

# Intellectual Discourse

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# *Intellectual Discourse*

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# The Concept of Ghulūw in Islam: An Analysis on Its Manifestations and Causes in The Modern World

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**Adibah Abdul Rahim \*\*\***

**Abstract:** *Ghulūw* (Religious extremism) is an ongoing issue which has been debated from the past and continues to the present day. It is astounding how something associated with religion can lead a person far from religion for doing something that is forbidden itself. Therefore, to understand the reality of this concept of *ghulūw* in this modern world, this article will attempt to explore the meaning of *ghulūw*; firstly, from the etymological and linguistic points of view, and then secondly, from the perspective of *shara'* including the *Qur'ānic* and Prophetic traditions before concluding its actual meaning by examining the opinions of both classical and contemporary Muslim scholars. Finally, this article will investigate its manifestations and causes of *ghulūw* in the modern world from the standpoint of contemporary Muslim scholars. Consequently, the study concludes that *ghulūw* refers to strictness in beliefs and actions which exceeds beyond the required limits of *shara'* and therefore emphasizing the importance of embracing the characteristics of *wasatīyah* as a remedy to reject and oppose all kinds of *ghulūw*.

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**Keywords:** *Ghulūw*, religious extremism, strictness, wasāṭiyyah, moderation, ummah wasatā, modern world and Muslim scholars.

**Abstrak:** Ghulūw (ektremisme dalam beragama) merupakan satu isu yang sering diperdebatkan sekian lama dan masih berterusan sehingga ke hari ini. Ia sesuatu yang menghairankan bagaimana perkara yang mempunyai kaitan dengan agama boleh membawa seseorang jauh pula daripada agamanya dengan melakukan sesuatu yang dilarang pula oleh agama. Dengan itu, bagi memahami realiti konsep Ghulūw dalam kehidupan dunia moden hari ini, artikel ini akan menerokai maksud Ghulūw; pertama, dari sudut etimologi dan linguistik, dan kedua, menerusi perspektif shara' termasuk dari kaca mata Qur'an dan tradisi kenabian sebelum dirumuskan maksud sebenarnya melalui penelitian pandangan para Ulama klasik dan juga kontemporari. Kesudahannya, artikel ini akan menyelidik manifestasi dan punca ghulūw dalam kehidupan dunia moden hari ini dari sudut pandangan sarjana Islam semasa. Seterusnya, kajian ini telah membuat kesimpulan bahawa ghulūw merujuk kepada ketegasan kepercayaan dan pengamalan dalam beragama sehingga melampaui batasan shara' dan ini seterusnya menjurus kepada keperluan untuk ditekankan kepentingan mendokong karakteristik wasāṭiyyah sebagai penawar dalam menolak dan menentang sebarang bentuk ghulūw.

**Kata Kunci:** *Ghulūw*, ekstremisme agama, ketegasan, wasāṭiyyah, kesederhanaan, ummah wasatā, dunia moden dan cendekiawan Muslim.

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## Introduction

Lately, sentiments of hate towards Muslims is increasing, especially in Western countries and majority non-Muslim countries. There are increasing reports on Muslim women being assaulted for wearing the *hijāb*, and other instances where Muslims have become victims of hate crime – most recently in Christchurch, New Zealand, where more than fifty people were killed and many more injured when an armed gunman opened fire on congregants at a mosque on 15 March 2019. The rise of Islamophobia and the trend of hate crimes against Muslims is indeed worrying. Nonetheless, from a certain perspective, one can argue that Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims are partially the results of the actions of some Muslims. Since the early 2000s, several new Muslim radical groups have emerged with the intention of building Islamic states. They include Al-Qaeda, ISIS and many others. These groups strive to achieve their aims of upholding Islam via armed struggles in the killing of innocent civilians.

The tendency of *ghulūw* is not only limited to the actions of terrorists but also in their behavioural interactions. Among negative behaviours that fall under religious extremism in this category are fanatical attitudes towards their teachers, intolerance towards others who may differ with their opinions, or accusing and labelling others as an infidel or *kāfir*. All these actions may lead to *ghulūw*. Thus, it is imperative to understand the concept of *ghulūw* from an Islamic perspective before examining the manifestation and the causes of *ghulūw* among Muslims in the modern world. From here, it may be possible to analyze and offer constructive solutions in overcoming the problem of religious extremism.

## Linguistic Meaning and Etymology of Ghulūw

According to Ibn Manzūr, *ghulūw* linguistically means to exceed reasonable bounds, or to exaggerate, or to overstate (Ibn Manzūr, 2008). Al-Jawharī added that etymologically, the term *ghulūw* means going beyond the limit (Al-Jawharī, 2009). Similarly, Ibn Fāris stated that the word of *ghulūw* indicates rising above and going beyond the appropriate measure (Ibn Fāris, 1999). Al-Luwayḥiq in his book (Al-Luwayḥiq,

2001), *al-Ghulūw fī al-Dīn* also quoted a view from a Western linguist named Edward Lane who identified *ghulūw* as someone “who acted, or behaved, with forced harshness, strictness, or rigour, in religion, so that he exceeded the proper, due, or common, limit,” (Lane, 1968, 2287). In his interpretation of the meaning *ghulūw* linguistically with the added element of *Qur’ān* and *ḥadīth* viewpoint, Nāṣir al-‘Amr concludes that *ghulūw* refers to exceeding the limit which has been legalized by *shara’* to the extent of exaggerating and takes it out the description and the intent of lawgiver (Al-‘Amr, 2019).

Besides that, numerous terminologies can be related to *ghulūw*, such as *tashaddud* (extremely strict), *ifrāt* (extreme and beyond actual limits), *tanaṭṭu’* (overly committed to religious rituals), *‘unf* (harshness) and *taṭarruf* (radicalism) (Al-Luwayḥiq, 2001). According to al-Luwayḥiq, *taṭarruf* is used for coming to the extreme end or limit of something in general. Hence, its meaning is more generic than *ghulūw*. As for the remaining words, *tanaṭṭu’*, *tashaddud* and *‘unf*, these are tantamount to attributes and expressions of *ghulūw*, which semantically has been explained before (Al-Luwayḥiq, 2001). Thus, there are numerous meanings for *ghulūw* linguistically, all of which refers to going beyond the limit that has been legalized by *shara’* - specifically in actions that relate to religion.

### ***Ghulūw* According to *Shara’* Perspectives**

In this section, this study will continue to investigate the meaning of *ghulūw* from the perspective of *shara’* in accordance with the *Qur’ān* and Prophetic traditions. In investigating the term *ghulūw* in the *Qur’ān*, it is only discussed in its form of *ghulūw* literally twice. Both appear in the prohibitive form of *‘Lā Taghlū’*, which means ‘do not transgress’ (‘Abd al-Bāqī, 1994). The two verses are as follows:

Firstly, “O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of God aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of God, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in God and His apostles. Say not “Trinity” : Desist: it will be better for you: for God is one God: Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is God as a Disposer of affairs..” (4:171)

Secondly, “Say, O People of the Book, do not exceed in your religion the bounds, trespassing beyond the truth, nor follow the vain desires of people who went wrong in times gone by, who misled many, and strayed from the straightway.” (5:77).

Both of these verses highlighted God’s prohibition of His *Ummah* from transgressing limits and indicates that extremism goes against the teachings of Islam. According to Haniff, although this revelation was originally directed to the *ahl al-Kitāb* (People of the Books), its message is clear for all, which is to stay away from any element of extremism. In these two verses, Allah forbids the People of the Books from exceeding the limits set in religion. This verse in particular addressed the Christians who had gone beyond their limits with regards to ‘Īsā (Peace be upon him) when they elevated him from the rank of Prophethood to be a God, whom they worshipped just as they worshipped Allah (Muhammad Haniff Bin Hassan, 2004). In Ibn Kathīr opinions, this transgression occurred because they have been misled and deviated from the straight path; which is the path of *wasatīyyah*, to the path of misguidance and deviation (Ibn Kathīr, 1992). Subsequently, the remaining discussion of *ghulūw* was in the form of meaning (*ma’nā*). Those verses are as follows:.

Firstly, “These are the boundaries ordained by Allah, so do not transgress them. And if any do transgress the limits ordained by Allah, such are the wrongdoers” (2:229).

In his commentary of this verse, Ibn ‘Āshūr stated that the limits of God are a reference for the orders and prohibition of *shara’*, which separate *halal* and *haram* as well as truth and falsehood. Anything that exceeds the limit is considered as a violation of the rule of *sharī’ah*, and whoever violates the provision of God is similar to exceeding the limits and boundaries of *shara’*. In this verse too, there were also clear reminders not to go beyond the defined limits and the order to comply with them, besides mentioning the outcome of transgressing beyond limits are cruelty and wrong-doing to others (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1984).

Secondly, “And monasticism, which they innovated; We did not prescribe it for them except [that they did so]” (57:27).

Based on this verse, Ibn Kathīr opined that the monasticism which the Christian invented is a decision on their own and had nothing to do with any command from God. Ibn Kathīr also remarked that in this verse,

Allah criticizes them in two ways: First, they invented things in their religion, something which Allah did not legislate for them. The second is that they did not fulfill the requirements of what they innovated and believed to be a way of getting close to God, the Most Honored and the Supreme (Ibn Kathīr, 1992). Holding the same position, Ibn Taymiyyah stressed that in this particular verse, it was intended to be directed to the Christians, as is clear from their context. In his own word, “The Christians committed more excesses than the other groups concerning matters of belief and worship. Thus, Allah explicitly forbids them in the *Qur’ān* from committing excesses.” (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2003, 196)

Thirdly, “O you who have believed, do not forbid the good things which Allah has made legitimate to you and do not transgress. Certainly, Allah does not like transgressors” (5:87).

In his commentary, Ibn Kathīr argued that this verse strongly indicates that there is no monasticism in Islam. Thus, this verse refrained us from exaggerating and making it hard for ourselves by prohibiting permissible things, and not to transgress the limits by excessively indulging in permissible matters; and to only use of it what satisfies our needs, and not to fall into extravagance (Ibn Kathīr, 1992). Accordingly, Riḍā went even further, arguing that some of the *sufīs* were torturing themselves by being hard upon worshipping rituals, which is one of the misconceptions that afflicted many of the worshippers and *sufīs* of the past who did that in imitation of the Christians monks before them. All acts of this nature are all forbidden, and the *sharī‘ah* has warned about falling into them (Riḍā, 1931). Similarly, in examining the discussion of *ghulūw* from the perspective of Prophetic traditions, numerous *ḥadīth* has indicated the Prophet (PBUH) prohibits any lifestyle or worship that exaggerates and transgresses beyond the limits set by *shara‘* either in the form word of *ghulūw* literally or in the form of meaning (*ma‘nā*).

In exploring the *ḥadīth* in the form of *ghulūw* and its derivatives, there is only one *ḥadīth* that came in this form from a different chain of narrations.<sup>1</sup> In this *ḥadīth*, which the Prophet (PBUH) commanded his *Ummah* to avoid any behaviour or action that leads to extreme reactions. A close examination of such texts shows that Islam emphatically warns against *ghulūw* as reported by Ibn Mājah. Ibn ‘Abbās said that

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the findings from the following link <http://dorar.net>

the Prophet (PBUH) asked him to collect some pebbles for him to use during the stoning of the pillars in the pilgrimage. He brought him small-sized pebbles. When he put them into the Prophet's hand, the Prophet (PBUH) said:

“Beware of going beyond the bounds of the religion. The people before you were destroyed by going to extremes in the religion.” (Ibn Mājah, 25: 3029)

Clearly, in this *ḥadīth*, the Prophet (PBUH) himself warned his *Ummah* from committing any actions that contain excessiveness beyond limits to keep them from suffering the same consequences that had happened to earlier nations. Apart from the prohibition of exceeding beyond bounds, he also explained the consequences and repercussions of extremism (Al-Luwayḥiq, 2001). In explaining further, Ibn Taymiyyah opined that the prohibition injunction in this *ḥadīth* does include in every form of excessiveness in matters of beliefs and deeds, where he mention that the most extremes in these matters are the Christians. He then cited an example in this *ḥadīth* on how throwing larger pebbles with the belief that they are the more significant than smaller ones are considered as an extreme action. Then he explained it that one must avoid following the way of the previous nations, as a means of avoiding us from what destroyed them before (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2003).

Accordingly, there are also numerous *aḥādīth* of *ghulūw*, which was in the form of meaning (*ma'nā*). Those *aḥādīth* are as follows:

Firstly, “Anas Ibn Mālik (ra) narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) said, “Do not be very strict on yourselves for then Allah will be strict upon you. Verily, people were strict upon themselves, so Allah was strict upon them. It is the remnants of those people who are in the hermitages and monasteries. [Then he quoted the verse,] “But the monasticism which they invented for themselves, We did not prescribe for them.” (Abū Dāwūd, 34: 4823)

In this *ḥadīth* which was referred to the extreme behaviours of the Christians who innovated such worship to God, the Prophet (PBUH) reminds the Companions to not impose austerities on themselves through extreme deeds such as fasting continuously without breaking fast, practising monasticism or praying throughout the night without sleep. It is to avoid the implications of Allah imposing austerities on

them by making such deeds an obligation which they may find hard to prescribe to due to their own weaknesses and be the reason for their destruction as how Allah had destroyed peoples before them (Ābādī, 1995). Accordingly, al-Luwayḥiq articulated that a person being hard upon himself is also part of *ghulūw* acts, and a cause for Allah, in turn, being hard upon him. The *sunnah* makes it clear that in the end, such a person will discontinue his actions and not be able to keep up with them. (Al-Luwayḥiq, 2001).

Secondly, Anas (ra) reported that some of the Companions of Allah’s Messenger asked his (the Prophet’s (PBUH)) wives about the acts that he performed in private. Someone among them (among his Companions) said: “I will not marry women; someone among them said: I will not eat meat; and someone among them said: I will not lie down in bed.” The Prophet (PBUH) then came and said, “What has happened to these people that they say so and so, whereas I perform prayer and sleep too; I practice fast and suspend observing them; I marry women too. And he who turns away from my Sunnah, he has no relation with me.” (Muslim, 16: 3403) “And monasticism, which they innovated; We did not prescribe it for them except [that they did so]” (57:27).

Based on this *ḥadīth* that has been mentioned here, undoubtedly, the Prophet (PBUH) was always keen to teach his companions how to be moderate in everything and how to maintain the balance between their religion and their worldly affairs, between their duties towards themselves and their duties towards their Lord, between physical pleasures and the happiness of the souls. Whenever he would find anyone deviating from such equilibrium and adopting exaggeration in any aspect, he would advise him and direct him back to the right path (Al-Qaradawi, General Characteristics of Islam, 2002). It is the actual Islamic teachings that always encourage Muslims to exercise moderation and to reject and oppose all kinds of extremism; either by excessiveness or bigotry.

Thirdly, Abdullah reported Allah’s Messenger (PBUH) as saying: “Ruined, were those who indulged in hair-splitting (al-Mutanāṭṭi’ūn).” He (the Holy Prophet (PBUH)) repeated this thrice” (Muslim, 46: 6784).

In his commentary, al-Nawawī said that ‘*al-Mutanāṭṭi’ūn* are destroyed’ referring to those who go into depths, extremes, and go beyond the

proper bounds in their speech or actions, which are the characteristics that were mentioned in the earlier *ḥadīth* (Al-Nawawī, 1996). The text of the *ḥadīth* clearly explains the path for those who transgress beyond the proper bounds will end up in destructions. The fact that the Prophet (PBUH) stated three times in one *ḥadīth* demonstrates how tremendous and dangerous this matter is (Al-Luwayḥiq, 2001). Subsequently, the Prophet (PBUH) resisted any inclination towards excessive religiosity and rebuked those of his Companions who exaggerated in their worship and asceticism to the point of exceeding the boundaries of *wasatīyyah*. The Prophet (PBUH) himself struck a right balance between the spiritual and the material, between the pursuit of this world and the hereafter, between people's right to life and happiness and the Sustainer's right to receive worship and the purpose for which human beings were created. (Al-Qaraḍāwī, 2006).

Based on interpretation given by Muslim scholars, particularly the exegetes on those verses that came in the form word of *ghulūw* or its meaning (*ma'nā*) from the perspective of *shara'* in accordance to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, it can be concluded that the meaning of *ghulūw* from Qur'anic and *Sunnah* perspectives are similar and along the line of the linguistic terms which refers to exceeding the bounds or limits.

### ***Ghulūw* From The Perspective of Muslim Scholars**

In expounding the meaning of *ghulūw*, Ibn Taymiyyah wrote in his book entitled *Iqtīḍa' al-Ṣirāt al-Mustaqīm*. He posited that *ghulūw* "is to go beyond the proper limits concerning a matter, beyond what it is deserving, either in praising it or disapproving it" (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2003, 64). Ibn Taymiyyah is not the only classical Muslim scholar who had written about the subject of *ghulūw*. Accordingly, Ibn Ḥajar also drew a similar definition when he said that *ghulūw* refers to exaggeration in something and being stringent in that matter by going beyond the proper limit (Ibn Ḥajar, 1989). The same definition was also given by al-Shāṭibī in his chapter on the legislation of innovations in religion (*al-Bida'*) in his book *al-I'tisām* (Al-Shāṭibī, 2007). Along this line of definition, 'Abd al-Wahhāb refers *ghulūw* as the concrete principle of transgressing to what God has commanded and forbids, as stated in the following verse ('Abd al-Wahhāb, 2007),

"And do not transgress [or oppress others] therein, lest My anger should descend upon you. And he upon whom My

anger descends has certainly fallen.” (20:81).

The views of contemporary scholars too on *ghulūw* are also very similar to those of classical Muslim scholars. According to Muḥammad al-Zuḥaylī, *ghulūw* means strictness and hardness in exceeding beyond the required limits ordained by *shara'* (Al-Zuḥaylī, 1991). In al-Durī's opinion, *Ghulūw* refers to the strictness and exceeding the limits of *shara'*, which is disparaged, prohibited from it by the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* (Al-Durī, 2017). The same can also be said to Ḥabānakah al-Maydanī who defined *ghulūw* in religion means going beyond the limits Allah has established, expanding on the domains of the religion that are drawn by those limits (Al-Maydanī, 1988). As for al-Qaraḍāwī, *ghulūw* means “being situated at the farthest possible point from the centre. Figuratively, it indicates a similar remoteness in religion, thought and behaviour.” (Al-Qaraḍāwī, 2006, 8)

Indeed, those definitions are very close to each other, which the conclusion is that *ghulūw* means to go beyond the proper limits in *sharī'ah*. In addition, al-Luwayḥiq asserted that the *ghulūw* debate among contemporary Muslim scholars had seen them agree that the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* must determine the guidelines for the conceptualization of *ghulūw* in today's context. According to him, the modern scholars also agreed that the context and setting of which one lives is also a significant factor in the allegiance of each individual to religiosity and will affect the injunction granted to him by the others, including granting or removing the extremism title (Al-Luwayḥiq, 2001). Thus, based on the discourse on *ghulūw* by both classical and contemporary Muslim scholars, it can be concluded that it is clear that they are also in the same position that *ghulūw* or religious extremism is going beyond the limits set by the *sharī'ah*.

### **Manifestations of *Ghulūw***

Before discussing the causes of *ghulūw*, it is essential to understand beforehand various types of *ghulūw*. In this segment, due to the needs and relevance of the scope of this study with regards to the modern-world context, it will only focus on the discourse among contemporary Muslim scholars who have argued that the manifestations of *ghulūw* could be divided into various categories:

Firstly, extremism related to beliefs. Generally, it is the most destructive type of extremism. It is far more damaging than any other



extremist categories. It is because this beliefs-related extremism leads to the *Ummah*'s detachment and hatred, which later develops into factions that fall off the straight path, and the worst of all may fall into infidelity (*kufr*) (Al-Luwayhiq, 2001). In this matter, there are several types of *ghulūw*, such as extremism in fundamental principles and faith ('*aqīdah*) which is related to the basic tenets (*kulliyāt*) of *sharī'ah* and faith. Example of this type of *ghulūw* is the insistence that there is another Messenger after Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), treating Muslims who commit sins as infidels, and declaring war on fellow Muslims or expiation (*takfīr*) for those who disagree with other Muslims (Al-Ḥaqīl, 1996). *Ghulūw* in beliefs is generally considered to be incorrect when it violates religious boundaries, which are driven by excessive exaggeration of what should be done. Excessive in this area occurs when someone resorts with false statements, lies and fabrications to defending his religious views, which is explicitly contradicted by the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) and Qur'ānic injunctions (Al-Farfūr, 1993).

Another form of *ghulūw* in belief is an exaggeration of allegiance as mentioned by al-Farfūr in his book, *al-Wasaṭiyyah fī al-Islām*. In his argument about this aspect of *ghulūw*, he gave several descriptions of this excessive loyalty to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); first, by loving him more than the love of Allah, or by claiming that the Prophet is the only Prophet in Islam, and there are no other Prophets or Messengers beside him, or by providing specific characteristics of divinity to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that are meant to be only for God. Second, the excesses of allegiance to the *Qur'ān* as God's only revelation and refusal to believe that there are other books revealed to the other Prophets beside the *Qur'ān* (Al-Farfūr, 1993). In addition, another instance of *ghulūw* in beliefs is the state of being excessive beyond the limits of truth in advocacy and support for the sake of religion such as the striving for the cause of faith in God, and other religious issues by fabricating lies, fairy tales and false allegation of metaphysical stories (Al-Farfūr, 1993).

Secondly, extremism related to legislation (*sharī'ah*). There are numerous forms of *ghulūw* with regards to *sharī'ah* related matters. The exaggeration in the legislative provisions by making a prohibition (*harām*) obligatory (*wājib*) and vice-versa rulings without any valid evidence from the religious sources and convincing evidence (Kamali,

2010). Accordingly, some believe that these acts, including promoting the detestable (*makrūh*) acts is nothing wrong with these ideas and believe that these kinds of worship are encouraged in Islam. However, in al-Farfūr's opinions, this is in fact, is a violation of the religion and an infringement of the limits of the provisions of God. According to al-Farfūr again, these excesses in religion is happening because of some particular religious clerics have no authority in giving *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) to the public in deducing the provisions of religion (Al-Farfūr, 1993).

The understanding of the texts is another instance of *ghulūw* in the legislative matter. To explain this, al-Luwayḥīq stressed that this happens when the text is described in a very strict method that is not in line with the overall characteristics of the *sharī'ah* and its main objectives, thus causing hardship for oneself and others (Al-Luwayḥīq, 2001). In supporting al-Luwayḥīq's arguments, Haniff then demonstrated that when someone makes it burdensome to interpret and understand the significance of divine revelations; going beyond what is required of a Muslim, and going beyond established and accepted methodologies (Muhammad Haniff Bin Hassan, 2004). In addition to that, al-Farfūr also argued that some Muslims believe that strictness in *ijtihād* and *fatwā* by the hardliners are the most encouraged by God which contrary to their beliefs, the most encouraging in *ijtihād* and *fatwā* is ease and removing hardship (Al-Farfūr, 1993).

Thirdly, extremism linked to good deeds (‘*Ibādah*). ‘*Ibādah* in this matter, is irrespective of the words or actions done by someone. According to al-Luwayḥīq, good deeds in this category also indicate that this is merely an act and not the outcome of an inappropriate faith; if it were not, it would be beliefs-related (Al-Luwayḥīq, 2001). There are several kinds of ‘*ibādah*-related *ghulūw*, all of which are bound to the rulings and come in various forms; such as forcing oneself or others to do what Allah did not permit as an act of worship and monasticism. For this, what a person can do without overburdening himself is the measuring stick. Although the *sharī'ah* endorses the nature of the practice itself, it is considered as extremism when one goes beyond that limit. Islam has, therefore not instituted monasticism, which requires the person to isolate himself or herself from life and enjoyment. Islam does not approve the pursuit of spirituality at the expense of material existence nor of the inclination to purify and uplift the soul by depriving

and punishing the body advocated by other religions and philosophies (Al-Qaraḏāwī, 2006).

Another instance of ‘*ibādah*’-related *ghulūw*, is the prohibition of some of the good things that Allah has allowed as acts of worship. When Haniff explained this, he articulated that an example of this sort of extremism is when an act of worship is mandatory on oneself or others when it is not obligatory in Islam, irrespective of how much Islam encourages this act of worship (Muhammad Haniff Bin Hassan, 2004). Furthermore, neglecting all or some of the necessities, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, or marrying, believing that all of these acts will influence his quality of ‘*ibādah*’, thus avoiding it will enable someone to concentrate more on worship. This is also regarded as a manifestation of *ghulūw* in al-Luwayḥiq’s views (Al-Luwayḥiq, 2001). From this perspective, Haniff argues that extremism is when critical (*ḍarūrī*) needs, such as eating, drinking, and sleeping, are neglected (Muhammad Haniff Bin Hassan, 2004). Thus, extremism is not only overdoing but also neglecting. For example, someone who resorts to intensifying his duty to God beyond the boundaries of religion or any aspect of it.

From this line of reasoning, such extremism can be classified as non-fundamental (*juz’ī*) and practical (‘*amalī*) issues. He demonstrated this point by quoting instances of renouncing marriage, performing prayers all night without sleeping, offering alms to the extent of failing to provide for one’s own family or when someone suddenly leaves his work to devote himself to worship thus failing to provide any source of revenue for his family (Muhammad Haniff Bin Hassan, 2004). Holding the same view, Bā Sallūm stated that this sort of *ghulūw* is part of *tanattu’* or inappropriate and being overly committed to religious rituals, contrary to the notion of *wasatīyyah*, which includes aspects of equilibrium, equity and moderation in Islam (Bā Sallūm, 2004).

Finally, extremism related to behavior. Unlike the other types of extremism, this form of practice is more related to the perception and action towards another person or people. One of the characteristics of this form of *ghulūw* is an obsessive pursuit of discovering faults in others and making uncompromising demands on them, in which according to Kamali is also another type of *ghulūw* that falls within the category of *al-Mutanatti’un* and is condemned by the Prophet (PBUH)

who has urged Muslims to avoid extremism (Kamali, 2010). Not only that, the individual who has this kind of behaviour will always simply accuse and judge other individuals and groups as being unreligious as soon as he suspects them of doing something not accordance to their own beliefs. In addition, he will also be charged with immoderation, negligence, westernization and contempt for *sunnah* or even unbelief, if anyone tries to proclaim a moderate and authentically Islamic position (Lemu, 1996).

Another prominent indication of this manifestation of *ghulūw* are bigotry and intolerance towards others that leads an individual to be stubbornly dedicated to his own views and prejudices, as well as rigidity that deprives him of clarity of vision as to the interests of other human beings, the purposes of Islamic law or the circumstances of the era. This stance contradicts the *Ummah's* principle of agreement in accepting differing views with the exception when it comes to the words of God or the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (PBUH). (Al-Qaraḏāwī, 2006). This kind of people who has these elements of bigotry and intolerance will always believe that he is right for them, and they cannot be wronged. He perceives anyone who differs from him as an enemy or at best as an ignorant person, which means that in any circumstances, he will not tolerate differences of opinion. It includes excessive efforts to force others into a comparable undertaking, despite the presence of excellent reasons for facilitation and the fact that God has not allowed such austerity (Al-Qaraḏāwī, 2006).

Accordingly, austerity and the overburdening of others are also other types of behaviour linked to extremism. In this regard, al-Qaraḏāwī gave an illustration of someone applying Islamic values to individuals who either reside in Muslim countries or who have only converted to Islam should not focus on minor or contentious issues but fundamentals, as we can see from the Prophetic advice. In this event, the Prophet (PBUH) alludes to Mu'ādh to spread the message of Islam gradually, beginning with the testimony of faith, that is, testifying to God's oneness and Muhammad as God's Messenger before advocating the other principle of Islam (Al-Qaraḏāwī, 2006). On the contrary, sternness without the account of period and space, for example, causing problems over trivial issues such as dressing or imposing such etiquette during eating and drinking, is uncalled for and certainly against Islam's doctrines and not part of the priorities prescribed by the Prophet (PBUH) (Lemu, 1996).

Subsequently, accusing or calling someone as an infidel or *kāfir* is also a component of the *ghulūw*-related behavioural faith. The judgment that another person is an unbeliever is a very damaging judgment with serious implications. Unless there is clear evidence and unquestionable evidence, no Muslim can take this step (Al-Luwayḥiq, 2001). There is a guidance by the Prophet (PBUH) who had warned that whoever calls an individual with *kāfir*, while he is not an infidel, then it will return to him. Because of the seriousness of calling a Muslim a disbeliever even when committing sins and acts of disobedience, scholars consider this to be a sort of injustice and outrage. Al-Luwayḥiq asserted that a *sharī'ah* injunction is also restricted by the well-known parameters extracted from the text of the Qur'ān and Sunnah . (Al-Luwayḥiq, 2001). Apart from the act of *takfīr*, another heinous act that is linked to behaviour related to *ghulūw* is the use of force and terror by individuals or Islamic movements who believe violence is the way forward in overcoming injustice and oppression to Muslims throughout the world. Some also have the psychological make-up that makes them conducive to extremism, in addition to lack of knowledge of the *sharī'ah* and is greatly affected by the deeds that contradict the *sharī'ah* that they witnessed in societies (Al-Luwayḥiq, 2001).

To conclude, types and forms of *ghulūw* are varied and wide-ranging from beliefs to their actions, which includes their behaviour towards other peoples. Although the cause to all of these happens due to the aims in seeking God's pleasures, because it is going beyond the limits set by the *sharī'ah*, it is considered as *ghulūw*.

### ***Causes of Ghulūw***

Religious extremism does not happen in a vacuum. Such a complex phenomenon is definitely caused by several factors, both direct and indirect, internal and external, some recent and some going far back in time (Lemu, 1996). Similar to the discussion of the manifestations of *ghulūw*, in this segment too, it will only focus on the discourse among contemporary Muslim scholars who have argued that the causes of *ghulūw* can be divided into several parts:

The first cause of *ghulūw* is a lack of knowledge in understanding the underpinnings of the primary purposes, spirit and essence of Islam which relates to the *sharī'ah* and faith. As such, extreme attitudes often arise from someone who is too eager to practice religious teachings

without fully understanding the knowledge of Islamic sciences and its methodology (Al-Qaraḍāwī, 2006). Al-Shāṭibī in his book, *al-I'tiṣām*, drew attention to the threat of this behaviour as the root causes of *bid'ah* or objectionable religious innovations, as well as the disunity of the *Ummah*, and may lead to inner conflict and gradual disintegration (Al-Shāṭibī, 2007). Accordingly, by not studying the *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth* thoroughly, or understanding the purpose of the objectives of *sharī'ah*, the importance of context and nature, the human condition and the changing times, a person who quickly concludes and issues an injunction or ruling based on his limited knowledge, coupled with the fanatical attitude towards teachers and a specific particular school of thought (*madhhab*) – all of these ignorances led to rigidity in practicing religion and eventually end up with some extremism attitudes (Al-Luwayḥiq, 2001).

This ignorance of the *Qur'ān*'s essence will ultimately lead to violations of the *Sunnah*. It also causes them to misunderstand the significance of the sacred scriptures by stating what was not a vice to be, and what was not a virtue to be a virtue. Some other element of this shallowness of understanding is the tendency to focus more on marginal and trivial problems, therefore failing to see the connection between the components (*juz'ī*) and the whole (*kullī*), between particulars ('ām) and universals (*khāṣ*), categorical (*muḥkam*) and allegorical (*mutashābih*) texts, speculative (*ẓannī*) and definitive (*qaṭ'ī*) texts (Al-Qaraḍāwī, 2006). It is essential to highlight that the fundamental issues of extremism and the misconception of Islam for years until now, is the emphasis on allegorical texts to define essential concepts and the disregard for categorical texts. Allegorical texts are those with obscure, vague or explicable meanings while the categorical ones are those whose meanings are evident, obvious and explicit. It is not characteristic of those with wisdom and knowledge to emphasize allegorical texts, but those whose heart is deprived of rationality and empathy (Al-Qaraḍāwī, 2006).

In expounding the danger of this kind of thinking, Lemu drew from the ideas of al-Qaraḍāwī by arguing that a person possessing this kind of knowledge will be unable to distinguish between major and minor degrees of infidels, polytheism or hypocrisy without any consideration to a person's inner motives, and wrong interpretation of allegorical texts of the *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth*. She also concluded that most of these

problems arise because of their self-learning methods from books and newspapers or in some cases through YouTube videos and websites, which is the main cause of self-radicalization extremism, which happen rampantly nowadays (Lemu, 1996).

The second cause of *ghulūw*, are those who adhere to the literal meaning of texts without attempting to establish their importance, significance and reasons. In doing so, the same errors committed by the original literalist school (*al-Zāhiriyyah*) that denies logical and linguistic analysis of rulings (*ta'īl al-aḥkām*) are being repeated. It follows then that it rejects analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) as it is believed that Islamic law differentiates between comparable items and brings those different to the other. This group of neo-literalist follows their predecessors by trying to control both acts of worship and transactions without paying any attention to their bases or attempting to comprehend their intentions and the human interests they are intended to serve (Al-Qaradāwī, 2006). Furthermore, by understanding literally the meaning of religious texts strictly, they tend easily condemn others as being non-believers and infidels, going astray or objectionable practitioners (Al-Qaradawī, Islamic Moderation and Renewal, 2013).

Another example of a group who follow a rigid adherence to the literal meanings is ISIS, whose ideology is defined as a religious doctrine that advocates literal interpretations of the sacred texts and *sharī'ah* laws. They promote a strict adherence to the *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth* in their enthusiasm for returning to a pure interpretation of faith, while vehemently rejecting any rationalistic orientation found in a wide range of Islamic intellectual teachings. By closing the opportunities for evaluation, introspection and discourse, they cut off the valuable tradition of early Muslim scholars. They also tend to quote selective components of passages from the *Qur'ān* to justify their claims. For instance, take this verse:

“And if you punish (your enemy), then punish them with the like of that with which you were afflicted” (16:126).

What ISIS did not add was the verse that finished with, “but if you endure patiently, verily, it is better for *al-Ṣābirīn* (the Patient Ones)” (Mohamed bin Ali, 2016). By using this verse, ISIS legitimizes murdering civilians as acts of self-defence and legitimise vengeance for killing innocent people in Palestine, Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere. Such jihadist movements

like ISIS in an example of contemporary Muslim literalists movement which fails to understand the fundamental aims, spirit and essence of faith. Some extremists claim to be versed in *sharī'ah*, but forget the importance of Islam's ultimate purpose and essence. They insist on the complete literal use of specific religious texts without taking into account the circumstances in which they are implemented (Lemu, 1996). In expounding the ignorance in religion, Muḥammad al-Zuḥaylī argued that the nature of being literalists, is to interpret religious texts without understanding the essence of *shara'* and the purpose of every injunction. Unfamiliarity with the objective of *sharī'ah* (*maqāṣid sharī'ah*) and the lack of understanding in considering the benefits and disadvantages to the individuals or society when applying such legislation will also lead to adverse situations and finally succumbing into transgression beyond the limit of *shara'* (Al-Zuḥaylī, 1991).

The third cause of *ghulūw* is a factor that relates to the social, economic and political aspects that affect the *Ummah* and Islamic nations. The dissatisfaction of the socially and economically disadvantaged condition of the *Ummah* is often the reason for some people to become an extremist. These problems become worse, with some of the Muslim states facing moral issues among their youths, and many of the countries did not implement *sharī'ah* laws. All of these problems have prompted them to conclude that this is due to hegemony and injustice of foreign powers (Sihabuddin Afroni, 2016). The same can be said on the global scene, in the face of the repression of Muslims in many parts of the world, these individuals feel helpless. They see many Muslim leaders in the hands of foreign powers seemingly reduced to puppets. It creates a sense of resentment and suspicion of anything that involves foreign elements such as modern knowledge regardless of the usefulness of such information to Muslims (Lemu, 1996).

Besides all this, some Muslims feel that the Muslim world and everything that Muslims hold most sacred is under attack with different forces working together to thwart any indications of resurgence. They claim, therefore, that non-Islamic causes find material and moral help from both East and West, while Islamic causes do not find any true or practical assistance from either camp (Al-Qaraḍāwī, 2006). In addition, they must think that Muslims are one *Ummah* as such, regardless of their nationalities or languages, concerned with all their affairs. Daily news carries accounts of the suffering of other Muslims in different regions



of the world to the Muslim involved. Moreover, they observe with anger that such occurrences elicit no appropriate reaction from governments of other Muslim countries. In contrast, they are utterly indifferent to fellow Muslims being persecuted. Muslim leaders seem to be mainly concerned with their own interest or allegiance to others rather than with God, his religion, his *Ummah* and his cause (Al-Qaraḏāwī, 2006).

Finally, the fourth cause of *ghulūw* is to redeem sins and past mistakes. For some individuals, the primary driving factor behind their sudden extreme religious behaviours will be to seek redemption from previous errors, sins and even crimes. Feelings of guilt about past sins, as well as worrying about the effects of sin and wrongdoing. Concerns and remorse for sin were later followed by a quick eradication of sin later on. Due to the desperate urge for the sin to be swept away, they find the wrong path by seeking to supplement with worship to God to the limit by breaking the boundaries set by the religion (Al-Zuḥaylī, 1991). Therefore, in this situation, seeking redemption in the minds of sinners does not just stop at extreme worshipping, but also to the extent in becoming a jihadist as a short cut to heaven. For instance, in ISIS ideology, going to heaven is not just a simple reward from God or merely a doctrine, but it also functions as their Modus Operandi. For them, to die as a martyr in battle or a suicide bombing means, literally, the immediate ascent to paradise and the beginning of life in heaven (Tiersky, 2018).

A report by the International Center for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR) demonstrates that jihadi networks like ISIS are merging across Europe to generate a hazardous brand of jihadist for whom violence is not just a spiritual quest, but as their way of life. In fact, new findings indicate that most of the recruits of the terrorist group have a prior criminal record, with several European fighters in the database of the ICSR continuing to smoke, drink and even take drugs until they leave for the so-called Islamic State. Moreover, ISIS also draws disturbed young people through what analysts describe as a “redeeming narrative”, with martyrdom engagement depicted as a whitewash for all previous sins (Lizzie, 2016). Thus, the cause of *ghulūw* is diverse and may be direct or indirect, visible or hidden. It may be religious, political, social, economic, psychological, intellectual, or a combination of all these.

### ***Wasaṭiyyah* as the tool to remedy the manifestations and causes of *Ghulūw***

The *wasaṭiyyah* of the Muslim *Ummah* is derived from the *wasaṭiyyah* of its religion, its way and system. It is the middle way to a middlemost nation that practices moderation in its laws and rituals, in its ethics and values, in its manners and tradition, in its feelings, and emotions, and its inter-relations (Al-Qaradawi, *Islamic Moderation and Renewal*, 2013). The Muslim as the ‘*Ummatan Wasaṭā*’ or the middlemost community, therefore, should not drift with materialism, but rather be balanced between spiritual and physical or material aspects, including in all its attitudes and actions (M. Quraish Shihab, 2007). The critical feature for the middlemost community overcoming the element of *ghulūw* that is, as prescribed in the *Qur’ān*, bears the divinely chosen title ‘Witness of Humanity’ (*Shuhadā* ‘*Alā al-Nās*) (*Qur’ān*, 2:143). Without knowing the holistic framework of *wasaṭiyyah*, which involves certain characteristics of justice (‘*adl*), excellence (*khayriyyah*) and equilibrium (*tawassuṭ*) and moderation (*‘idāl*), the conviction of these attributes are not feasible (M. Kamal Hassan, 2015). In supporting the significance of this verse, Baker articulates it this point nicely, “The *Qur’ān* speaks clearly of Muslims as people of the centre, an *Ummah*, justly centred as a witness over nations. To bring Islam into views, the focus must be on the midstream rather than the margins.” (Baker, 2015, 62)

Therefore, to acquire *wasaṭiyyah* or a justly-balanced nation, the *Ummah* should not lose sight of the obligation upon Muslims to become not only religious but also to be more knowledgeable, morally conscious and civilizational witnesses over humankind, with the attributes of justice and moral excellence as the core features (M. Kamal Hassan, 2015). More crucially, Kamal emphasized the significance of this justly-balanced country in fulfilling this critical task of “civilization witnessing” and governance. The Muslim community must also strive for extensive excellence knowledge in religious, its essence and worldly science, in the spirit of absolute and uncompromising monotheism (*tawḥīd*), fulfillment of divine trust (*amānah*), performance of comprehensive worship of Allah (‘*ibādah*) and desire to spread Allah’s compassion to all (*raḥmatan li al-‘Ālamīn*). Numerous reformist Muslim scholars have also emphasized this point over the centuries, especially after the era of Western powers’ colonization to the present (M. Kamal Hassan, 2015). Moreover, al-Qaradāwī also believes that *wasaṭiyyah* is an

alternative approach at worldwide level for the Muslim community in changing negative perceptions towards Islam. He also pointed out that *wasatīyyah* can also be used as an instrument to protect the Muslim community from generating any hostility to them and Islam around the world from others by advocating positive virtues. In al-Qaraḍāwī's own word,

“It is the Islam of simplicity, not complexity, of preaching not alienation, kindness, not violence, of acquaintance not disregard, of tolerance not fanaticism, of the content not the form, of achievements not dispute, of offering not pretention, of *al-ijtihād* (reasoning) not *al-taqlīd* (blind imitation), of *al-tajdīd* (renewal) not stagnation, of punctuality not neglect, of the *wasatīyyah* not excessiveness or negligence.”

It is, therefore, necessary to restore *wasatīyyah* at the communal level (Al-Qaradawi, *Islamic Moderation and Renewal*, 2013, p. 197). In expounding on the importance of the *Ummah* to remain faithful to its commitment to *wasatīyyah*, Kamali argued that the manifestation of *wasatīyyah* should not only be done but should also be seen to be done and made visible to all concerned, not only to the personal conduct of individuals but also to the inter-civilization of the Muslim community, the *Ummah*, in incongruity with other communities and nations (Kamali, 2010).

In short, it is important for a Muslim and the community to embrace the concept of *wasatīyyah* and ‘*Ummatan Wasatā*’ as the tools to remedy the manifestations and the causes of *ghulūw*. With regards to ‘*Ummatan Wasatā*’, which is the thrust of the *wasatīyyah* principle, is not only about the interpretation of *wasat* as just (‘*adl*) or the best and excellence (*khayriyyah*) but also the necessity for the *Ummah* to be balanced in everything they do in terms of worship, morality and also material. The requirement of being just, excellent and balanced are not only at the individual level but also the *Ummah* as a whole nation. This justly-balanced nation or the middlemost community is not limited just to the Muslim community only but also transcends to the global community. The fact that *Qur’ān* implies this *Ummah*'s position in the middle and prepared by God to be the witness over humankind, this *Ummah* has the significant role to be the exemplary *Ummah*, an inspiration for the whole universe that cannot be accomplished without elevating the community to become the best, just and balanced in everything. Only with that, the

manifestations and causes of *ghulūw* can be eradicated and the *Ummah* could be the justly-balanced nation as it is supposed to be.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this discourse puts forth that the term *ghulūw* refers to strictness in beliefs and actions which exceeds beyond the required limits ordained by *sharāʿ*. Contemporary Muslim scholars have listed and categorised the causes and manifestations of *ghulūw* in the modern world today which are diverse and beyond the actual meaning of *wasatīyyah*. In addition, Muslim scholars have also emphasized the importance of understanding the concept of *wasatīyyah* and ‘*Ummatan Wasatāʿ*’, which involves definite attributes of ‘*adl* (just), *khayriyyah* (the best or excellence), *tawassuṭ* (intermediacy), *qaṣd* and *iʿtidāl* (moderation), *tawāzun* (balance), *taʿādul* (equilibrium) and even *wasat* (middle). The demand of the adoption of this manifestation of *wasatīyyah* approach as the tools to remedy the element of *ghulūw* in the modern world is not only at the individual level but also at the level of the *Ummah* as a whole nation and ultimately as the middlemost community as prescribed in *al-Baqarah*, 2:143 which bears the divinely chosen title ‘Witness of Humanity’ (*Shuhadāʿ* ‘*Alā al-Nās*). Hence, it is imperative upon Muslims to exercise *wasatīyyah* and to reject and oppose all kinds of *ghulūw* which include *tanattuʿ* (nitpicking religiosity) and *tashdīd* (strictness, austerity).

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