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GLOBAL PRAYERS
Contemporary Manifestations of the Religious in the City

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Performing Crowds: The Circulative Urban Forms of the Tariqa Alawiya Youth Movement in Contemporary Indonesia

Set in the capital city of the world’s largest Muslim country, this essay focuses on new ways of practicing Sufism in contemporary Jakarta. Instead of capturing Sufism as an inner-spiritual, esoteric practice of mystical Islam, this research tells stories about a newly emerging Sufi movement that is struggling to reconcile Islam with urban life. Much of the research about contemporary life in the Muslim world has paid attention to the lives of Muslims on the extremes. On the one hand, it explores the struggles of Muslims who are condemning and resisting modern culture and the so-called “Western” way of life. On the other hand, there is literature sympathetic to Muslims who strive to employ a liberal interpretation of the Quran on contemporary life, including sexual orientation. In contrast to these extreme portrayals, this essay is concerned with moderate Muslims who not only struggle continuously to redefine “Islam,” but also fight to survive under the current economic crisis. Unlike many upper-middle-class Muslims who adopt Sufism as a form of escapism, the lower-middle class youths in Jakarta inhabit an Islamic identity to help them engage with the harsh life of the city.

The leaders of this movement come from a group of migrants from Hadramawt in south Yemen, which it is acknowledged are descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Their honorific title is Habib or Habaib in plural. A young scholar has been redefining the Sufi Brotherhood Tariqa Alawiya, by engaging in various urban issues. Characterized by flexible relationships between scholars and students, the brotherhood does not require formal allegiance (bay’a) for their members, and inducts its membership by way of prophetic genealogical relationships and complex practices of “a canon of saints, texts, rituals, special places, and genealogies” (Ho 2006). A form of voluntary study group (majelis ta’lim), suits perfectly the plasticity of the new Tariqa movement.

The movement first became visible in Jakarta in 2006, as part of a striking new phenomenon in Indonesia after the fall of President Suharto (1998). That is, it became visible together with the heightened public visibility of Islamic groups, which vied with each other for attention in the capital, Jakarta, and elsewhere. The movement has unleashed lavish multimedia congregations on Jakarta’s streets on a weekly basis, taking advantage of the perpetual traffic-jams, by engaging passers-by and passengers in the many cars that have stalled. Its motorcades travel across and around Jakarta’s roadways, parks, and other public places, including mosques and tombs, attracting tens of thousands of young adherents. The weekly mobile event celebrates the maulid, or birthday of the Prophet, which until recently was a state-sponsored event in addition to being one celebrated through a range of syncretically inflected religious rituals. The event unsettles the secular status of urban public spaces and concerns many self-identifying secularist Indonesians. Dominated by male lower-middle class youths, the followers of this movement are highly mobile, using motorbikes to circulate in the city, and adept at integrating Internet and mobile communication technologies to promote their religious performances.

Jakarta provides not only a stage for the movement’s religious performances, but also shapes the mobility of their congregation in ways that engage with the issues and interests of the Muslim youth. The movement conducts its congregation on Saturday evenings instead of Thursdays, the latter being the traditional holy night for Muslims that practice Zikr (or remembering God). The popular entertainment of the lower-middle class youth of Jakarta is illegal road-car or bike racing, as their access to malls and other leisure spaces is
limited. Their performance, organized at least once a week, requires a space large enough to accommodate 10,000 to 20,000 followers. The mobility of the congregation, I argue, is the ethnography of invitation and rejection, of being visible in the city.

In this essay, I tell two stories about how this movement attracts its followers by articulating the aspirations of lower-middle class Muslims toward the spatial transformation of Jakarta. It focuses on tactics utilized by the movement to navigate the spatial, social, and political landscapes of Jakarta. I argue that the practice of performing crowds, entangled with urban politics, has been an important tactic.

**SAYYID AND THE CITY**

Scholars have been studying Jakarta from two opposed perspectives. On the one side, they see Jakarta as a secular entity, constituting buildings, offices, and roads. On the other side, there are the studies concerned with ethnic groups and religious actors who inhabit and are developing the “cultural life” of Jakarta. This research is an attempt to understand how the city has evolved through the eyes of religiosity, observing the roles of faith and morality in relation to the spatial and infrastructural aspects of Jakarta.

As a post-colonial city, visually, Jakarta expresses the tensions between planning and displacement, order and rebelliousness by various political and cultural actors through time. Located to the west of Java, Jakarta is the capital of Indonesia. This geographic position puts it constantly at the intersection of local, national, and global concerns, especially as it is also an important seaport. Development of the city began in the fourth century CE, when it served as a seaport settlement, known as Kalapa, of the Hindu Kingdom of Sunda. In modern times, the city has been struggling to negotiate between the invention of capitalism and the demands of urban justice.

During the Dutch colonial era (1619–1942), Jakarta’s infrastructure developed specifically in order to host the offices of the colonial government and trading companies. Jakarta was a strategic node connecting the trade network between the Indian Ocean and South China Sea. Jakarta, then known as Batavia, was a proto-harbor city formerly ruled by Hindu and Islamic kings. Its colonial government rewrote its history to claim that the city dated to their occupation in 1619. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, in order to keep hold of the city, the Dutch had to defeat other members of the European colonial empire, namely the Portuguese and the British, who were also interested in the trading opportunities, mainly spices and cash crops, of the region.

The nineteenth century saw the rapid development of Batavia as an international seaport after the Suez Canal opened in 1869. As the international seaport of Batavia developed, ideas and values, in addition to commodities, entered Indonesia. As with other European colonisers, capitalistic and religious expansion motivated Dutch colonial expansion in Indonesia. Yet, they were not the first, as other global actors, namely the Arabs and the Chinese, had been traveling to Indonesia intent on building economic and religious connectivity since the sixth century CE. When the Dutch established Jakarta as the trading center of their company VOC (the East India Company), they had to manage the life of the communities already living in the city, including other foreigners. The colonial government treated the other foreigners as their counterparts in business as well as potentially rebellious enemies.

The history of Batavia is also the history of the Arabs and Islam in Indonesia. The people of Hadramawt began to enter Batavia at the end of the eighteenth century. The new steamship operation, in conjunction with the opening of the Suez Canal, affected the escalation in the number of Hadrami people during this period. Distribution of the Hadrami centered around six cities in the area, with the largest section of the community in Batavia, which illustrates the importance of the city as an international trading node.

The Dutch managed the plurality of Batavia at three levels: at the top were the Europeans; the Hadrami, Chinese and the Eurasians were in the middle; and at the bottom were the Indonesians. In various urban slum areas outside the walled city of Batavia, the Hadrami actively engaged with the development of Islam by building mosques and Islamic schools, as well as maintaining graves of Hadrami saints. In the early twentieth century, they established two important organizations (Jami’yyat al-Khayr and Sarekat Islam), both of which are associated with the awakening of “Indonesians” against the colonialists. Those organizations operated in education and political activities in order to fortify the patronizing position of the Hadrami toward the indigenous population. In the process, a conflict arose between the Sayyids and the non-Sayyid Hadrami concerning the prophetic authority of the former. The bourgeoisie opposed the Sayyids by using the framework of Islamic reformism, characterized by the value it puts on egalitarianism.

After independence, the state forced Indonesian-born Hadramis to become Indonesian citizens, and thus their privileged position during colonial times declined. The Sayyids focused their activities in various enclaves, including Kwikang, which then became the “Islamic Center.” In general, since independence, the activity of the Sayyid has been limited to Islamic activities, although some have joined political parties at a minor level.

**KEMANG: THE “NIGHTSPOT” AREA OF SOUTH JAKARTA**

Kemang is a vibrant quarter in southern Jakarta lined with rows of art galleries, stylish office buildings, expatriate-rented houses, and myriad middle- to upper-class nightspots. In contrast to the restless nightlife area in the downtown business district of Chinatown, Kemang, which started out designated a residential neighborhood, has a more laid-back atmosphere and family-friendly tone. The Kemang district was once a village inhabited by the Betawi people, who are native Jakartans. In the 1960s, the villagers began selling their land to settlers, who then built large houses for the middle and upper classes as well as expatriates. By the 1990s, the large houses of the middle and upper classes dominated, surrounded by clusters of smaller houses, predominantly occupied by the less affluent Betawi people who had remained there.

Betawi neighborhoods are among those designated for circulation by the brotherhood as the Habaib have a profound historical role in the development of Islam in Jakarta. In May 2009, the Istiqomah Mosque invited a faction group within the movement, the Majelis Nurul Musthoфа, to conduct a mawlid celebration. That Saturday night, the mosque, located approximately a kilometer from a nightspot area, enjoyed a successful Saturday-night congregation with around 6,000 parking tickets sold (mainly for motorbikes, with a small handful for cars and minibuses). Longing to repeat the success, the hosts expressed their intention to conduct another mawlid celebration for New Year’s Eve. Gobeng, a local resi-
dent, repeats the community leader’s statement at the time, “We are worried that Kemang will be like Bali. We will not allow them to transform this neighborhood into the home of Satan!” The resentment, apparently, is associated with the image of Bali as a “paradise” tourist destination that celebrates “immorality and irresponsible behavior.” The process of transforming Kemang into a tourist area (Jakarta Post, January 2, 2002) has upset most of the mosque’s Betawi Muslims. Habib Hasan, the leader of the Betawi group, was pleased with the idea, however, and the mosque committee agreed to apply for permission to run the event.

Two days before the event, a problem arose: the mayor of South Jakarta revoked the permission granted a couple of weeks earlier. The cancellation confused many of the people involved in the preparation: the group had already produced a big poster advertising the event, featuring an image of Habib Hasan in his turban with the caption “Kemang Berdirizikir” (Kemang Remembering God) and a tagline: “Lumpuhkan Kemaksiatan di Malam Tahun Baru” (Cripple the Immorality of New Year’s Eve). They had also distributed the invitation via Facebook, used text messaging, and put up large banners advertising the event in several spots around Kemang. The chief of the mosque committee immediately went “missing” and was not contactable. Angga, head of the group’s Permissions Department, recounts, “We did not know what had happened. Then we saw several posters from various pubs and bars advertising their New Year’s Eve events. The big one was the event sponsored by the cigarette brand, Sampoerna A Mild Menthol: ‘Kemang Frozen in Time.’” As tensions escalated, Angga recalls, he was finally able to figure out that there was a group called “Persatuan Pengusaha Kemang” (Association of Kemang Entrepreneurs) working against their project. The association had approached the majelis the day before the event to ask the group to remove the maulid banners. Indeed, the association had sent in its thugs in order to get the message across. The group stood its ground and went ahead with the preparations.

On D-day, December 31, 2009, the group’s set-up crew arrived at the location in the afternoon. There, they encountered two units of the Satuan Pamong Praja, or Satpol PP (Officers of City Order), the formal civil service police unit of the Jakarta government. The officers were armed with gas-powered revolvers or blanks and electric-shock sticks (Jakarta Post, July 11, 2010), and served to enforce various urban gentrification projects and other kinds of state-sponsored violence. The officers told the crew to set up the stage as far away as possible from the nightspot area. The group’s crew had to dismantle and rebuild the stage several times. By nightfall, the stage had been set up and the muhibbin (followers) began to arrive at the location. This group then decided to apply another strategy of boundary making: as they had already placed speakers in several spots, they started playing loud maulid songs.

With the maulid songs now overwhelming the soundscape, the crew began to install the stage and other congregational sets: the digital projectors, sound system, stage for musicians and singers, video cameras, and rugs, as well as a group of people selling various goods progressively encircling the main stage. Regardless of the fact that the main stage was located about two blocks away from the center of the nightspot area, the turnout was huge. The parking tickets sold out; 9,000 in all that night, and the parking department had difficulty accommodating all the vehicles in the area. The muhibbin were seated on the streets, arranged in rows occupying several alleys, which formed tentacles, with the stage as the head. In turn, the tentacles blocked several access streets leading to the nightspots. Hundreds of people found they were unable to reach their destinations in the pubs and nightclubs and as the maulid did not end until around one in the morning; some of the New Year’s Eve festivities were canceled and others were delayed for several hours. The group was indeed obstructing the mobility of the prosperous by blocking access to their secular celebrations, using religious events as their urban tactic.

PRIOK: MAKING A LANDSCAPE, MAKING A SAINT

The second story tells of another way in which Tariqa Alawiya entangles itself with urban renewal processes. In this case, the interruption of two development projects in the area, located respectively at the harbor and the downtown area of the city, by the discovery of two tombs belonging to Hadrami saints. It was April 14, 2010; since the morning, all TV stations were broadcasting repeatedly breaking news on a bloody clash in Jakarta’s planned International harbor area over the removal of Habib Hasan Al-Haddad’s tomb. The clash occurred between Satpol PP public order officers, who wanted to remove the tomb from the site, and the followers who were defending it. Three people died and hundreds more were injured. In a split second, the tomb received national attention and the president proposed granting it National Heritage status. The number of visitors to the saint’s tomb multiplied overnight. Four months after the event, however, the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI; Council of Indonesian Muslim Scholars) presented their investigation into the clash; having looked into the tomb’s history, they concluded that the tomb was actually a fraud, and declared that Habib Hasan was not a saint. The second case involves the regeneration of an area in Cikini, a wealthy, central Jakarta neighborhood that was the target for a luxurious apartment building. Located in the exact center of the area, the tomb of Habib Abdurrahman bin Abdullah Al-Habsyi had been prepared for relocation somewhere else, when water suddenly began gushing out from beneath it. Instantly, hundreds of people headed for the spot, not to pay homage, but to collect the water that they believed was sacred. Soon afterwards, a group of the saint’s extended family claimed the space, and gradually transformed the area into a proper place for tomb pilgrimage. Eight months later, a mob, paid by the developer of the apartment complex, raided the site. Several people were injured and the raiders and the defenders are now in court. The raid has brought the process of negotiation between the developer and the tomb’s defenders to a halt. It gives the group of families presently occupying the tomb site a “state of exception” (Agamben 2005) to cultivate its miraculous reputation and develop a religious study group attached to it.

Tanjung Priok has a pivotal position in the history of Indonesian political Islam, marked by the tragic massacre in 1984. The 1984 Tanjung Priok Massacre claimed at least twenty-four lives, with fifty-four more injured and still others missing. The massacre was one of the political events to erupt in the 1980s, following the systematic ideological homogenization by President Suharto’s New Order regime imposed on national political entities, including Islamic ones. Distinguished as a nationalist and secular regime, Suharto’s government had forced Islamic political groups—within parliament as well as outside it—to acquire
“Pancasila” as their sole ideological principle (Bourcier and Hadiz 2003; Ramage 1997). Pancasila is the basic national philosophy, which at the beginning of the Indonesian independence movement expressed universal humanity. Suharto’s regime used Pancasila as an ideological tool to repress resistance groups on the right as well as to the left. Twenty-six years after the Priok Massacre, the area made headlines once more in relation to Islamic issues. The Massacre of 1984 occurred around midnight; the 2010 riot took place during the day, which meant it was broadcast by national TV and received huge national media coverage. The central issue of the riot, which was a national spectacle, was the tomb of a cleric, Habib Hasan bin Muhammad Al-Haddad, later famously known as “Mbah Priok” (the Grandfather of Priok). The tomb is located on land claimed both by the state-owned operator of Tanjung Priok Port, the Pelindo Company, and the heirs of the cleric. Koja, an area of Priok, has been part of a grand gentrification plan to build a new, large international port. The land on which the tomb is located is designated a container-terminal area. The riot occurred on April 14, 2010 between Satpol PP troops, who wanted to remove the tomb, and the supporters who were defending it.

THE RIOT
The tomb is located in Koja, in the eastern part of Tanjung Priok, specifically on Dobo Street. The site of the tomb consists of a twenty square-meter memorial complex (the tomb), a 300 square-meter built-up area with a meeting hall and a shop, and a parking area. Two different gates divide the site. In the bigger picture, the site is part of a 145-hectare plot owned by the Pelindo Company. The company claims that the tomb’s presence is illegal and has asked the government to assist them in demolishing the buildings (Madani Institute 2010). It was on a Wednesday morning at around seven when Public Order Agency troops arrived at the location. Seventy army personnel and 200 police officers accompanied the troops, which were at least 1,750 strong. As soon as they arrived, up to 100 people blocked the tomb and started burning old tires. The officers brought in heavy equipment to demolish the tomb and its buildings, such as tractors, bulldozers, and excavators. However, when the officers, police, and soldiers attempted to enter the tomb, the defenders began to throw stones and Molotov bombs. The police responded with water cannons and tear gas. The police stopped the confrontation at around half-past nine that morning. Habib Selon from Forum Pembela Islam (FPI; Islamic Defender’s Front) arrived at the location, along with three members of the Jakarta People’s Representative Council (DPR). They agreed to negotiate with the heirs of the cleric and their advocate Yan Juanda, in a nearby mosque outside the tomb. Meanwhile, people started arriving at the area, but the police blocked them at an intersection about a kilometer from the tomb. Two national TV stations, Metro TV and TV One, as well as SCTV, a general station, had been broadcasting breaking news since morning; the headlining was emotive, “Priok Tragedy” (Metro TV); “The Bloody Tanjung Priok” (SCTV). As the news broke, more and more people, with various motivations, began arriving in the area to watch the incident. Ijon, a male, age twenty-two, was shocked when news broke about the demolition, which was what had motivated him to join the crowd, but he had not expected things to turn violent. Ijon had a friend, Adi, who joined majelis ta’lim, the Islamic study group attached to the tomb. Ijon and others reached the crowd waiting at the end of Dobo Street, the only street with access to the tomb. The crowd grew larger towards noon while negotiations were still in progress. Lori, a twenty-seven year-old female reporter from Metro TV, arrived at the location around ten that morning to join the Metro TV team that had been there since seven that morning when the riot had first started. “We had received information that the tomb...
The negotiators arrived at an agreement to postpone the demolition and all parties would bring the case to the court. The Governor of Jakarta, Fauzi Wibowo, immediately called the Satpol PP commander and asked him to pull out all troops in the area, including the police and the army. While the troops were walking to their cars and preparing to leave, the crowd, who had been waiting at the top of Dobo Street, managed to break through the police blockade. They burst out toward the police and public order officers and started throwing stones. The clash then erupted anew, with many in the crowd armed with machetes, sharp weapons, and bamboo sticks, and some of them setting light to the vehicles belonging to the police and public order officers. In this second eruption, two public order officers and a resident lost their lives. The Indonesian Red Cross reported that 119 people were injured, and vehicles torched with an estimated value of over twenty-two billion rupiahs (US$ 2.3 million). The clash lasted until midnight. The TV stations broadcast the incident live, especially the peak of the second clash, which ran between noon and six that evening.

MIRACLE, MYTH, AND HERITAGE

The live broadcast of the deadly Priok clash on national television had a widespread impact on people’s perception of the tomb. People were familiar with “Mbah Priok,” as the cleric Habib Hasan bin Muhammad Al-Haddad was nicknamed, and the overwhelming opinion of the public was on the side of the defenders of the tomb. All eyes pointed to Jakarta’s government and public order officers as the villains. Having such an unimpeachable position gave the descendants of Mbah Priok a boost of confidence; now they were sure they would be able to bargain with the government.

The day after the incident on April 15, the governor organized a meeting at the city hall to discuss the clash and its solutions. At the meeting, Mbah Priok’s descendants Habib Ali Alayidrus and Habib Sting Alatas broke off the deal they had made with the DPR to put forward the case to the judicial court. Now, with their renewed confidence, they asked the government to preserve the mausoleum as an important historical site of the Betawi Muslims. They demanded that the government maintained not only the twenty square-meter tomb, but also the 45,000 square-meter area, which included an Islamic pesantren (boarding school). They began to articulate a notion of “cultural heritage” to explain the existence of the tomb. On behalf of the “Jakarta Muslim community,” Habib Riziq from the FPI stated, “If any legal action is taken for this case, the people will not support that initiative, as they have distrust for the accountability of law. If Habib Hasan’s family loses their land rights in court, people will think the law and the judge have been bribed. So, it is better for the government to negotiate with Mbah Priok’s descendants” (Kompas, April 15, 2010).

The major support came directly from the president. Two days after the incident, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono invited the cleric’s heirs to meet him after Friday prayers at his palace. The president placated Mbah Priok’s family with a personal pledge to protect the mausoleum. He strongly encouraged all parties involved to keep calm while negotiations started for the rest of the disputed area. Habib Ali Zenaal bin Abdurahman Al Idrus, one of Mbah Priok’s grandsons, emphasized to journalists after the meeting that the president would sign a plaque declaring the tomb part of the national cultural heritage.

I visited the tomb one afternoon in June 2010. It was during the month of Syaaban according to the Islamic calendar, the busiest month for traditionalist Muslims to circulate among sacred tombs for ziyarah (pilgrimage). Five fifty-two seat intercity buses and motorcycles packed the parking lot to capacity, and visitors queued for wudu (ablution) as a requirement of the pilgrimage. Most wore Arabic garb of white cloth with long sleeves. The majority of the visitors that afternoon were middle-aged men and women, but some younger people had accompanied them. It was apparent that most of the organizers of the pilgrimage were young people.

I talked to one of the visitors, a Mr Sumarno, aged forty-three, who came from Rangkas, a four-hour drive from Jakarta. He performed the veneration annually during the month of Syaaban. Last year, Mr Sumarno said, he visited four sacred tombs in Jakarta, but not Mbah Priok’s tomb. “I just heard about this tomb because of the bloody clash. I am happy to be able to visit this famous place. I saw it on TV. I believe in keramat (the miracle) of Mbah Priok.” Some other people I asked said that they had also visited the tomb, thanks to the proliferation of the Mbah Priok tragedy on various media, including the TV and Internet. One adherent, who worked at the gate to the tomb, said that the number of visitors that year had doubled in relation to previous years.

Two of the tomb’s coordinators, Habib Ali Zenaal bin Abdurrahman Al Idrus and Habib Salim bin Umar Al Atas, have produced various memorabilia representing the figure of Mbah Priok. In principle, these mirror the two narratives told to followers: first, Mbah Priok or Habib Hasan Al-Haddad was wali Allah (a saint), born in Palembang, South Sumatra in 1727. He traveled to Jakarta to proselytize after studying Islam in South Yemen. Unfortunately, on his journey from South Yemen to Jakarta, his ship hit a storm. The ship was wrecked, and the body of the cleric was found adrift on the coast of Jakarta, along with a cooking stove, known as periuk in Indonesian. Some locals who found the cleric’s corpse took him ashore and buried him with the remains of his paddleboat as the gravestone. The area was renamed Tanjung Priok in his honor. The second narrative relates how there had been previous attempts to evict Mbah Priok’s grave. In the colonial period, the Dutch had had to accept the deaths of many of their workers while trying to convert the coastal area into a harbor. The Dutch asked local clerics for their help in establishing spiritual communication with Mbah Priok, and were finally able to continue with the project after delivering the demands from the cleric’s spirit; that is, to relocate his corpse under the supervision of his family. His hagiography states, “When the Dutch carried out the relocation, the corpse of Mbah Priok was still intact, fragrant, and his eyes closed with vibration.” The book framed the 2010 clash as another of Mbah Priok’s miracles, as the small number of family members and followers were able to fight the government’s forces, vastly superior in number, thanks to the help of various spirits: giants, angels, and birds. The merchandise

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1 Interview with Lori Singer, November 2011.
Since the cases described above, I have attempted to depict the different ways in which the Indonesian public conceives of the visibility and invisibility of Islam in the public sphere. During the Suharto era, the state pertained to obscure the relationships between Islam and politics. As reflected in the 1984 Tanjung Priok case, the state preferred to keep the people’s movement anonymous in a bid to veil “the real” political dynamics of that period. General L. B. Moerdani, representing the government, announced to the media that the clash had occurred between the military and “a rebellious group,” rather than specifically saying it was an Islamic group. The state controlled the press in reporting details of the clash, and warned them not to write outside the official state version of events (McGregor 2007). As the state strictly controlled freedom of expression, very few people could access the reports on the 1984 clash, written by independent groups and clandestinely circulated. The New Order regime created a state of terror, where they utilized the area between the visible and invisible for the purposes of garnering power. On the subject of the 1966 Massacre, the state produced a six-hour propaganda film that amplified the violent figure of “the communist” as an example of ekstrim kiri (the extreme left), which later proved useful in painting the other group, i.e. an Islamic group, as the ekstrim kanan (extreme right). The state, vulgarly, put the rebellious Muslims in court for the bombing incidents of the 1980s. This extreme left–right dichotomy was useful in positioning the New Order at the center, as the organization that supported the constitution and the national principle, Pancasila. The state terror was also taking the form of violent performances in an urban setting in 1983, by publicly displaying the corpses of petty criminals, gang members, and street thugs who had been killed at night in mysterious circumstances, inside black jeeps, behind tinted-glass windows (Spyer 2002; Siegel 1998; Strassler 2004).

In the post-Suharto era, the state has reduced its control over the dynamics of the public sphere, and supports both freedom of speech and expression. Transparency has become one of the political keywords in defining Indonesian reform, as a part of the country’s aspiration to build democracy and fight corruption. In addition, the state sees the Reformasi era as a chance to reveal and recover political entities, which various forms of national political hegemony obscured and concealed. Therefore, political openness has reformed visual public culture into one saturated by political figures, who at one time, the state oppressed. This new visibility includes the “resurgence” of political Islam to inhabit the public sphere. This process of the reconfiguration of public culture has taken place in parallel to the proliferation of violent conflict in various regions suggesting links with ethnicity and religiosity. Simultaneously, one could observe the frailty of the state in tackling these problems. Therefore, as Steedly reminds us (in press), we need to understand this reconfiguration of Indonesian public culture in conjunction with the dispersal of centralized power and the proliferation of ethnic and religious conflicts.

Television made visible the Mbah Priok clash enabling “strangers” to take part in the incident. It is misleading to think that all the people in the crowd defending the tomb were adherents. Quite unexpectedly, I met a youth named Arman in a congregation of Majelis Rasulullah in Tanjung Priok, who told me an interesting story about his experience of joining the clash. Arman was born in Madura, and while he was still at school, he would help his father, who was an illegal street vendor, to sell shirts and trousers at Pasar Permai (the marketplace). Three months before the clash at Mbah Priok’s tomb, public order officers obviated illegal market traders. It was a serious clash, although there were no casualties, and many of the illegal traders at Madura lost their space at the market. When the Mbah Priok clash occurred, many of the Madurese ex-traders from Pasar Permai joined the fight against the officers, because of their resentment, and not their belief in the saint.

I consider urbanity as a productive process, whereby residents struggle to conceive of social collaboration and networks of opportunities through a spatial process. I have followed the arguments of a number of scholars, who see the connection between cultural practices and the economy in constituting urbangy (Hansen and Vaa 2004; Robinson 2006; Simone 2004). In this way, I am striving to understand religion or other kinds of spiritual forms, not as fixed products derived from sacred text, but as a platform that enables various urban actors to come up with their own articulations. Religion, as an urban engagement, has particular characteristics in facilitating residents’ everyday goals. How can we therefore understand the negotiation between religiosity and urbanity through the process of making a saint visible? On the one hand, making the actions of urban renewal visible is part of everyday news broadcasting by Indonesian TV. On the other hand, in contemporary Jakarta life, making the practices of urban discipline as carried out by Satpol PP a spectacle, is something the city-state regularly does. Usually, the city-state invites the print media and TV journalists to cover events where officers are seen demolishing illegal houses or using harassment and intimidation to deal with squatters, illegal street vendors, and other marginalized urban groups. By making visible the officers’ actions, the government hopes to report effectively on government work, while also establishing the sense of regulation it is enforcing.

On the other hand, making the saint visible through the production of miraculous narrations has always been part of the Tariqa Alawiya tradition. It is common for waliqullalah (establishing the popularity of a saint) to be contingent on miracle stories from his hagiography. There are around eleven Habib tombs in Jakarta, but why are only four regarded as important? The descendants of Mbah Priok (Habib Hasan Al-Haddad) tried several times to interest the media in miracles that they said occurred at or around the tomb. For instance, in 2007, the country’s largest national newspaper, Kompas, reported on the conflict between the descendants of Habib Al-Haddad and the Pelindo Company. In the report, Habib Ali Al-Haddad’s descendants mentioned that Pelindo’s attempts at evicting the tomb failed because the bulldozer broke down and the workers became ill. However, that miraculous story did not boost the tomb’s popularity as much as the 2010 clash.

However, when events and media collide, then something extraordinary happens, as seen when the media made visible the clash at Mbah Priok’s tomb, thus enabling “strangers” to take part in the incident. The consequence of making public events visible to a wider audience is the chance other actors have to tap into the platform created by the event. Everyone, from the president to militant leaders, has tried to become part of the process, in turn, elevating their reputation. Under the rubric “cultural heritage,” the president met Mbah
Priok’s descendants to show his concern for the Islamic Ummah. At the same time, presidential approval helped to enlarge the contest; the tomb was elevated from being merely an asset of the Islamic Ummah and became instead a “national asset.” Habib Rizique, only recently released from prison on a charge of violence and religious intolerance, used the clash as his stage to reappear in public.

As noted, the publicity also created a chance for unexpected actors to get involved. In July 2010, three months after the clash, the MUI announced their investigation into the case of Habib Hasan Al-Haddad. The council came to two important conclusions, which revealed that the tomb and the sainthood of Habib Hasan was in fact a fraud (Madani Institute 2010). The council did not believe that Habib Hasan was a saint and only recognized him to be a devout Muslim. The council’s first conclusion was that the tomb was actually empty. Under the militaristic threat of Suharto, in 1997, the corpse of Habib Hasan Al-Haddad or Mbah Priok had been transferred to another graveyard (the Semper site). In 1999, a year after Suharto stepped down, the descendants returned to the location in Koja to start reconstructing the tomb without the corpse inside. The second conclusion relates to the history of the saint: the MUI concluded that the story of Mbah Priok was a fabrication. The history of Tanjung Priok is not appertained to the arrival of Habib Hasan Al-Haddad in the area, they argued. The reason for Habib Hasan’s visit to Jakarta was to make a pilgrimage to the tomb of Habib Husein bin Abu Bakar Alaydrus, which is in Keramat Luar Batang and the oldest Habaib tomb in Jakarta, but unfortunately he died at sea, when he was shipwrecked in a storm.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

My research attempts to understand the process of the formation of the Islamic youth movement in Indonesia—a phenomenon that is not limited to Indonesia—as other scholars have chronicled the proliferation of novel Islamic movements in megacities (Roy 2006; Meuleman 2002). However, few studies have adequately addressed the role of urban practice as the generative force in the formation of urban movements. On the one hand, seeing the city as a mere “container” for religious phenomena, this portrayal generally frames Islamic movements as a form of escapism from modern-day crises. On the other hand, in terms of the macro-micro perspective, these studies commonly understand the religious movement to be a by-product of a national and global political transformation. These portrayals in general fail to ask how and why the movement emerges in the city and, in turn, becomes entangled in urban issues such as gentrification and/or the contestation over public space. This essay, therefore, focuses on developmental process of the religious movement as a practice of making relations and networks; many other of the researches into the Islamic movement have focused on the rigidity, coherency, and uniformity of it. As this research attempts to cultivate the subjectivities of Muslims, I understand the movement, and its youthful followers, as entities that are fragmented, fragile, and incomplete. In this way, my research moves away from a depiction of Islam as a mere discursive text and articulates it as it is lived.

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