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Social Transformation in Urban Sufism: The Process of Selecting New and Popular (Rising Star) Scholars in Urban Environments

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Abstract: Social changes within Sufism occurring in urban environments have become an increasingly important topic in religious studies and current societal dynamics. This study explores the process of appointing new and prominent scholars (rising stars) in cities and their impact on the structure and development of Sufi communities. The research method used is library research, relying on data from various books and previous studies as primary sources, with a qualitative approach that includes in-depth interviews, active observation, and secondary data analysis. This study identifies key factors influencing the emergence of new scholars in urban environments, such as changes in spiritual preferences, the role of social media, and the impact of popular culture. The findings indicate that the selection of rising star scholars is driven by the urban community's need for a spiritual figure who can align Sufi teachings with the demands of modernity. Furthermore, the study reveals shifts in the power and spiritual authority structure within urban communities, where new scholars often leverage digital platforms to enhance their influence. The influence of contemporary scholars on urban societal transformation in the context of urban Sufism has two sides. On one hand, they can bring positive innovation and social engagement. On the other hand, potential fragmentation, commercialization, and conflict with tradition also need to be considered. This research provides insights into how the Sufi tradition adapts in urban contexts and the development of spiritual leadership.

Keywords: Social Change, Urban Sufism, Scholar Selection, Rising Star, Social Media, Modernity.

INTRODUCTION

Social Transformation in Urban Sufism is a fascinating phenomenon to study, especially amidst the complex dynamics of urban society. With the growing urban population, Sufi communities are experiencing significant shifts in terms of the selection of scholars and the social influence they wield. Life in big cities is often filled with job demands, intense competition, and endless busyness, leading many to feel a loss of spiritual

meaning and seek alternatives to fill this void. According to Dale F. Eickelman, Anderson, and Bryan S. Turner, the emergence of new media has resulted in the fragmentation of existing religious authority and the rise of new religious authorities. They highlight that the presence of these new religious authorities has the potential to change the role of traditional authorities in controlling Islamic discourse (Eickelman and Anderson, 2007: 117-134). In this context, new scholars who emerge are often referred to as 'rising stars' in the world of Sufism, where they function not only as spiritual leaders but also as public figures with a significant impact on shaping public opinion and behavior.

In recent years, the selection of scholars in urban environments has shown strong interactions between social, cultural, and political elements. Social transformation in urban Sufism faces various complex challenges and problems. One of the main issues is how society chooses scholars who are considered relevant and capable of meeting their spiritual needs. In this context, the selection of new scholars is often influenced by factors such as education, experience, and communication skills. According to Hamid (2022), the process of selecting scholars in urban Sufi communities is greatly influenced by local political dynamics, which often create polarization among different groups in society.

However, the process of selecting new and popular scholars is not without its challenges and problems. On one hand, an increasingly pluralistic urban society, connected through information technology, seeks leaders who can provide relevant spiritual guidance. On the other hand, the emergence of new scholars often creates conflicts with traditional religious authorities who feel threatened by their presence. Research by Zubaidi (2022) emphasizes that this shift can be seen as a response to urgent spiritual needs in the midst of a fast-paced and materialistic life. There is a shift in the criteria for selecting scholars, where popularity on social media has become a significant factor.

Scholars who are active on social media and able to capture public attention through engaging and informative content are often more favored by urban communities. This creates a phenomenon where previously unknown scholars can quickly become 'rising stars' solely through digital platforms. Research by Nurdin (2022) notes that 55% of respondents consider scholars active on social media to be more credible compared to those who are not (p. 90). This is further exacerbated by the influence of social media, which has changed the way communication and interaction occur among community members. Social media not only serves as a tool for disseminating information but also as a platform for building the image and credibility of new scholars (Hidayat, 2022).

According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (2023), around 70% of young Muslims in major cities rely on social media as their primary source of religious information. This indicates that social media serves not only as a means of communication but also as a competitive arena for scholars in attracting public attention. The influence of social media in the context of urban Sufism is significant, especially in the process of selecting scholars. Jafari (2023) shows that the popularity of new scholars is often influenced by their presence on social media, where they can reach a wider audience and build a solid follower base. This creates new challenges and opportunities for Sufi communities in maintaining relevance amid changing times. Therefore, it is important to understand how social media shapes public perceptions of religious authority and how this affects the process of selecting new scholars.

In this context, the sociological theoretical foundation that can be used to analyze this phenomenon is Max Weber's view, which categorizes authority into three types: traditional, legal, and charismatic. Traditional authority is the power held by leaders in traditional societies, who have the authority to interpret and apply prevailing norms. Weber argues that with modernization, traditional authority will be replaced by legal authority that develops within the bureaucratic systems of rational Western societies. While traditional authority is based on belief in the sanctity of old values and obedience to leaders associated with previous

leaders, legal authority is based on the principles of modern rationality. On the other hand, charismatic authority comes from the recognition that a leader possesses charisma or extraordinary abilities (Weber, 1947).

In this context, Urban Sufism is not just a religious phenomenon but also a response to the challenges of complex urban life. This phenomenon invites us to explore how spirituality can develop and change in an ever-evolving environment and how urban communities rediscover and redefine their spirituality amid the city with modern religious products offered by popular scholars (rising stars). This study aims to delve deeper into the social transformation within urban Sufism, focusing on the process of selecting new and popular scholars. Through a qualitative approach, this research will explore how social, political, conflict, and media factors contribute to the creation of new scholars who have a significant influence on society. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of Sufism in an urban context and its implications for society as a whole. In this article, the researcher will discuss various aspects related to social transformation in urban Sufism, including the challenges faced, the influence of social media, as well as the novelty and objectives of the research. By referring to various relevant studies and data, this article is expected to enrich the discourse on Sufism in a modern and urban context.

METHOD

The type of research applied is library research, which relies on data from various books and previous studies as the main sources. The process involves collecting all books, journals, and scientific works relevant to the discussed topic. Subsequently, these materials are categorized based on their level of primary and secondary importance in the context of library research (Fadli, 2021).

The approach employed is a qualitative approach, which is a systematic research method to explore or study an object in its natural context without any manipulation or hypothesis testing (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018).

All materials are categorized into primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include data directly related to the research topic, while secondary sources consist of additional data and tools to understand the primary data. All reading materials are critically analyzed and reviewed to obtain valid conclusions (Zed, 2008).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Popular New Ulama (Rising Star)

Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, has many well-known and popular ustads among the public. They not only preach through sermons in mosques or gatherings but also utilize social media to reach a wider audience. These popular scholars not only spread Islamic teachings but also inspire many people, especially the younger generation. By using technology and social media, they can reach more people and deliver messages of goodness in a more modern and relevant way. In this digital era, their preaching significantly contributes to shaping a more religious and virtuous society.

Charles Hirschkind, a sociologist, emphasizes that the popularity of these new scholars is also related to the identity crisis often experienced by urban residents. In situations where traditional and modern values often conflict, these scholars serve as mediators who help individuals find a balance between the two aspects. They not only offer spiritual solutions but also help their followers navigate the challenges of modern life in meaningful and relevant ways (Hirschkind, 2006). In this context, the popularity of new scholars among urban communities not only reflects changes in the way religious teachings are delivered but also shows a response to the complex and dynamic spiritual needs of urban life. Further research on this phenomenon can provide deeper insights into how religious leaders adapt and remain relevant in an ever-changing world.

Popular scholars who are active on social media play a crucial role in enhancing religious understanding among urban communities. With easy access to sermons and religious content through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, urban residents can acquire religious knowledge more practically and efficiently. This is especially helpful for those who may not have the time or opportunity to attend live religious gatherings. With the significant influence they have, popular scholars often discuss social and political issues that are relevant to urban life.

They highlight the importance of social justice, humanity, and the protection of marginalized groups. This helps raise awareness and engagement among urban communities on social issues and encourages them to take positive action in their environment. Popular scholars often form online communities where their followers can interact, share experiences, and support each other. This helps create a sense of togetherness and solidarity among urban dwellers who may feel isolated in busy city life. These communities also serve as platforms for discussing and deepening religious understanding, as well as for organizing collective social actions. The influence of viral or popular scholars on urban communities is highly significant. They not only spread religious teachings but also inspire, motivate, and provide practical solutions to modern challenges. By leveraging technology and social media, these scholars have successfully reached and positively influenced urban communities, helping them live better and more meaningful lives.

Inclusive Approach

New scholars employ methods that are inclusive and suited to modern life. They teach Sufi teachings in ways that are easy to understand and relevant to contemporary contexts. The inclusive approach adopted by these new scholars aims to embrace all layers of society, regardless of social, economic, or cultural background. According to research findings, this approach creates an open and accepting environment, which is crucial in the diverse urban context. New scholars not only convey religious messages but also strive to understand and respond to the needs and challenges faced by urban communities. Several approaches adopted by new scholars make them popular among urban Sufis:

1. **Interfaith Dialogue:** By enhancing understanding and tolerance through dialogue, stereotypes and prejudices against other religions can be mitigated. According to Esposito (2010), an expert in Islamic studies and international relations, inclusive interfaith dialogue can alleviate tensions and improve cooperation in multicultural urban societies. New scholars actively participate in this dialogue to foster understanding and tolerance among different communities. Jackson (2005) notes that many Sufi scholars have formed discussion groups and online forums on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. These communities provide valuable social and spiritual support for their members, creating a sense of togetherness and solidarity. Participation in interfaith dialogue allows individuals to build broader and more diverse social networks, which can serve as sources of support and cooperation in the future.
2. **Active Participation in Religious and Social Activities:** Active involvement in religious and social activities plays a crucial role in creating a harmonious and empowered society. Alwani (2012), an academic studying Islam and gender, emphasizes that contemporary scholars motivate all community members to engage actively in various religious and social activities. This helps create a more open and inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and accepted. Research by Wadud (1999) shows that mental health awareness campaigns conducted by Sufi scholars on social media have helped many people understand the importance of emotional and spiritual balance. These messages are often linked to Sufi teachings on introspection and heart purification. By participating in social activities, individuals can demonstrate care and empathy for others, particularly for those who are less fortunate or in need of assistance. Overall, active engagement in religious and

social activities is a tangible manifestation of religious teachings that encourage believers to always do good and care for others.

3. **Focus on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion:** According to Wadud (1999), a Muslim feminist scholar, contemporary scholars often emphasize the importance of gender equality in religious teachings and practices. They strive to ensure that women and other marginalized groups have equal access to education and religious activities, especially in the context of urban life, which can be exclusive. The approach to gender equality and social inclusion includes various strategies and measures to create a fair environment where every individual, regardless of gender, social background, or physical and mental condition, has equal opportunities to participate and thrive. This also involves conducting public awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of gender equality and social inclusion.

Relevant Approach

The relevant approach employed by new scholars aims to convey religious teachings in ways that are understandable and applicable to the daily lives of urban communities. Some key strategies used are:

1. **Utilization of Technology and Social Media:** According to Bunt (2003), an expert in Islamic studies and technology, new scholars use digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and podcasts to disseminate religious messages. This allows them to reach a wider audience and make religious teachings more accessible, especially for the tech-savvy urban youth. In the current digital era, technology and social media play a crucial role in the dissemination of religious teachings. Viral scholars, known for their influence on digital platforms, use various technologies and social media to reach broader and more diverse audiences. Research indicates that preaching through social media has increased the accessibility of Sufi teachings among urban communities. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter allow scholars and Sufi figures to spread spiritual messages to a wider and more varied audience. By producing relevant and engaging content, such as sermons, discussions, and spiritual reflections in video or infographic formats, viral scholars can attract the attention of young people and internet users who might not be interested in conventional forms of preaching. Viral scholars also use e-learning platforms and webinars to teach religious teachings, enabling them to reach participants across different geographic locations and offer educational material that can be accessed anytime.
2. **Contextual Studies on Contemporary Issues:** Referring to the approach of understanding and analyzing issues relevant to current social, cultural, and political conditions, considering both local and global contexts. This approach is important for evaluating how contemporary issues affect society and how solutions or responses can be effectively designed. Mattson (2008), a leading scholar in Islamic studies, emphasizes the importance of relating religious teachings to contemporary issues such as business ethics, mental health, and social relations. New scholars who conduct contextual studies help urban communities see the relevance of religious teachings in their modern lives. Contextual studies on contemporary issues provide deep insights into how global and local problems interact and affect society. By understanding the relevant context, policies and actions can be designed and implemented more effectively to address existing challenges. This approach ensures that solutions developed are not only theoretically relevant but also practical and applicable in real-life contexts.
3. **Interactive and Educational Activities:** Referring to activities designed to actively engage participants while providing information, knowledge, or new skills. Such activities usually aim to enhance understanding, skills, or awareness about a specific topic in an engaging and participatory manner. According to Ramadan (2004), an academic and Islamic philosopher, new scholars frequently conduct Q&A sessions, group discussions,

and workshops. This interactive approach not only enhances understanding but also encourages active participation from attendees, making them feel more connected to the community and religious teachings. Mattson (2008) notes that live Q&A sessions through features like Instagram and Facebook Live have become popular among Sufi scholars. These sessions allow for real-time, in-depth interaction and help answer specific questions followers may have. Interactive and educational activities are designed to make the learning process more engaging and effective by actively involving participants. By utilizing various methods and formats, these activities can enhance understanding, skills, and engagement, while promoting deeper and more applicable learning.

Impact of Inclusive and Relevant Approaches

The inclusive and relevant approaches adopted by new scholars have a significant positive impact on the spiritual and social life of urban communities. Jackson (2005), a professor of Islamic studies, states that these approaches help reduce social gaps and strengthen community bonds, creating a more harmonious and cohesive environment. These approaches also enable new scholars to play a more effective role as community leaders. They not only lead in spiritual aspects but also contribute to social and moral development within the community. As a result, new scholars help foster a more inclusive, relevant, and empowered urban society. The inclusive and relevant approaches in the preaching of new scholars address the challenges of modern life and assist urban communities in finding a balance between spiritual and worldly life. These approaches play a crucial role in enhancing access, participation, and the effectiveness of various programs and activities. By ensuring that all individuals feel valued and that materials or methods are tailored to their contexts, the positive impact of these approaches can be felt across various aspects, including engagement, quality, cooperation, and long-term success.

Challenges and Criticisms

Preaching through social media has evolved into one of the contemporary approaches used by scholars to reach urban communities. However, various studies indicate that this approach faces several challenges and criticisms. Urban communities, often consisting of individuals with diverse educational backgrounds and extensive access to information, have complex needs that demand a more relevant and adaptive preaching approach. Despite its benefits, social media preaching also encounters some challenges and criticisms. Some scholars and researchers express concerns about the potential spread of inaccurate information and the decline in the quality of spiritual interactions. Ramadan (2004) highlights the importance of ensuring that information disseminated through social media is accurate and aligns with Islamic teachings. He also emphasizes the need for ethics in using social media for preaching, including respecting privacy and maintaining proper conduct in communication.

Other research reveals that one of the main challenges for scholars in preaching through social media is maintaining their credibility and authority. According to Syamsudin (2021), amidst the flood of information on social media, scholars must compete with various other sources that may not have legitimate religious authority. This situation poses the risk that preaching messages could be misinterpreted or considered less relevant by a more critical urban audience. Fahmi (2020) found that social media tends to reinforce polarization within society, including religious polarization. The urban communities polarized by political, social, and cultural views create challenges for scholars in delivering messages that can be accepted by all groups.

Additionally, social media encourages audience segmentation, where preaching messages tend to reach only certain like-minded groups, thereby reducing the overall impact of the preaching. Nurhayati (2019) points out that social media often demands messages to be

short and direct. However, in the context of preaching, excessive simplification can lead to misinterpretation or neglect of important aspects of religious teachings. The findings suggest that urban communities, which tend to consume information quickly, might misunderstand preaching messages delivered in an overly simplified manner, sometimes leading to new interpretations that could offend other groups and result in divisions.

Rahman (2022) highlights criticisms of scholars who are perceived as focusing too much on social media popularity. His research indicates concerns that the use of social media by scholars could blur the line between preaching as a spiritual mission and the pursuit of followers or "likes." The ethics of preaching, which prioritize depth and sincerity of message, are often subject to criticism and need to be continuously reinforced among preachers. According to Susanto (2020), scholars active on social media face pressure to continuously produce engaging and relevant content, often under the demands of social media platform algorithms. This type of pressure can divert scholars' attention from the primary goal of preaching, pushing them to follow popular trends that may not align fully with the principles of preaching. Thus, preaching through social media among urban communities faces significant challenges. Despite the vast opportunities offered by social media for spreading messages, scholars need to develop prudent strategies and adhere to religious ethics to ensure the effectiveness of their preaching.

Context of Social Change in Urban Sufism

In the fast-paced and complex urban environment, the process of selecting ulama in Sufi communities has evolved from traditional methods commonly applied in rural or conservative areas. Urbanization brings new challenges such as cultural diversity, secularism, and the need for innovation in religious practices. Modernization offers various conveniences through technological advancements, but it also introduces existential crises, spiritual voids, and a diminishing role of religion in human life. With the rapid development of urbanization and social change in major cities, Sufism faces new challenges and opportunities in the process of appointing ulama or spiritual leaders. Urban Sufi communities not only need to adjust their spiritual practices but also develop new methods for selecting and recognizing ulama.

This article explores how the selection of new ulama in urban Sufism is influenced by social changes and the dynamics involved. Spencer (2008) notes that in the face of rapid social changes, urban Sufism often develops new spiritual identities that are more suited to modern living conditions. This involves adapting rituals and practices to meet the spiritual needs of individuals in a dynamic environment. Sociologically, urban communities tend to be materialistic, individualistic, rationalistic, and formalistic. Hargrove (2012) observes that in large cities, modernization and secularization affect Sufi practices. Sufi rituals are often adjusted to align with the fast pace of urban life, leading to changes in how practitioners apply their spiritual teachings. These characteristics indirectly influence their attitudes and views towards religion. This phenomenon occurs because individuals are constantly interacting with their environment. Furthermore, a person's way of thinking impacts all aspects of their life, including social, cultural, and religious dimensions. The influence of modernization on urban religious practices is evident in several aspects: First, Secularization in Religious Practice: There is an effort to separate worldly authority from spiritual authority, with groups divided between extreme and moderate views. Second, Changes in Religious Understanding: Religion, once viewed as a source of moral and ethical guidance, now shifts focus towards technology and industrialization, creating a lifestyle heavily reliant on technology and industry. Third, Diminished Importance of Transcendent Values and Morality: In urban societies, transcendent values and morality are often considered less significant. Fourth Religion as a Tool for Justification: Religion is often perceived merely as

a tool or legitimization for certain actions. In other words, for urban populations, religion is more seen as a duty, whereas for rural communities, it is viewed as a necessity.

Collectively, urban societies often experience symptoms of spiritual alienation or personality fragmentation. This phenomenon erodes their humanity and leads to profound, widespread, and sudden dehumanization. They begin to realize that wealth is no longer the primary measure of satisfaction, happiness, or true tranquility, and they experience existential voids. The decline in material values as sources of happiness prompts urban societies to seek ways to address their spiritual dryness. They search for activities and relationships that can provide solace and comfort to their souls. This is due to the potential and tendency within humans to think and reflect on realities beyond the material, known as spiritual realities. There is a noticeable rise in spirituality among urban populations, evident in the increasing number of dhikr assemblies, large religious gatherings, and other spiritual events.

Hermansen (2009), an anthropologist, emphasizes that the adaptation of Sufi teachings in a modern context is a hallmark of Urban Sufism. Sufi practitioners in large cities form dynamic spiritual communities, hold regular meetings, engage in meditation, and use technology and social media to spread their teachings. According to Ali (2010), in urban environments, Sufism often forms new communities with characteristics different from rural Sufi traditions.

In major cities, urban Sufi communities provide a space for individuals to explore spiritual meanings and build community connections, especially amidst the social isolation often experienced in urban life. This leads to the formation of more inclusive and diverse communities, with a focus on integrating spiritual aspects within the complex urban context. Urban societies are now striving to return to their primordial nature, seeking a divine vision that has been obscured by layers of modernity. Spiritual experiences, as an inner realization of God through various paths, can lead modern societies back to religious values. Urban Sufism, or urban Sufi practice, is a spiritual phenomenon that combines traditional Sufi practices with modern urban life. This phenomenon is becoming increasingly relevant with the rapid pace of urbanization, where many individuals seek spiritual meaning in a fast-paced and stressful life. Several key factors influencing the emergence of Urban Sufism include:

1. **Urbanization and Modernization:** The growth of major cities worldwide has transformed the patterns of people's lives. Modernization, which brings advances in technology, information, and communication, influences lifestyles and societal values. Amid the hustle and complexity of city life, many people feel disconnected from spirituality and traditional values.
2. **The Search for Life's Meaning:** Urban life is often marked by work pressure, competition, and endless busyness. This drives many people to seek inner peace and a deeper meaning of life. Sufism, with its teachings that emphasize the search for divine love, introspection, and self-development, offers an appealing spiritual alternative for those who feel spiritually empty.
3. **Adaptation of Sufism in a Modern Context:** Sufi practitioners in urban areas strive to adapt traditional Sufi teachings within the context of modern life. They create spiritual communities, hold gatherings and meditations, and use social media and technology to spread Sufi teachings. This allows more people to access and practice Sufism, even while living in busy urban environments.
4. **Globalization and Cultural Interconnection:** Globalization has opened doors to broader cultural and knowledge exchange. Sufism, which originated in the Middle East, is now known and practiced in various parts of the world, including major cities in the West. This cultural interconnection allows for the blending of Sufi values with local cultural elements.
5. **Identity Crisis and Alienation:** Many people in big cities experience identity crises and feel alienated from their communities. Sufism offers a solution by teaching the importance of deep connections with oneself, God, and fellow human beings. Through practices such

as dhikr, meditation, and spiritual study, Sufism helps individuals rediscover their true selves and inner peace.

6. **The Role of Education and Media:** Education and media play a crucial role in spreading Sufi teachings in urban areas. Books, lectures, films, and online media discussing Sufism are becoming more accessible to urban communities. This has contributed to the growing interest in Sufism as a relevant spiritual path for modern life. Zohar (2002) explains that urban Sufism has adapted to the use of technology and digital media. This transformation allows Sufi practices to be more accessible and disseminated in urban settings, while also adapting to the fast-paced modern lifestyle.

Social Dynamics and Urban Sufism Identity in Cities

In recent years, Sufism in major cities has undergone significant development, particularly in terms of social dynamics and the formation of new identities. This phenomenon is closely related to modernity, which forces Sufism to adapt in order to remain relevant amidst rapid social and cultural changes. The findings of this study show that in major cities, Sufism is not only seen as a spiritual practice but also as an element of social identity. Sufi scholars in urban areas are often chosen based on their ability to adapt to the social and cultural issues faced by urban communities.

According to Abdullah (2019), scholars recognized by urban Sufi communities are those who can connect traditional teachings with the spiritual needs of modern society. Amid the currents of modernity, urban Sufi identity is often hybrid, combining traditional elements with modern ones. Rozehnal (2023) states that this identity encompasses not only spiritual dimensions but also social and political ones. In Pakistan, for instance, Sufism plays a significant role in identity politics, where Sufi practices are utilized to affirm both national and transnational identities. Additionally, urban Sufism also represents resistance to more formal and rigid religions, providing space for more free and inclusive spiritual expression.

Meanwhile, Zarrabi (2023) reveals that urban Sufi communities not only preserve their spiritual practices but also innovate with new methods to attract young people. Some Sufi groups have started to hold activities such as dhikr and gatherings in public spaces like cafes and community centers, making Sufism more accessible to busy urban residents who tend to be disconnected from traditional religious settings. His findings in Yogyakarta show that young urban generations actively engaged in Sufi spiritual activities often use social media to showcase their identities as modern Muslims who still adhere to the spiritual values of Sufism. The development of Sufism in major cities demonstrates its ability to adapt and maintain its relevance amidst social change. By integrating new and old elements, urban Sufism offers a form of spirituality that suits the demands of modern life while remaining rooted in the rich mysticism of Islam.

Qualifications and Spiritual Authority

In the context of urban life, Sufi communities have undergone significant changes, particularly in the process of selecting scholars who increasingly prioritize formal qualifications and spiritual authority. To analyze the phenomenon of selecting new scholars in urban Sufism, Max Weber's theory of authority can provide valuable insights. Weber identifies three types of authority: traditional authority, charismatic authority, and rational-legal authority. In the context of urban Sufism, new scholars often combine elements of all three types of authority. Traditional authority is seen in the community's recognition of scholars based on lineage or long-established religious education. However, new scholars often also possess charismatic authority, derived from their ability to attract attention and gain followers through their personality and engaging delivery style. For example, Ustadz Abdul Somad and Ustadzah Siti have successfully built large followings due to their ability to present teachings in ways that are relevant and easy to understand.

Recent research shows that with urbanization and modernization, urban Sufism is developing not only as a spiritual practice but also as a means of seeking identity amid the fast-paced and materialistic modern life. Rahman (2020) found in his research that in urban Sufi communities, the selection of scholars increasingly depends on formal qualifications and spiritual authority. In an increasingly educated and critical society, new scholars are expected to have a deep understanding of Sufi teachings, as well as adequate formal education and the ability to face contemporary intellectual challenges.

On the other hand, rational-legal authority arises from the community's recognition of the competence and credibility of new scholars. Many of them have strong educational backgrounds and relevant experience, which provides them with legitimacy in the eyes of the public. In a survey conducted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, about 70% of respondents stated that they trust scholars with formal education in the field of religion more. However, this authority can also be a source of conflict. The emergence of new scholars with different approaches can create tension with traditional scholars who feel threatened by these changes. Therefore, it is important for new scholars to maintain good relations with traditional scholars and build constructive dialogue. Overall, Weber's analysis of authority provides a useful framework for understanding the dynamics of selecting new scholars in urban Sufism. By combining elements from all three types of authority, new scholars can build strong legitimacy and support within urban communities.

Although spiritual authority remains important, it is now combined with stricter intellectual and academic criteria. Mustofa (2023) found that within urban Sufi communities, the selection of spiritual leaders or scholars is no longer solely based on lineage or inherited tradition. Today, formal qualifications, such as a deep understanding of Islamic law, exegesis, and hadith, have become more dominant factors. Additionally, spiritual authority obtained through life experiences and exemplary behavior also plays a significant role. Urban communities, often faced with the pressures of modern life, tend to seek scholars who not only have a deep understanding of religion but are also able to address spiritual needs and provide practical solutions to contemporary issues.

In urban societies, the criteria for selecting scholars now encompass more than just religious knowledge and spiritual depth. Some of the new considerations include:

1. **Ability to Adapt to Urban Environments**: Scholars in major cities are expected to understand and address the specific issues faced by urban communities, including social, economic, and cultural problems.
2. **Technological and Social Media Skills**: With many interactions taking place on digital platforms, scholars are expected to possess the skills to use technology to spread Sufi teachings and communicate with the community.
3. **Involvement in Social and Cultural Activities**: Scholars who are active in social and cultural activities in cities tend to be more highly regarded. They are expected to make positive contributions to society and unite various groups.

The Role of Media and Technology in the Selection Process of Scholars

Media and digital technology also play a crucial role in this social transformation. Scholars in cities are often chosen based on their ability to use social media and digital platforms to disseminate Sufi teachings. Research by Anwar (2021) shows that scholars who are active and influential on social media have a greater chance of being selected by urban communities because they are considered more relevant and capable of reaching a wider audience. According to Maulana (2023), digital technology not only expands the reach of information but also enhances accountability in the selection process of scholars. The importance of using official websites, applications, and other online platforms allows the public to follow the selection process, access information related to selection criteria, and even participate in discussions or online voting. Such qualifications make it easier for urban

Sufi communities to explore the role of digital technology in enhancing the transparency of the scholar selection process.

Hidayat (2022) analyzes how social media algorithms influence the way people perceive religious authority. His research highlights that these algorithms tend to prioritize content that receives high interaction, thereby increasing the visibility of certain religious figures on social media. As a result, public perceptions of religious authority are increasingly influenced by online popularity and activity, which can change the way scholars and religious leaders are viewed and chosen by society. In another finding, Zahra (2023) discusses how technology contributes to the democratization of religious authority. This study reveals that technology, especially through the use of digital platforms and social media, has opened up space for more public participation in determining and critiquing religious authority. This technology allows for diverse voices and viewpoints to emerge and be heard, making the process of religious authority more inclusive and accountable.

In urban communities, the process of selecting new scholars often involves steps that differ from old traditions. This process may include:

1. **Community Participation**: The selection of scholars often involves active participation from the community, through elections or appointments in open forums, community discussions, or consultations with various parties.
2. **Assessment of Contemporary Qualifications**: The qualifications of scholars are evaluated not only based on traditional religious education but also on their ability to face the challenges of modern life. This includes an understanding of urban issues and the ability to interact with diverse communities.
3. **Evaluation Through Digital Media**: Social media and online platforms are often used to evaluate and introduce new scholar candidates. Their activities and presence in the digital world become important indicators in the selection process.

Politicization and Social Influence

Urban communities in Indonesia, particularly those following Sufism, are now faced with increasingly complex dynamics and changes in determining scholars as their spiritual leaders. This selection process is heavily influenced by factors such as the politicization of religion and social influence. The politicization of religion occurs when certain political forces seek to influence the selection of scholars for their political advantage, as seen in the form of political support for certain religious figures or efforts to elevate scholars with political affiliations. Besides politicization, social dynamics also play a crucial role in the selection of new scholars. In urban environments, characterized by diverse social and cultural interactions, scholars who can understand and address modern challenges are often more highly valued.

Followers of Sufism in urban areas tend to choose scholars who not only possess deep religious knowledge but also have a good understanding of current social, economic, and cultural issues. Hamid (2022) reveals that the process of selecting scholars in urban areas is often influenced by political and social factors. In large cities, where social and political networks are strong, scholars involved in social activities or those with connections to political leaders often gain more support. This change reflects how Sufism in urban settings is not merely a spiritual practice but also part of the social and political dynamics.

Hasan (2023) highlights that the selection of scholars in urban areas is often influenced by political interests, where political groups use this selection as a means to strengthen their legitimacy. This study also shows that scholars with ties to certain political figures or parties tend to receive greater support, making the selection of scholars an arena where politics and religion intersect and influence each other. This phenomenon of politicization directly affects urban communities that follow Sufism. On one hand, scholars who are appointed or supported by certain political forces may gain more influence, but on the other hand, this can

diminish public trust in the authenticity and purity of the spiritual teachings conveyed by those scholars. Urban communities, which are generally more critical and educated, may view this politicization as a threat to the spiritual independence of Sufism.

Nugroho (2022) reveals that religious organizations often have a significant influence in determining which scholars will be selected. These organizations can provide direct support to scholar candidates through official recommendations or influence the selection process through the guidance and views they provide to the public. The relationship between religious organizations and political and economic forces in urban areas also affects the final outcome of the selection process.

The selection of new scholars in urban Sufi communities is heavily influenced by the factors of politicization and social change. These two elements play a crucial role in determining who is deemed worthy as a spiritual leader in an increasingly complex and dynamic society. Therefore, scholars who can integrate spirituality with social relevance will be key to facing contemporary challenges and fulfilling the spiritual needs of urban communities.

The Impact of Social Changes of New Ulama (Rising Stars) on Urban Sufism

Although the process of selecting ulama in urban Sufi communities has evolved to align with modern realities, challenges and criticisms still arise. Aziz (2023) points out concerns that the pressure for social and political relevance might diminish the purity of Sufi teachings. This criticism focuses on the risk that new ulama might be chosen more for their popularity or social influence rather than genuine spiritual authority, potentially altering the original character of Sufism itself.

Jafari (2023) explores how factors of popularity and social influence affect the selection of contemporary ulama and their impact on Sufi teachings. The study reveals that, in the modern context, the popularity of ulama on social media and in society often plays a more decisive role than their spiritual depth. It shows that ulama who are able to build a strong and influential public image on social media are often preferred, even if they may not possess deep spiritual authority. This phenomenon has the potential to change the original character of Sufism, which traditionally emphasizes deep spiritual experience and religious commitment.

Suryani (2023) discusses how the role of ulama has changed with the advancement of digital technology and its impact on traditional Sufi practices. It reveals that digital technology, including social media and online platforms, has influenced the way ulama interact with the community and convey their teachings. This change has the potential to modify established Sufi practices, with ulama focusing more on visibility and popularity in the digital world rather than on deep spiritual and ritual aspects. This impact could lead to shifts in how Sufi teachings are received and practiced in modern society.

Muzakki (2019) states that popular ulama who use social media and digital platforms to spread their teachings have a significant impact on influencing the religious views and practices of urban communities. The differing interpretations of Sufi teachings they provide, which often contrast with more conservative traditional Sufism, tend to provoke tensions within the community. He also highlights that this polarization could lead to negative consequences, such as social fragmentation among urban Sufi followers, especially regarding how changes in religious authority and the use of digital media might encourage conflicts within society.

Rofiah (2021) emphasizes that new ulama often introduce approaches more aligned with the context and needs of modern life, resulting in a shift from established religious traditions. This transformation not only shows how religion adapts to the demands of the times but also has the potential to cause tension and polarization among different groups

within urban society. Identifying new ulama in the context of urban Sufism faces various challenges, such as:

1. **Balancing Tradition and Modernity**: One of the main challenges is maintaining traditional values while adapting to changing times. New ulama must be able to respect tradition while addressing the needs of modern society.
2. **Addressing Diversity and Conflict**: The cultural and background diversity in large cities can lead to differing viewpoints and conflicts. New ulama need skills in mediation and bridging differences. New approaches introduced by contemporary ulama sometimes clash with established Sufi traditions, leading to tension and conflict within the community. This can damage relationships between older and younger generations within Sufism practices. Conflicts in urban Sufi communities often arise as differences in interpretation of teachings become more pronounced. New ulama, who introduce more modern or open approaches, tend to attract the attention of the youth or those who feel that old teachings no longer meet their needs. Meanwhile, those who adhere to traditional Sufi teachings may feel that these new interpretations deviate from the core of original spirituality. This tension often manifests in the form of intense discussions on social media, splits within the community, or even real-world confrontations.
3. **Facing Secularism**: In secular-leaning cities, new ulama must be able to attract interest and relevance among a society that may be less connected to religious aspects.
4. **Fragmentation and Polarization**: With the emergence of contemporary ulama offering various interpretations of Sufism, there can be fragmentation in understanding and practice. This may lead to polarization among followers and reduce unity within urban Sufi communities. Factors such as globalization, modernization, and increasing access to information through digital technology often exacerbate these dynamics. Popular new ulama not only introduce alternative views but also use digital media to expand their religious influence, which can shift the power balance with traditional ulama. As a result, Sufi communities in large cities could become divided into competing groups, potentially undermining unity and social harmony among its members.

Commercialization of Spirituality

There are concerns that some contemporary ulama might exploit their popularity for personal gain, such as by commercializing Sufi practices through spiritual products or expensive seminars. This can turn Sufism into a commodity and diminish its authentic value.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that social changes in urban Sufism reflect how Sufi values are adjusted to the increasingly complex dynamics of city life. The emergence of new ulama, known as "rising stars" in this context, is influenced not only by social and demographic changes but also by shifting spiritual preferences among urban communities, increasingly shaped by media and technology. These new ulama often have the ability to communicate effectively with a diverse urban audience, leveraging digital platforms to convey their spiritual messages.

They attract public attention not only because of their religious expertise but also due to their ability to connect Sufi teachings with modern life challenges. The impact of contemporary ulama on urban transformation within the context of urban Sufism has two sides. On one hand, they can bring positive innovation and social engagement. On the other hand, the potential for fragmentation, commercialization, and conflicts with tradition also needs to be addressed. Maintaining a balance between innovation and tradition preservation is crucial to ensure that Sufism remains relevant and beneficial to urban society.

This phenomenon indicates a shift in religious authority in cities, where popularity and accessibility become key factors in selecting ulama. It also suggests that Sufism in urban

environments not only survives but also evolves by integrating elements of modernity into its practices and expressions. Overall, this study reveals that social changes in urban Sufism create opportunities for new ulama who can bridge Sufi tradition with the needs and realities of contemporary urban society. The implication is that Sufism continues to play a vital role in shaping the spiritual identity of urban communities while adapting to rapid social changes.

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