

# UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE PROPHET: CHARISMA AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY IN CONTEMPORARY MADURA, INDONESIA

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**Abstract:** This ethnographic study explores the phenomenon of religious authority held by a *murshid* (Sufi Master), Kiai Haji Abdul Mannan, in Madura, Indonesia, despite his unconventional background. Applying Max Weber's theory of charismatic authority, the research delves into the factors enabling the rapid attraction of *jama'a* (followers) and the establishment of his religious influence. This study emphasizes the pivotal role of the *murshid's* charisma in building his religious authority and highlights how the newly founded *majelis dhikir* (religious chanting group), known as Majelis Dzikir Nurut Tauhid, consolidates the *jama'a* and fortifies the *murshid's* religious authority. This study provides profound insights into how religious authority can thrive and endure within the Madura context, even when the religious leader possesses an unconventional background. The main argument of this study is that the religious authority of the *murshid* is constructed upon charisma, charismatic claims, and a cohesive community of followers. It offers a compelling example of the intricacies of religious authority dynamics in society.

**Keywords:** Religious authority; charisma; Kiai Mannan; *majelis dhikir*; Madura.

## Introduction

Kiai Haji Abdul Mannan is the founder of a *majelis dhikir* (religious chanting group) known as Majelis Dzikir Nurut Tauhid (MDNT) in Prenduan, Sumenep Regency, Madura. The aim of this group is to encourage Muslims to become better individuals, deepen their piety, and nurture a profound love for God and the Prophet. In a relatively short period, from its establishment in

2017 until 2022, MDNT has attracted *jama'ā* (followers) of no fewer than 1,000 people, consisting of both men and women from diverse regions. These attendees come not only from Madura but also from places such as Malang, Blitar, Pasuruan, Lumajang, Jember, Kendal, Bali, Lombok, and even Malaysia. It is noteworthy that it is not just about quantity; the *jama'ā* also displays a remarkable level of loyalty. To date, Kiai Haji Abdul Mannan (hereafter referred to as Kiai Mannan) has emerged as a new religious authority in the eastern part of Madura, and his influence has been met with both acceptance and opposition.<sup>1</sup>

This article delves deeper into the figure of Kiai Mannan and his efforts to establish religious authority in Madura, rather than delving into his philosophical or ritualistic aspects. What makes this study particularly fascinating is the fact that Kiai Mannan lacks a lineage of religious scholars, does not possess a high level of formal education, and comes from a humble background in a small rural village. In the context of Islamic religious tradition, religious authority is often associated with lineage, formal education, and affiliation with prestigious religious institutions.<sup>2</sup> Even in Madura, to become a *kiai*, in addition to having a lineage of *kiai* and leading a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), one must also be a member of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU).<sup>3</sup> However, Kiai Mannan has transcended these conventional expectations through the “excep-

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<sup>1</sup> Within the social structure of Madurese society, *kiai* or religious leaders (*guruh*) typically hold higher authority than the other two sources of authority, namely parents (*bbuppa'-bhappu*) and rulers (*rato*). Muhammad Afdillah, *Dari Masjid ke Panggung Politik: Melacak Akar-akar Kekerasan Agama Antara Komunitas Sunni dan Syiah di Sampang, Jawa Timur* (Yogyakarta: CRCS, 2016), 27-31.

<sup>2</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> See Yanwar Pribadi, *Islam, State and Society: Local Politics in Madura* (London: Routledge, 2018), 51. NU, established on January 31, 1926, in Surabaya by a group of renowned Islamic scholars, is a Sunni Islamic organization. It serves as a custodian of tradition by upholding the teachings of all four schools of Islamic law, with a particular emphasis on the Shafii school of thought, which holds the most prominent position. In Madura, NU is the dominant organization and very closely connected to the religious life of the Madurese community. Due to this closeness, NU is often likened to the ‘second religion’ of the Madurese people. Nor Hasan, “Dinamika Kehidupan Beragama Kaum Nahdhiyyin-Salafi di Pamekasan Madura,” *ISLAMICA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (September 2013), 84-102.

tional qualities” he possesses, qualities that have stirred the hearts and won the admiration of many of his followers.

The qualities in question refer to his claims of direct tutelage in the realm of *barzakhi*<sup>4</sup> (the intermediary realm between this world and the afterlife) from the Prophet, receiving divine revelations (*ilhām*)<sup>5</sup> from God, and the ability to bestow blessings (*baraka*)<sup>6</sup> upon his followers. These claims, which encompass a profoundly spiritual dimension, have attracted people from various social strata in Madura and beyond to become his *jama‘a*. These followers are exceptionally loyal, respectful, obedient, submissive, and affectionate toward the *kiai*. They accept without question everything the *kiai* says.

Therefore, Kiai Mannan’s success in attracting followers and establishing strong religious authority raises intriguing questions regarding religious authority in Islam and how factors such as religious claims, personal spiritual experiences, and social structures influence the construction of such authority.<sup>7</sup> Hence, this research aims to answer several crucial questions, including:

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<sup>4</sup> The *barzakhi* method means knowledge is imparted in the realm of *barzakh*, which is the ‘intermediate realm’ or the abode of the souls of the deceased before the Day of Resurrection. *Barzakhi* is also often referred to as *uwaysi*. The latter term refers to the name Uways al-Qarnī, a Yemeni individual who lived during the time of the Prophet and never met the Prophet but is believed to have been converted to Islam by the *ruh* (spirit) of the Prophet after his death. The *barzakhi* or *uwaysi* method is distinguished from the *hissi* method, where knowledge is acquired through physical meetings between a *murid* (student) and a *murshid* (Sufi master). Martin van Bruinessen, *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah di Indonesia: Survey Historis, Geografis, dan Sosiologis* (Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, second edition, 1994), 48-49.

<sup>5</sup> *Ilhām* is a mode of receiving knowledge or information that is obtained swiftly, abruptly, and highly confidentially within a person’s soul without prior study. In this context, *ilhām* is akin to *wahy*. However, they diverge in terms of the recipients. *Ilhām* may be granted to whomever God desires, including ordinary humans, whereas God imparts *wahy* to His prophets and messengers. Hasbi Ashshiddeqy, *Pengantar Ilmu Tafsir* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1953), 17; Muhammad Abduh, *Risalah Tauhid* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1963), 140-141.

<sup>6</sup> *Barakah* or *baraka*, in Islam, is the beneficent force from God that flows through the physical and spiritual spheres. See Jamhari, “The Meaning Interpreted: The Concept of *Barakah* in *Ziarah*,” *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2001), 87-128.

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

How do the religious claims made by Kiai Mannan affect his followers in their religious practices and spiritual understanding? What role does MDNT play in upholding Kiai Mannan's religious authority and influencing religious practices in Prenduan, particularly, and Madura in general?

To address these questions, this study employs ethnographic methods. I conducted fieldwork in 2021-2022 in Prenduan, Sumenep, where I directly interacted with and participated in the activities of Kiai Mannan and MDNT. I observed, recorded, and documented relevant field findings. I also conducted interviews with Kiai Mannan, some of his *jamā'a*, local community leaders, NU figures, and members of the general public. However, the names of the people quoted in this article are fictitious and camouflaged due to their preferences to remain anonymous. The collected data were then analyzed using Weber's theory of 'charismatic authority.' According to Weber, 'charisma' is "an extraordinary quality possessed by persons or objects that is thought to give these persons or objects a unique, magical power."<sup>8</sup> As a religious figure in Madura, Kiai Mannan exhibits characteristics of charismatic authority. He is revered by his followers because they believe he possesses unique spiritual knowledge, exceptional piety, and a direct connection to Divine sources of knowledge. His authority is rooted in the belief that these qualities are intrinsic to him.

Studies on religious authority in Madura have indeed been conducted extensively. However, existing research tends to focus more on the competition among religious authorities rather than on the reconstruction of religious authority itself. One notable example is Hamdi's study of the Sunni-Shi'ah conflict in Sampang. According to Hamdi, the Sunni group, represented by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), constitutes the ruling class that seeks to maintain the status quo by delegitimizing the Shi'ah group, its rival, by accusing them of deviance and expelling them.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Hefni

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<sup>8</sup> Weber distinguished this charismatic authority from two other types of authority, namely rational authority and legal-formal authority. See Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1947).

<sup>9</sup> Ahmad Zainul Hamdi, "Klaim Religious Authority dalam Konflik Sunni-Syi'i Sampang Madura," *ISLAMICA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (March 2012), 215-231.

examines the competition for religious authority between *kiai pesantren*, who lead traditional-accretive Islamic communities, and *kiai kampung* as representatives of traditional-syncretic Islamic communities. The traditional-syncretic Islamic communities that continue to practice rituals rooted in ancestral traditions are considered syncretic practices by *kiai pesantren* and therefore require correction.<sup>10</sup> Another study, by Rasuki, explores the religious conflict that occurred in Sumenep in 1997-1998 between traditional *kiai* and the Walisongo Akbar group led by *Ustadh* Supardi, rooted in the struggle for religious authority and material resources.<sup>11</sup>

Studies on how religious authority is constructed in Madura have been conducted by Pribadi and Damanhuri. Through ethnographic research conducted in Banten and Madura between 2009-2018, Pribadi illustrates that religious authority in both Madura and Banten is often marked by conflicting responses within the complex and fluctuating relationships between supporters of 'local Islam' and 'foreign Islam.' The former group is characterized by their well-preserved local culture and traditions that have been upheld for centuries by their supporters, while the latter is known for aggressively introducing various foreign influences, particularly Salafism from Gulf countries.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, Damanhuri demonstrates the creation of religious authority through 'intellectual achievement,' accomplished by producing a series of works. The production of these works serves as the starting point for the emergence of traditionalist, post-traditionalist, and modernist authorities. However, according to Damanhuri, the birth of religious authority is not solely attributed to a strong command of classical Islamic knowledge but is also

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<sup>10</sup> Mohammad Hefni, *Islam Madura: Sebuah Studi Konstruktivisme-Strukturalis tentang Relasi Islam Pesantren dan Islam Kampung di Sumenep Madura* (Malang: Literasi Nusantara, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> Rasuki, "Konflik Keagamaan di Sumenep Madura: Studi Perebutan Otoritas Antara Kyai Tradisional dan Walisongo Akbar" (Ph.D Thesis--Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Yanwar Pribadi, "Fragmentasi Umat dan Penciptaan Otoritas Keagamaan: Tanggapan terhadap 'Islam Lokal' dan 'Islam Asing' di Indonesia," *Jurnal Masyarakat dan Budaya*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2019), 103-120.

supported by other power networks, such as kinship relations, *pesantren*, and knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

The studies mentioned above, especially the last two, do not fully explain the construction of religious authority in Madura in the case of Kiai Mannan. Kiai Mannan's religious authority did not arise amidst religious group conflicts. People joined his congregation more because of Kiai Mannan himself, whom they believed could fulfill their spiritual needs. Additionally, Kiai Mannan did not possess intellectual achievements. He did not master classical Islamic knowledge. In fact, on several occasions, Kiai Mannan admitted that despite spending a considerable amount of time at *pesantren*, he could not read the traditional Islamic texts. Furthermore, rather than having a network of *kiai* family, *pesantren*, and knowledge, he was born into a farming family and had a challenging and difficult life. Therefore, differing from previous research, this study contends that charisma plays a pivotal role in captivating followers and establishing religious authority, and that religious practices and cohesive *jama'a* can enhance the authority even further.

This article begins by discussing Kiai Mannan's biography, including his family background, childhood, education, marriage, livelihood, and his years-long spiritual journey. It then delves into the exceptional qualities possessed by Kiai Mannan, through which he inspired many individuals who later became his devoted and obedient *jama'a*, filled with admiration, love, and affection for the *kiai* or *murshid*. The role of MDNT is then discussed to illustrate its role in building and maintaining Kiai Mannan's religious authority. This discussion is crucial for entering into the next section, which explores Kiai Mannan's religious authority in comparison to other authorities in Prenduan, specifically, and Madura, in general. The article concludes with a summary.

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<sup>13</sup> Damanhuri, "Kiai, Kitab dan Hukum Islam (Relasi Kuasa Teks dan Otoritas Keagamaan di Sumenep, Madura)" (Ph.D Thesis--Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, 2019).

### Spiritual Transformation of a *Murshid*<sup>14</sup>

Kiai Mannan was born on June 12, 1970, in the village of Karduluk, Pragaan Subdistrict, Sumenep Regency, East Java, into a humble farming family. He was the youngest of four siblings. His father, Asban, was a toddy palm farmer who would climb toddy palm trees every morning and evening to collect their sap. Meanwhile, his mother, Asi, was a homemaker who worked daily to assist her husband in processing the toddy palm sap into brown sugar for sale in the local market. The sale of brown sugar served as the primary source of income for young Abdul Mannan's family.

Kiai Mannan completed his formal education at Karduluk 3 Public Elementary School, Bandungan (1983) and then continued at *Pondok Pesantren Annuqayah*, Guluk-Guluk,<sup>15</sup> to complete his Islamic Elementary School (1986) and Islamic Junior High School (1989).<sup>16</sup> In Guluk-Guluk, he studied under Kiai Haji Ahmad Basyir Abdullah Sajjad (d. 2017) in the Latee Complex, where he learned traditional Islamic sciences, ranging from Arabic grammar

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<sup>14</sup> In this context, "*Murshid*" has a straightforward meaning as a spiritual guide. The term "*Murshid*" has been adopted in many modern Sufi communities, urban Sufism, Majelis Dhikr and Shalawat, and is no longer confined to Sufi orders that traditionally had stringent criteria for a *Murshid*. In this regard, see Arif Zamhari, "Socio-Cultural Innovations in Urban Sufism, The Case Study of Majelis Dzikir and Shalawat Nurul Musthafa," *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2013), 119-144; Arif Zamhari and Julia Day Howell, "Taking Sufism to the Streets: Majelis Zikir and Majelis Salawat as New Venues for Popular Islamic Piety in Indonesia," *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (2012), 47-75; Rubaidi, "The New Pseudo-Sufi Order of the Majelis Shalawat among Urban Muslims in East Java," *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (December 2020), 431-456.

<sup>15</sup> *Pesantren Annuqayah* Guluk-Guluk is a traditional *pesantren* that, to this day, teaches religious sciences based on *kitab kuning* (yellow books) or the works of earlier scholars, utilizing a class-based system. As such, this *pesantren* falls within the Semi-Modern Islamic Boarding School category, which can be distinguished from Salaf and Modern *pesantrens*. Muhammad Nihwan and Paisun, "Tipologi Pesantren (Mengkaji Sistem Salaf dan Modern)," *JPIK: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Ilmu Keislaman*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Maret 2019), 59-81. Like most traditional *pesantrens* in Madura, this *pesantren* is affiliated with the NU. See "Sejarah," <https://annuqayah.id/sejarah/> (accessed on 10 May 2021).

<sup>16</sup> "Tentang Penulis," in Kiai Haji Abdul Mannan, *Kitab Nurut Tauhid: Ma'rifatullah wa Ma'rifaturrasul*, Vol. I (Tuban: CV. Karya Litera Indonesia, 2019), 60-61.

such as *naḥw* and *ṣarf* to *Sharī‘ah* and theological studies such as *fiqh*, *kalām*, *tafsīr*, and *ḥadīth* based on the works of scholars from the Classical-Middle Ages.<sup>17</sup>

Ever since Kiai Mannan married Asri, he lived in his wife’s house in Prenduan.<sup>18</sup> In Madurese tradition, it is customary for the husband to move into the wife’s home after marriage. From this marriage, Kiai Mannan was blessed with a daughter named Lia. In addition to Lia, Kiai Mannan had several sons, but sadly, they all passed away in infancy. To support his family, Kiai Mannan worked as a Pick-Up truck driver, transporting various goods like wood, sand, soil, stones, and whatever his clients required. Furthermore, Kiai Mannan also sold woven mats made from palm leaves and employed several people. Thanks to his successful endeavors, Kiai Mannan eventually managed to purchase a Pick-Up truck.

As time passed, Kiai Mannan’s household faced many problems, especially financial difficulties due to unsuccessful business ventures, bankruptcy, and mounting debts. Due to extreme hardship, he even admitted to pawning his sarong.<sup>19</sup> Kiai Mannan frequently argued with his wife, disappeared from home, and at times, returned to his parents’ house in Karduluk, leaving his wife and child behind. This happened repeatedly but always ended in reconciliation. One day, when the difficulties seemed to have reached their peak, and he felt “*odhi’ ta’ nemmu seddbheng*”

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<sup>17</sup> Kiai Haji Abdul Mannan, *Dhikr Akbar*, Sumenep, June 24, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Prenduan is a village situated within the Pragaan Subdistrict in the southwestern part of Sumenep Regency. The village is approximately 30.7 km to the southwest of the town of Sumenep, slightly farther away than its distance to the town of Pamekasan, which is 27 km. According to the observations of Huub de Jonge, a Dutch anthropologist who conducted field research in this village in 1976-1977, the inhabitants of Prenduan are devout followers of Islam. In their eyes, Islam is not just a mere symbol but also a set of teachings that must be deeply internalized. Because of this, De Jonge referred to this village as a stronghold of orthodoxy. Huub de Jonge, *Madura dalam Empat Zaman: Pedagog, Perkembangan Ekonomi, dan Islam* (Jakarta: PT. Gramedia, 1989), 239; Theodor W. Juynboll, *Handleiding tot de Kennis van de Mohammedaanche wet Volgens de Leer der Sjafi‘itische School* (Leiden: Brill, 1930), 9-16 and 44-51.

<sup>19</sup> Kiai Mannan is renowned for his love of sarongs. For him, sarongs are a source of pride. As a result, from a young age, Kiai Mannan enjoyed collecting expensive sarongs. It is no wonder that when he faced financial difficulties, sarongs became the only valuable items he could pawn.



(living in misery), he decided to go away on his own. Feeling like he had nothing to lose, he was not afraid of losing anything, not even his life.<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 1.** Kiai Haji Abdul Mannan, the *murshid* of MDNT.

Kiai Mannan confessed to “studying *tamhīd*” or embarking on a spiritual journey from 1992 until he discovered what he was looking for in 2005.<sup>21</sup> During this period, he left his family to search for a spiritual teacher or *murshid*, even traveling to Banten, walking from one sacred site to another, practicing *tahannuth*<sup>22</sup> in

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<sup>20</sup> Kiai Haji Abdul Mannan, *Pengajian Rutin*, Sumenep, May 3, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Kiai Haji Abdul Mannan, *Pengajian Rutin*, Sumenep, June 10, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> *Tahannuth* is a spiritual condition akin to a retreat, where, for a certain period, someone secludes themselves from society to engage in worship, introspection of the self, and doing good deeds. It is expected that through this seclusion, one can avoid sins and, simultaneously, achieve a state of inner purity. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Azharī, *Tabdhīb al-Lughah*, Vol. 4 (Kairo: ‘Abd al-Karīm Azbawī Press, n.d.), 481. Nabi pernah melakukan *tahannuth* di Gua Hira, Mekkah, hingga menerima wahyu pertama, yaitu al-‘Alaq [96]: 1-5.

various locations (he once practiced *tahannuth* at a site in Sumenep for 20 months until his family believed he had passed away), or simply staying secluded and locking himself in his room for days. However, he was consistently rejected by every potential teacher he approached without receiving a satisfying explanation. Ultimately, he never had a *murshid*, and his knowledge of tauhid was acquired directly from the Prophet through *barzakhi* method.<sup>23</sup>

The spiritual transformation brought about significant changes in Kiai Mannan's life, affecting his family, social standing, and economic circumstances. He began to devote considerable attention to his family, assuming the role of a responsible husband and father. With his newfound spiritual abilities, he also gained recognition as a traditional healer (Madura: *dbukon*) who served as an intermediary (*wasilah*) for curing various illnesses, warding off sorcery, determining auspicious and inauspicious days, and ensuring the success of businesses or the popularity of merchandise.<sup>24</sup> People seeking his assistance came not only from his local community but also from different regions of Madura and even Java. As is customary for knowledgeable individuals in Madura, he accepted "envelope" (money) from each patient who sought medical treatment, business advice, or even simple prayers for success in exams.

In addition to providing medical treatments, people also turned to him for spiritual guidance, to learn *tawhid*, or to seek inner peace. While their numbers were relatively small compared to those seeking medical help, they were the individuals who interacted with Kiai Mannan most frequently. In fact, those who came from distant places often temporarily resided at Kiai Mannan's *ndhalem* (home). Kiai Mannan stressed to his students the significance of "drawing nearer to God, becoming His most devoted and righteous servants, fostering piety, and nurturing deep

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<sup>23</sup> Kiai Haji Abdul Mannan, *Dhikr Akbar*, Sumenep, October 7, 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Healing illnesses through spiritual capabilities is categorized under the epistemology of *'irfāni* (intuitive power), which is conducted through mystical practices such as spiritual endeavors (*mujahadah*), *tawajjuh*, self-cleansing (*taṣkiyat al-naḥs*), *warā'*, consistency (*istiḳamah*), and forbearance (*sabr*). M. Syamsul Huda, "Epistemologi Penyembuhan Kiai Tabib," *ISLAMICA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (September 2013), 103-120.

love and longing for God and His Prophet.”<sup>25</sup> His students addressed him using a variety of titles, ranging from “*kiai*,” “*abah*,” to “*yaikbona*.”

As time went by, Kiai Mannan’s circle of students continued to grow, and by 2017, they had formed a cohesive *majelis dhikir* called “Majelis Dzikir Nurut Tauhid.” This *majelis dhikir* was centered at Kiai Mannan’s own residence in Prenduan and attracted participants from various regions, including Madura, Malang, Blitar, Kendal, Lumajang, Jember, Bali, Lombok, Kalimantan, and even Malaysia.

Kiai Mannan documented his Sufi insights in a work titled *Kitab Nurut Tauhid: Ma’rifatullah wa Ma’rifaturrasul*. The book was published in two (of six) volumes. The first volume was released in 2019, followed by the second one in 2020, both published by CV. Karya Litera Indonesia, Tuban. Each volume measures 12 x 17 cm and is written in the Indonesian language, with neither volume exceeding 100 pages in length. Despite covering distinct subjects, they maintain a sense of continuity. Volume One delves into the relationship between humans and God, spanning from the inception of humanity to the means through which individuals can strengthen their bond with God. Volume Two focuses on the “*maqāmat*” (stations) that individuals must traverse to attain the highest echelons of spiritual knowledge or experience.

*Kitab Nurut Tauhid* stands out for its exceptional nature because everything contained within it mirrors Kiai Mannan’s spiritual journey and personal encounters. In regard to this, Kiai Mannan articulated, “Sufism is the science of ‘feeling’ [*dhawq*] so every Sufi scholar composes their works based on the ‘feeling’ they personally experience, a sentiment that inevitably differs from that of others.” Although the bibliography of the book references a few renowned sources, such as *al-Minaḥ al-Sanīyah* by al-Shaʿrānī, *Risālat al-Muʿāwanah* by al-Ḥaddād, *Qāmiʿ al-Tughyān* by al-Bantānī, and *Fath al-Rabbānī wa al-Fayḍ al-Raḥmānī* by al-Jīlānī, all of these serve as secondary sources. The primary source is Kiai Mannan’s direct knowledge or *ʿilm shahādah*.

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<sup>25</sup> Mannan, *Kitab Nurut Tauhid*, I: 61.



**Figure 2.** *Kitab Nurut Tauhid*, vol. 1 and 2.

### **Genealogy, Revelation, Altruism: Some Elements of Charisma**

On several occasions, both in *Dhikr Akbar*, *Pengajian Rutin*, or discussions within smaller circles, whether directly or indirectly, Kiai Mannan often presents several of his unique qualities that influence how his *jama'at* perceive him. I have identified several of these exceptional qualities, including his scholarly lineage, fount of knowledge, *baraka*, inspirational ability, and altruism.<sup>26</sup>

Kiai Mannan claims to have received knowledge directly from the Prophet through *barzakhi* means. Receiving knowledge from the Prophet is not easily obtained. Initially, it often involves someone “meeting” with the Prophet, and it intensifies over time, leading to being loved and trusted by the Prophet to receive his

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<sup>26</sup> In Weber's terminology, the components of charisma always portray the leader as an individual with extraordinary, even supernatural, power that can transform their followers into the desired state. Without such components, a charismatic and authoritative leader cannot be established. This form of authority, based on charisma, can be distinguished from two other sources of authority: legal-rational and traditional. George Ritzer, *Sociological Theory* (New York: MC Graw Hill, 2008), 219.

trust (*amānah*).<sup>27</sup> Due to this genealogy of knowledge, Kiai Mannan's statements are often preceded by phrases such as "the saying of the Prophet," "*amānah* of the Prophet," or "the hope of the Prophet." Kiai Mannan also frequently clarifies ḥadīths that he finds peculiar, such as the ḥadīth narrated by Anas b. Mālik about the splitting of the Prophet's chest. The ḥadīth tells the story of two angels splitting the Prophet's chest to cleanse impurities within him.<sup>28</sup> Although this ḥadīth is well-known and considered authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*), Kiai Mannan believes that its content diminishes the Prophet's nobility. For Kiai Mannan, the Prophet is an incredibly noble figure in both the physical and spiritual realms, surpassing the stature of the entire universe and its contents, including the angels.<sup>29</sup> According to his communications with the Prophet, the splitting of the chest never actually occurred. Additionally, Kiai Mannan seeks direct clarification from the Prophet on many other topics, such as sorcery, pain, and various aspects related to his spiritual journey.

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Kiai Haji Abdul Mannan, Sumenep, September 13, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> In full, the narration of the ḥadīth is as follows: "Anas b. Mālik narrated, Abū Dhārr related that the Prophet said, 'While I was in Mecca, the roof of my house was opened suddenly, and Jibrīl came down. He split my chest open and washed it with Zamzam water. Then, he brought a golden vessel filled with wisdom and faith, poured it into my chest, and sealed it back up. After that, he held my hand and took me to the sky of the world.'" The event, although widely accepted by most of the Muslim community, remains a controversial theme that has not been fully resolved among scholars. Mun'im Sirry, *Kontroversi Islam Awal: antara Mazhab Tradisionalis dan Revisionis* (Bandung: Mizan, 2015), 236; Muhammad Husain Haekal, *Sejarah Hidup Muhammad*, trans. Ali Audah (Jakarta: Litera Antar Nusa, 2003), 126-128; Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad Sang Nabi: Sebuah Biografi Kritis*, trans. Sirikit Syah (Surabaya: Risalah Gusti, 2001), 89.

<sup>29</sup> For this very reason, Kiai Mannan was also among those who rejected the controversial lecture by Gus Muwafiq, which touched upon the childhood of the Prophet. According to Gus Muwafiq in his lecture, Prophet Muhammad was born into the world without radiance, neglected as he lived with his grandfather, scruffy, and he would 'probably' steal guavas if they were available. The lecture was recorded, generated controversy, and quickly went viral. Watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LN1XJFWyKc> (accessed on June 26, 2021). Kiai Mannan considered Gus Muwafiq's sermon as derogatory toward the Prophet. For Kiai Mannan, the Prophet was the most perfect human being who was truly safeguarded by God, even before his birth into the world. This safeguard extended to refraining from sinful actions like stealing guavas. Kiai Haji Abdul Mannan, *Pengajian Rutin*, Sumenep, 3 May 2021.

Meanwhile, Kiai Mannan's knowledge originates from intuition (*ilham*) or unveiling (*kashf al-mahjub*), or through direct witnessing (*shahādah*) that is immediate or present (*ḥudūr*).<sup>30</sup> This type of knowledge comes or presents itself suddenly to an individual without any intermediaries. This knowledge is also known as self-objective knowledge or does not require subject-object correspondence because both are the same or a single reality; as if someone already knows or has knowledge within them; as if all questions already have their answers within an individual. With this knowledge, Kiai Mannan can perceive the inner and outer states of others, whether they are visible or invisible, spoken or unspoken, or not yet articulated. Kiai Mannan advises others without first knowing the details of their issues. In fact, Kiai Mannan conducts religious lectures without opening a single book or a compilation of works by previous scholars. With this knowledge, every word spoken by Kiai Mannan conveys a "language of the soul" (divine language) that is profound, beautiful, simple, and inspirational.

Despite being in the position of a *murshid*, he serves his disciples exceptionally well. Every visitor or temporary resident is provided with three free meals a day, not to mention bottled water, coffee, tea, and even snacks that they can help themselves to. For every *dhikr* event such as *Legian* and *Kliwonan*, Kiai Mannan does not request any contribution from the *jama'ah*. If one of the *jama'ah* holds a wedding ceremony in Prenduan, Kiai Mannan covers nearly half of the kitchen expenses. In this regard, Kiai Mannan says, "Even if there were 2,000 of you [the *jama'ah*] living here, I could provide food every day."<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the resting place of the *jama'ah*, consisting of three floors equipped with separate bathrooms for men and women, is much more luxurious compared to Kiai Mannan's very modest home.

In addition, Kiai Mannan is deeply concerned about the economic well-being of every member of the congregation. This

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<sup>30</sup> This knowledge goes by several names, such as *'ilm shahādah* (knowledge through witnessing) or *'ilm ḥudūrī* (knowledge by presence). This knowledge is what Plato referred to as "primordial knowledge" within the human being. See Asfa Widiyanto, "Traditional Science and Scientia Sacra: Origin and Dimensions of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Concept of Science," *Intellectual Discourse*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2017), 249-273.

<sup>31</sup> Kiai Haji Abdul Mannan, *Pengajian Rutin*, Sumenep, May 17, 2021.

concern is evident in his efforts to initiate and facilitate various economic ventures for his followers, including the cultivation of mealworms, herbal medicine, herbal cigarettes, cattle farming, and the establishment of a company based in the city of Malang. For Kiai Mannan, all members of the congregation must “escape poverty” because impoverished individuals often find it difficult to engage in *dhikr*. Poverty frequently serves as a barrier for someone to remember God and follow His commandments.<sup>32</sup> Kiai Mannan admits to always praying for his *jamā‘a* to become wealthy. He interprets *zuhd* not as “avoiding the world” but as “not being deceived by the world.”<sup>33</sup>

### Relational Power between the *Murshid* and the *Jamā‘a*

For the reasons mentioned above, Kiai Mannan emerges as a charismatic Sufi leader who can win the hearts of many. He is perceived as a *kiai*, *murshid*, and even as a hidden saint (*al-wali al-mastūr*) by his followers. This makes his followers highly confident, obedient, loyal, and fond of Kiai Mannan. To his followers, Kiai Mannan is one of the few individuals who has reached a very high spiritual station and is very close to being honored by God and the Prophet, and is even referred to as a saint. Therefore, they accept everything said and done by Kiai Mannan as truth without questioning. Kiai Mannan’s words, statements, and advice are considered divine revelations from God or the “language of the soul” that can be understood by tranquil souls.<sup>34</sup> Due to his sanctity, Kiai Mannan is believed to bring *baraka*, elevate the status, and ensure the salvation of all his followers both in this world and the hereafter.

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<sup>32</sup> For Kiai Mannan, turning away from God, even for a moment, is considered a sin. Turning away from God is a condition of the heart caused by various factors, including worldly matters. Compare this to Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb b. al-Ḥusayn al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī, who said that “the negligence of a servant towards God, even for the blink of an eye, is a betrayal.” Abdul Halim Mahmud, *Sidi Abu Madyan: Sang Maha Guru Kaum Sufi*, trans. Sechu Muhammad (Yogyakarta: CV. Layar Creativa Mediatama, 2017), 100.

<sup>33</sup> Compare this to the view of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, who said, “Rather than living in poverty and complaining, it is better to live in wealth and be grateful,” as cited in Sayyid ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī, *al-Minah al-Saniyah ‘alā Waṣilat al-Matbūlīyah* (T.t.: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyah, t.t.), 11.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Hasan, Sumenep, May 18, 2021.

Related to the honor and the ability to bring *baraka*, it is reflected in the recitation of a special *tawassul* (approach to God) by the followers, where the name of Kiai Mannan is mentioned third, after the God and the Prophet.

Bi riḍā Allāh Ta‘ālā, al-Fātiḥah... Bi shafā‘ah Rasūl Allāh, al-Fātiḥah... Bi barakah murabbi rūḥinā Shaykh ‘Abd al-Mannān al-Preduanī, al-Fātiḥah...

In the aforementioned *tawassul* recitation, it is evident that the recitation of *sūrah* al-Fātiḥah is directed towards seeking God’s pleasure (*riḍā*) first, then for *shafā‘ah* (intercession), and the third is for the *baraka* of Kiai Mannan. This *tawassul* is regularly recited by the *jama‘a*, whether at the beginning of individual or collective *dhikr* activities, when starting to recite the Qur’an at their homes, beginning an important endeavor, or when facing difficulties in daily life.

The recitation of *tawassul* also illustrates the high regard and esteem in which Kiai Mannan is held by his followers. This is evident in the gestures of the followers when they are in the presence of their *murshid*, which is a daily occurrence at the residence of the *murshid* in Preduan. Every day, people come to Preduan for various reasons, such as participating in *dhikr* activities, seeking advice, or simply to “ease their longing” for their *murshid*. Upon their first meeting with the *murshid*, they usually greet him by shaking and kissing his hand. When shaking hands, they always position themselves lower than him. If he is standing, they will stand with their bodies slightly bowed. If he is sitting in a chair, they will stand halfway, resting on their knees and feet. If he is sitting on the floor, they will sit with their knees and feet touching the ground. When facing him, they often bow their heads, listen attentively, and affirm whatever he says.

On every occasion, Kiai Mannan demonstrates the power of *dhikr* to God and reminds all his followers to engage in *dhikr* constantly, anywhere, anytime, and under any circumstances. This is why every follower possesses a *tasbeḥ* (prayer beads) and uses it for *dhikr*, whether during collective *dhikr* sessions with the *murshid*, in their family settings, or even at their workplaces.<sup>35</sup> I found that they use various types of *tasbeḥs*, ranging from manual *tasbeḥs* to

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Latif, Sumenep, March 22, 2022.



digital ones. Manual *tasbehs* come in several variations, including those with 99 beads, 33 beads, or just 17 beads, which also double as fashionable bracelets. The digital *tasbehs* used by the followers also come in various forms, from handheld devices to ring-shaped ones, some with alarms and some without, with capacities ranging from 10,000 to 100,000 counts.

The *jama'at* never miss the collective *dhikr* activities led directly by Kiai Mannan, such as *Legian* and *Kliwonan*. For them, *dhikr* led by the *murshid* has a different “feeling” compared to *dhikr* led by senior members of the group. They follow Kiai Mannan wherever he leads the *dhikr*, even if it means going outside of Madura. They are willing to sacrifice many things to participate in collective *dhikr* led by the *murshid*, including wealth, time, and energy. Instead of complaining about their sacrifices, they claim to find their own happiness in it. In fact, many followers claim to receive *baraka* from their participation in *dhikr* activities, such as having their expenses “reimbursed by the God,”<sup>36</sup> “having their businesses become more prosperous,”<sup>37</sup> “being healed from illnesses,”<sup>38</sup> or “finding peace.”<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, those who do not participate in *dhikr* activities feel regret, shame, and fear of not receiving *baraka*.<sup>40</sup> The same feelings apply to those who feel they have not heeded the advice or instructions of the *murshid*.

Meanwhile, their love for Kiai Mannan is expressed through prayers for his well-being and that of his family. Even though they may feel unworthy to pray for the *murshid*, they believe that their prayers will benefit them as well. When Kiai Mannan falls ill, some followers decide to temporarily stay in Prenduan to await his recovery. Their affection for the *murshid* is also reflected in the lyrics of songs from the salawat group of MDNT, such as the following modified lyrics from the song *Sidnā al-Nabī*.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Joko, Sumenep, October 7, 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Abdur, Sumenep, October 7, 2021.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Maya, Sumenep, October 7, 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Sri, Sumenep, October 7, 2021.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Herman, Sumenep, June 24, 2021.

<sup>41</sup> The songwriter of this song is unknown, but what is certain is that it was initially popularized by Haddad Alwi and Sulis in the 1990s. In recent times, the song has been covered by numerous content creators on social media, including various Sufi chant groups within the community. *Sidnā al-Nabī* contains praises for the God, the Prophet, and righteous individuals.

Sidnā al-nabī, sidnā al-nabī, sidnā al-nabī  
Sidnā al-nabī, sidnā al-nabī, sidnā al-nabī  
Shaykh ‘Abd al-Mannān al-Prenduanī ḥabīb al-nabī

### **Organizing *Majelis Dhikr*, Preserving Authority**

In 2017, Kiai Mannan established a foundation called the Majelis Dzikir Nurut Tauhid, which accommodates all activities of Kiai Mannan and his *jama‘a* in Prenduan, including *pengajians*, collective *dhikr*, commemorations of Islamic holidays, and other religious rituals. The establishment of this foundation was motivated by two main factors. First, the significant increase in the number of Kiai Mannan’s students. They came one after another, and those living around Prenduan would come every day, even twice a day. As a result, Kiai Mannan’s *ndhalem* was never empty within 24 hours, and every night was filled with the sounds of *dhikr* by the *jama‘a*. Second, there was a growing number of religious gatherings suspected of deviating from mainstream Islamic teachings. Therefore, based on recognition from the Ministry of Law and Human Rights of the Republic of Indonesia, this foundation aims to establish its legal status and disassociate from activities that cause disturbances or are affiliated with ideologies contrary to the state’s ideology.

As explained in *Kitab Nurut Taubid*, the *majelis dhikr* group aims “to invite humanity to draw closer to God, to become His best servants, and to be God-fearing servants full of love and longing for God and His Messenger.” Hence, Kiai Mannan always emphasizes to his *jama‘a* the importance of remembering God through continuous *dhikr*, not only with the tongue but also with the heart, which should be reflected in their actions. Additionally, Kiai Mannan consistently highlights the greatness of the Prophet’s status and the nobility of his character, urging all followers to send blessings upon the Prophet. Kiai Mannan cannot tolerate anything that tends to diminish the honor of the Prophet.

This objective is realized in every activity of the *majelis dhikr* group, including *pengajian rutin*, daily *dhikr*, *Legian*, *Kliwonan*, and the celebration of Islamic holidays. *Pengajian rutin* involves discussions on *tawḥīd* and how to apply it in daily life, held twice a week, on Sunday and Thursday nights. There is no specific theme planned for each *pengajian*; the theme can come from Kiai Mannan himself or arise from questions posed by the congregation. As far as I have

observed, the themes of these *pengajians* revolve around topics such as sustenance, gratitude, forgiveness, salvation, blessings, intercession, supplication, the creation of man, the Prophet's role model, and more. *Pengajian rutins* are attended by a congregation of no fewer than 50 people, both men and women. Men sit in a carpet in a U-shaped formation facing Kiai Mannan, while women sit in the back in rows, which are usually unstructured. Kiai Mannan conducts these *pengajians* based on divine inspiration received by him. The duration of these gatherings can range from a minimum of four hours (8:00 AM - 12:00 PM) to a maximum of eight hours (8:00 PM - 4:00 AM).



**Figure 3.** The *jama'a* in MDNT's *Legian* in Prenduan.

The daily *dhikr* is held every evening on the second floor of the MDNT main building, from 7:00 PM to 8:00 PM, led by the congregation members on a rotational basis. This activity is attended by a portion of the congregation, typically around 20-30 men and women, especially those from the Prenduan area. The leader recites the *dhikr* using a loudspeaker, and all participants join in the *dhikr*. The *dhikr* recitation begins with *tawassul*, followed by *Ṣalawāt Jibrīl*,<sup>42</sup> *Tembang Shafā'ah*,<sup>43</sup> *tablilan*,<sup>44</sup> supplications, *Qaṣīdah*

<sup>42</sup> The recitation of *Ṣalawāt Jibrīl* is “*ṣallā Allāh ‘alā Muḥammad.*” It is named *Ṣalawāt Jibrīl* because it is believed to have been recited by Jibrīl to Prophet

*Burdah*,<sup>45</sup> and concludes with the *Ṣalawāt Tibb al-Qulūb*.<sup>46</sup> After completing this sequence of *dhikr*, each congregation member shakes hands with one another.

As their names suggest, *Kliwonan* and *Legian* are held once a month, specifically on the Thursday night of *Legi* and that of *Kliwon*<sup>47</sup> in Prenduan. Both of these *dhikr* sessions include the *tawassul*, *Ṣalawāt Jibril*, *Tembang Shafā'ah*, *tahlilan*, *Ṣalawāt al-Barzanji* with musical accompaniment, *tawajjuh*,<sup>48</sup> and conclude with *dhikr jahr*.<sup>49</sup> These two *dhikr* sessions are led directly by Kiai Mannan and

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Adam as a dowry for marrying Eve. Yudi Prayoga, "4 Keutamaan Membaca Shalawat Jibril," in <https://lampung.nu.or.id/syiar/4-keutamaan-membaca-shalawat-jibril-zOKU2> (accessed on 16 January 2022).

<sup>43</sup> *Tembang Shafā'ah* was written by Kiai Mannan and contains greetings directed to Nūr Allāh, Nūr Muḥammad, Nūr Awliyā', Nūr Malāikah, and other nūrs (lights), totaling seven greetings.

<sup>44</sup> *Tahlilan* is an activity of reciting a series of Qur'anic verses and *kalimah tayyibah* (phrases of goodness that, when recited by someone, will earn them rewards from God), which include *tasbiḥ* (reciting *subḥāna Allāh*), *taḥmid* (reciting *al-ḥamd li Allāh*), *taḥlil* (reciting *lā ilāha illā Allāh*), and *takbir* (reciting *Allāh Akbar*).

<sup>45</sup> *Qaṣīdah Burdah* is a poem consisting of 160 verses that praise the Prophet, convey moral messages, spiritual values, and a spirit of struggle. It was written by a knowledgeable and deeply devoted scholar named al-Būṣirī. This poem is found in his work titled *al-Kawākib al-Durriyah fī Maḍ Khayr al-Barriyah*. The recitation of *Qaṣīdah Burdah* is believed to have the power to ward off calamities. Emna Laisa and Nurul Qomariyah, "Tradisi Baca Burdah Sebagai Penguat Kesehatan Mental Santri di Tengah Pandemi Covid-19 (Studi Kasus di Pondok Pesantren Matsaratul Huda Panempan Pamekasan)," *Proceedings of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Islamic Studies (ICONIS)*, IAIN Madura, Pamekasan, Indonesia, 17-18 November 2021.

<sup>46</sup> *Tibb al-Qulūb* means 'healing of the hearts.' It consists of praises for the Prophet and is believed to have the power to cure various illnesses. For the recitation and its benefits, please refer to Shaykh Yūsuf b. Ismā'īl, *Sa'adat al-Darain fī al-Ṣalāt 'alā Sayyid al-Kawnayn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, n.d.), 26.

<sup>47</sup> *Legi* and *Kliwon* are two of the five names of days in the Javanese calendar, believed to have particular significance.

<sup>48</sup> *Tawajjuh* means 'turning towards God.' This part is often referred to as the core of the *dhikr*, where all the congregation sits quietly, not making any noise, creating a moment of silence. They close their eyes and try to feel the spiritual connection with God within their souls.

<sup>49</sup> *Dhikr jahr* means 'remembrance with raising one's voice' so that it can be heard at least by oneself. In this part, with raised hands, the congregation prays to God for anything they have been hoping for, releasing all shackles of desires

attended by all *jama'a* without exception, hence they are often referred to as the “*Dhikr Akbar*” (the Grand *Dhikr*). Before the *tawassul*, Kiai Mannan usually delivers a sermon lasting approximately 20 minutes. Kiai Mannan typically wears a white or black robe, a white *peci* (headgear) wrapped with a *sorban* (headband), while the *jama'a* are dressed entirely in white, including *peci*, clothing, and sarong. Some *jama'a* dress similarly to how the *murshid* dresses. Due to the large number of participants, ranging from 500 to 1000 people, both of these events use larger loudspeakers and are facilitated with LCD/monitors at various points so that every congregation member can directly see the *murshid* and all activities during these sessions. According to Kiai Mannan, the *Legian* and *Klinonan* sessions are considered *amanah* from the Prophet and must be upheld.

Every year during the month of Ramadan, MDNT organizes a “*Pondok Ramadan*” event in Prenduan, which is attended by all the congregation members. This event takes place during the last 10 days of Ramadan. The main activity of *Pondok Ramadan* is *i'tikāf* (staying)<sup>50</sup> every night. The *i'tikāf* includes *pengajian* related to themes associated with Ramadan and the virtues of *Laylat al-Qadr*. Meanwhile, *i'tikāf* is aimed at welcoming the night of *Laylat al-Qadr*, which is believed to occur within the last 10 days of Ramadan.<sup>51</sup> The *jama'a*, especially those coming from outside Madura, bring all the necessary supplies, including clothing and food. They are divided into several groups responsible for cooking on a rotating basis each night. The *Pondok Ramadan* activities

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and expectations, often leading to some of the congregation members shedding tears.

<sup>50</sup> *I'tikāf* is a worship performed by staying in a mosque. This worship is recommended for Muslims, especially during the last ten days of Ramadan. It can be a choice for Muslims to seek the blessings of *Laylat al-Qadr*. Besides the mosque, *i'tikāf* can also be carried out at home. Shaykh 'Abd al-Karīm b. Muḥammad al-Rāfi'ī, *al-'Aẓīz fi Sharḥ al-Wajīz*, Vol. 6 (Dubai: Markāz Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyah, n.d.), 503.

<sup>51</sup> This is similar to the opinions of scholars who state that *Laylat al-Qadr* occurs during the last ten nights of Ramadan, particularly on the odd-numbered nights. However, no scholar can specify a specific time because the occurrence of *Laylat al-Qadr* is a secret known only to God. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 5 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2000), 155 and 569.

conclude with the Eid al-Fitr prayer, which is led directly by Kiai Mannan.

Furthermore, this *majelis dhiker* assembly is also active in social activities and the observance of significant Islamic holidays. Thus far, the successfully conducted social activities include mass circumcisions, distribution of *zakāt al-fitr*, distribution of sacrificial meat, facilitating COVID-19 vaccinations, free health check-ups, and road repairs in the surrounding areas. In terms of healthcare services, MDNT collaborates with the Community Health Center of Pragaan Subdistrict and the Health Department of Sumenep, mediated by several members who work in these two institutions. The target beneficiaries of these social activities are not only limited to *jama'ā* but also extend to the general public, and usually take place in the MDNT premises in Prenduan. Moreover, the Islamic holidays observed by MDNT include the Islamic New Year, the Prophet's birthday (*Mawlid al-Nabi*), the Night Journey and Ascension (*Isrā' Mi'raj*), and the Revelation of the Qur'an (*Nuzūl al-Qur'an*). MDNT even celebrates national holidays, particularly Independence Day. Throughout the month of August every year, various red and white decorations adorn the MDNT environment.

Currently, MDNT has branched out into several locations, including Malang, Blitar, and Jember. In these branches, the MDNT *jama'ā* is quite substantial, unlike in Kendal, Lumajang, Jember, Bali, Lombok, Kalimantan, or Malaysia, where the number of the *jama'ā* is relatively small, not exceeding 200 people. Especially in Malang and Blitar branches, they hold *Dhiker Akbar* every month, led directly by Kiai Mannan and attended by all *jama'ā*.

Although it has its own organizational structure, MDNT heavily relies on the figure of Kiai Mannan. Kiai Mannan's views and policies automatically become the organization's views and policies, including his stance on the COVID-19 pandemic, maintaining distance from political parties, respecting religious differences, and disapproving of polygamy. Additionally, Kiai Mannan has his own system for determining the beginning of the Ramadan month, the occurrence of *Laylat al-Qadr*, and the dates of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, which are consistently followed by all its members.

## Authority Contested

With the increasing number of followers, Kiai Mannan has become a new religious authority, especially in Prenduan, Sumenep, Madura. Kiai Mannan diligently spreads the message of true righteousness and invites all of his *jamā'ua* to become the best believers who love and are loved by the God and the Prophet through the path of spiritual solitude or Sufism, which is translated into narratives and practices of Sufism that are suitable for the local Indonesian context. Over time, the number of people joining the congregation has grown. Kiai Mannan's religious authority has successfully transcended geographical, demographic, and social class boundaries. However, controversy and rejection of Kiai Mannan's teachings have also become inevitable, especially from local religious authorities, namely traditionalist NU group. In fact, MDNT is considered a deviant sect.

These rejections stem from both the perceived misleading teachings of Sufism and the figure of Kiai Mannan himself, who is considered non-authoritative. Among the points of rejection are, firstly, the recitation of the *dhikr* "*lā ilāha illā Anta-lā ilāha illā Ana*" (there is no god but I). The *dhikr* is part of the recitation in the *tahlilan*, specifically following the *dhikr* "*lā ilāha illā Allāh*" (there is no god but Allah). According to the decisions made by the Bahtsul Masail (discussion of the problems) of NU Sumenep, anyone who recites this *dhikr* is judged as (1) having apostatized both outwardly and inwardly if they understand the meaning of the recitation and believe themselves to be God-like; (2) not apostatizing if they do not understand and do not believe themselves to be like God; (3) the practice of this *dhikr* is considered forbidden (*ḥarām*) because it is not based on the clear authorization (*ijāzah*) of a scholar with a sound theological background and knowledge; and regardless of the conditions, (4) the sect that practices this *dhikr* is still considered deviant for teaching beliefs that are harmful to the faith.<sup>52</sup> "It is not *dhikr*; it is an attempt to make it *dhikr*. '*Lā ilāha illā Ana*' is not *dhikr*. That belongs solely to God. Humans should not engage in *dhikr* like that. If they continue to do so, it means they

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<sup>52</sup> "Keputusan Bahtsul Masail PCNU Sumenep di MWCNU Bluto, Ahad 11 September 2022," available at <https://pcnusumenep.or.id/bahtsul-masail/keputusan-bahtsul-masail-nu-sumenep-aliran-baru-meresahkan/> (accessed on 3 March 2023).

are committing *shirk* (associating partners with God), deviating, and claiming to be God.”<sup>53</sup>

Secondly, the claim of being able to capture *Laylat al-Qadr*.<sup>54</sup> This is related to the activities during the last 10 days of Ramadan, known as *Pondok Ramadan*. According to traditionalist groups, if this claim is taken literally, it cannot be justified because *Laylat al-Qadr* is not a tangible object. If the claim is about the certainty of attaining *Laylat al-Qadr*, it is also not justified, as attaining *Laylat al-Qadr* is a favor bestowed by God only upon those He wills. It can be justified if the claim is about attaining the virtues (*faḍilah*) of *Laylat al-Qadr* by engaging in abundant *dhikr* during the last nights of Ramadan.<sup>55</sup>

Thirdly, Kiai Mannan’s claim regarding acts of worship that can directly reach (*muṣūl*) God without the mediation of angels. Traditionalist groups believe that all acts of worship by human beings, including the acts of worship performed by a prophet, go through the mediation of angels, except for certain acts of worship such as the *dhikr* “*Lā ilāha illā Allāh Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh*” and the prayers of the oppressed.<sup>56</sup>

Fourthly, concerns regarding his background in theology and scholarship. The decision made by the Bahtsul Masail of NU Sumenep suggests that Kiai Mannan lacks a clear theological and scholarly background.<sup>57</sup> Because Kiai Mannan claims to have received direct teachings from the Prophet, he feels that he does not need to follow a specific school of thought (*madhhab*) in matters of theology. His assumption is that all schools of thought ultimately rely on the Prophet through their respective imams. He consults directly with the Prophet through *barzakhi* methods for all religious matters and rarely references specific scholars, using them only as secondary sources. This approach is difficult for

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Soleh, Sumenep, June 14, 2021.

<sup>54</sup> M. Quraish Shihab interprets *Laylat al-Qadr* as a night when God decrees the journey of Mankind and is a night of unparalleled nobility. M. Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Qur'an: Fungsi dan Peran Wahyu dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat* (Bandung: Mizan, 1999).

<sup>55</sup> “Keputusan Bahtsul Masail PCNU Sumenep di MWCNU Bluto, Ahad 11 September 2022.”

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



traditionalist groups that adhere to the al-Ash‘ārī and al-Māturidī theological schools.

However, in my opinion, the rejection by the traditionalist NU group is more likely due to Kiai Mannan’s family background and his past rather than the issue of the *barzakhi* method of sanad. Although the scholarly lineage of the *barzakhi* method is highly controversial and considered fake, NU has historically accepted this method. This can be seen in their acceptance of the Tijaniyyah Sufi Order as a recognized Sufi order (*ṭarīqah mu‘tabarah*).<sup>58</sup> Shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī, the founder and *murshid* of the Tijaniyyah, is well-known for his scholarly lineage, which traces directly back to the Prophet through the *barzakhi* method. Therefore, it seems strange that NU would question this method. The rejection appears to be more rooted in the fact that Kiai Mannan does not come from a *kiai* family, lacks a pesantren background, does not have a higher education, and has a troubled past. “He does not know anything. He used to sell mats. Now he is teaching tasawwuf and even claims to be God. He is a devil. I am ready to debate him live on YouTube.”<sup>59</sup>

So far, both Kiai Mannan and MDNT have felt no need to respond to some of these controversies or rejections. According to Kiai Mannan’s statement, no one has approached him seeking clarification (*tabayyun*) regarding his Sufi thoughts or *dhikr* practices. Even though there have been some who came forward, instead of seeking clarification, they mostly requested (if not demanded) the removal of certain elements in the *dhikr* that they deemed misleading. However, to avoid escalating tensions in the community, since December 2020, Kiai Mannan began removing the *dhikr* “*lā ilāha illā Anta-lā ilāha illā Ana*” from the *tablīlan*. This was done “...not because the *dhikr* itself was wrong, but rather to

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<sup>58</sup> Initially, the emergence of the Tijaniyyah order stirred controversy within the community due to some of its teachings and the unconventional nature of its knowledge transmission chain. The significance of this issue was so pronounced that it was discussed twice at the NU Congress, first during the 3<sup>rd</sup> NU Congress in Surabaya (1928), and later at the 6<sup>th</sup> NU Congress in Cirebon (1984). During the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress, the Tijaniyyah order’s acceptability (*mu‘tabarah*) was acknowledged, and the decisions made at the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress reinforced those of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress. Ahmad Asmuni and Hajam, *Tarekat Tijaniyah di Pesantren Buntet: Melacak Genealogi dan Polarisasinya* (Cirebon: CV. Pangger, 2022), 185-186.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Raihan, Sumenep, June 2, 2021.

maintain a conducive atmosphere. The *dhikr* recitations remained correct, and it would serve as a reference for the *jama'a* in the future. If there are *jama'a* who wish to use that *dhikr* again, it is valid because the *murshid* had previously performed it.”<sup>60</sup>

Kiai Mannan's statement regarding the lack of *tabayyun* (seeking clarification) from the community may be accurate because the decisions made during the Bahtshul Masail conducted by NU Sumenep were based on issues circulating in the community and the testimony of former MDNT members, not on individuals who are still considered members, let alone Kiai Mannan himself. In the description of the Bahtsul Masail, it is written, “according to the issues circulating in the community, both from former members and others...” This can be understood because from the beginning, the decision text never mentioned the name Kiai Mannan or MDNT located in Prenduan. The text only referred to “a group of residents suspected of promoting an unusual stream... in one area in Sumenep.”<sup>61</sup> However, even though the *murshid's* name and group were kept confidential, it is not difficult for anyone reading it to deduce the group or stream in question because Kiai Mannan and MDNT have become very well-known, especially in Sumenep.

## Conclusion

This study delves into understanding the phenomenon of religious authority of a Sufi master (*murshid*) in Madura, who, despite having an unconventional background, managed to attract many followers and become an influential religious authority. This study applies Max Weber's theory of charismatic authority as the primary framework to explain this phenomenon. One of the main arguments developed in this research is the central role of the *murshid's* charisma in building his authority. This charisma is associated with charismatic claims, such as spiritual connection with the Prophet, receiving revelations, and possessing the ability to bring *baraka*. This charisma successfully inspires followers, making them believe, fear, and flock to become part of the religious community of the *murshid*. This charisma serves as a strong and convincing attraction for those seeking spiritual

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Fadil, Malang, August 8, 2021.

<sup>61</sup> “Keputusan Bahtsul Masail PCNU Sumenep di MWCNU Bluto, Ahad 11 September 2022,”

guidance and religious leadership. Additionally, this research also emphasizes the crucial role of the *majelis dhikr* (religious chanting group) in consolidating the *jama'a* (community) and strengthening the authority of the *murshid*.

Finally, this research provides profound insights into how religious authority can develop and endure in the context of Madura, especially in situations where a Sufi teacher has an unconventional background. The religious authority of the *murshid* is built upon charisma and a solid community of followers. This serves as an intriguing example of the complexity of religious authority dynamics in society.

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## 2. Interviews

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- Hasan, a 37-year-old senior *jama'a*, Sumenep, May 18, 2021.
- Herman, a 57-year-old tobacco farmer, Sumenep, June 24, 2021.
- Joko, a 45-year-old *ustadh* from Blitar, in Sumenep, October 7, 2021.
- Kiai Haji Abdul Mannan, Sumenep, September 13, 2021.
- Latif, a 40-year-old civil servant and teacher, Sumenep, March 22, 2022.
- Maya, a 20-year-old university student, Sumenep, October 7, 2021.
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