neo-Sufism movement is arguably very elitist, while what Emha is doing is more mass-oriented neo-Sufi movement.

On the other hand, despite these differences between the Nurcholis Madjid neo-Sufism movement and the Mocopat Syafaat Emha Ainun Najib, both try to cultivate self-autonomy, and emphasise that with this self-autonomy and authenticity, anyone can access God directly without having to go through the intermediaries of a *murshid*, as in the order of the *tarekat*. In addition, the Mocopat Syafaat movement has advantages not possessed in the Nurcholis Madjid neo-Sufism community, namely its more egalitarian and mass dialogue, so this movement can play a role that can surpass Cak Nur's neo-Sufism. Mocopat Intercession can be seen as a new civilization movement reviving the character of Islamic civilization that once triumphed in the golden age of Islam.

Why can it be a civilization movement? This is because in Mocopat Syafaat involves a comprehensive dialogue which spans issues of politics, culture, religion in the strict sense, and the discourse of moral and scientific transformation in the broad sense. Of course the contexts of the golden age of Islam and the contexts of contemporary Indonesian society has differences, but the dialogue between religious tradition and the acceleration of technological advances is also important to consider.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Louay Safi, *Ancangan Metodologi Alternatif* (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Julia D. Howell, "Introduction: Sufism and Neo-Sufism in Indonesia Today," accessed November 6, 2019, [https://www.academia.edu/8805253/Introduction\\_Sufism\\_and\\_Neo-Sufism\\_in\\_Indonesia\\_today](https://www.academia.edu/8805253/Introduction_Sufism_and_Neo-Sufism_in_Indonesia_today).

<sup>3</sup> Howell.

<sup>4</sup> Howell.

5. Howell, "Introduction."
6. "Tafsir Surat Al-Ahzab, Ayat 56," accessed November 6, 2019, <http://www.ibnukatsironline.com/2015/09/tafsir-surat-al-ahzab-ayat-56.html>.
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8. Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1987
9. Kaisar Atmadja, "Bagaimana Pemaknaan Shalawat pada Kehidupan sehari-hari di Pengajian Mocopat Syafaat, di Desa Kasihan Bantul, Yogyakarta, terhadap Beberapa Orang Pengikutnya yang Memiliki Beragam Profesi", Master Thesis at Sociology Department, Faculty of Social and Political Science", Gadjah Mada University, 2014

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