

Religious Extremism And The Sanctification Of Individuals As An Impediment To The Sustainability Of Environmental Quality Of Life: An Applied Analytical Study In The Contemporary Islamic Context

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze religious extremism (Ghulūw) and the sanctification of individuals within the contemporary Islamic context, and their role as a primary impediment to the sustainability of environmental quality of life in its comprehensive sense (social, intellectual, psychological, and natural). The research reviews the definition of Ghulūw and reprehensible sanctification, and highlights the manifestations of this phenomenon in modern reality, such as the blind imitation of celebrities, the deification of symbols, and fanaticism for sects and groups. The study provides an analysis of how Ghulūw contributes to the disintegration of the social fabric, the stunting of reason and creativity, the spread of ignorance and injustice, and the undermining of security and stability—all of which are factors that directly hinder the ability of societies to achieve sustainable development and protect their natural resources. The study discusses the applied implications of these impediments in the current context, emphasizing the challenges that obstruct developmental and environmental initiatives. It affirms the importance of returning to the principles of moderation and temperance in Islam as a fundamental solution to confront Ghulūw, thereby contributing to the building of resilient and sustainable societies—environmentally, socially, and intellectually—in the modern age.

Keywords: Ghulūw, Sanctification of Individuals, Environmental Quality of Life, Sustainable Development, Contemporary Context, Application, Analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Islam is the religion of moderation and temperance, a principle confirmed by its foundational texts, as in the Almighty's saying: {And thus We have made you a justly balanced community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you} [Al-Baqarah: 143]. This noble verse establishes the principle of balance and moderation as a fundamental characteristic of the Islamic nation (al-Qurṭubī, 1964). Islam has explicitly and clearly forbidden religious extremism (Ghulūw), as Allah the Almighty says: {Say, "O People of the Scripture, do not exceed the limits in your religion beyond the truth and do not follow the inclinations of a people who had gone astray before and misled many and have strayed from the soundness of the way"} [Al-Mā'idah: 77].

Ghulūw, in its essence, is the transgression of limits in matters, and it is a dangerous and ancient scourge, as old as humanity. Historically, this phenomenon appeared since the time of Noah (peace be upon him), passing through Greek civilization, and the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic nations (Lassloom, n.d.). This extremism continues to exist in our present time in various forms, perhaps the most prominent of which is the excessive veneration of individuals. This type of Ghulūw represents a grave deviation from the moderate path to which Islam calls and is one of the foremost challenges facing societies in all times and places, especially amidst the growth of extremist ideologies in the contemporary context, which leverage technological advancements and social media for their dissemination.

The sanctification of individuals has perilous consequences that are not confined to the creedal aspect but extend to the social, economic, and intellectual spheres, adversely affecting human development and the sustainability of the quality of life. In this research, the focus will be on the

“environmental” impact of *Ghulūw*, which is not intended to mean the natural environment in its direct sense, but rather the intellectual, social, and psychological environment of a community. These environments are essential components of a comprehensive quality of life. The intellectual and creedal disturbances caused by *Ghulūw* disrupt the psychological well-being of individuals, weaken the social fabric, and impede intellectual and cultural development, thus negatively impacting the sustainability of societal welfare. This paper highlights the contemporary manifestations of *Ghulūw* and how they impede the sustainability of environmental quality of life, offering an applied analytical study within the contemporary Islamic context.

2. Problem Statement

The research problem lies in that the phenomenon of religious extremism towards individuals and their sanctification, despite religious warnings and the paradox of scientific advancement, continues to manifest strongly in the contemporary Islamic context, posing a major impediment to the sustainability of the comprehensive “environmental” quality of life. In an era of informational openness and the rise of celebrities, we find that *Ghulūw* has taken new forms, including the blind imitation of public figures (whether in religious or worldly matters), the deification of certain symbols or charismatic personalities, and blind fanaticism for groups and movements. This reprehensible sanctification leads to the *تعطيل* (stagnation) of critical thinking, encourages blind imitation, and promotes absolute submission to the words and actions of these individuals, even if they contradict clear religious texts or sound logic (Lassloom, n.d.).

The gravity of this phenomenon is not limited to creedal deviation but extends to directly threaten the environmental quality of life in its comprehensive sense. Intellectually, *Ghulūw* impedes the development of thought and innovation and leads to cognitive stagnation that harms a society’s ability to adapt and renew (al-Blaihi, n.d.). Socially, *Ghulūw* contributes to *takfīr* (excommunication), division, and conflict, which fragments the social fabric, destabilizes society, and negatively impacts cooperation and solidarity (Lassloom, n.d.). Psychologically, fanaticism and *Ghulūw* breed hatred and enmity, and disrupt the psychological peace of individuals and groups. These negative effects hinder any efforts towards sustainable development and comprehensive well-being and weaken the ability of societies to manage their resources effectively. Consequently, analyzing the contemporary manifestations of *Ghulūw* and its applied repercussions on the sustainability of environmental quality of life is necessary to understand the challenges of reality and to propose sustainable solutions.

3. Research Objectives

This research seeks to achieve the following objectives within the contemporary Islamic context:

- To identify the most prominent manifestations of *Ghulūw* and the sanctification of individuals in the current era.
- To analyze the underlying reasons for the persistence of the phenomenon of *Ghulūw* in the contemporary context.
- To uncover the applied effects of *Ghulūw* and the sanctification of individuals as an impediment leading to the disintegration of societies.
- To highlight the role of *Ghulūw* in disrupting the course of sustainable development, from the perspective of environmental quality of life.
- To provide practical recommendations for confronting *Ghulūw* in the modern era, in a way that contributes to enhancing the comprehensive environmental quality of life.

4. Research Questions

This research attempts to answer a set of pivotal questions within the contemporary Islamic context:

- What are the most prominent manifestations of *Ghulūw* in and the sanctification of individuals in contemporary reality?
- What factors contribute to the persistence and spread of the phenomenon of *Ghulūw* in the modern era?
- How does *Ghulūw* in the sanctification of individuals contribute to the disintegration of the social fabric?

- What role does *Ghulūw* play in disrupting the course of sustainable development, from the perspective of environmental quality of life?
- What are the practical recommendations for confronting *Ghulūw* to enhance the comprehensive environmental quality of life in contemporary Islamic societies?

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have addressed the phenomenon of *Ghulūw* in Islam, although the focus on its impact as a direct impediment to the sustainability of environmental quality of life (in its comprehensive sense) in the contemporary context still requires further deepening. These studies form an important launching point for this research:

- **Studies on the concept and types of *Ghulūw*:**
 - A master's thesis titled: "*Taqdīs al-Ashkhāṣ fī al-Fikr al-Bāṭinī: Dirāsah ‘Aqadīyah li-Firaq al-Ismā‘īliyyah al-Nuṣayriyyah al-Durūz ‘Arḍ wa-Naqd fī Ḍaw’ al-Kitāb wal-Sunnah*" [The Sanctification of Persons in Esoteric Thought: A Doctrinal Study of the Ismā‘īlī, Nuṣayrī, and Druze Sects—A Presentation and Critique in Light of the Qur'an and Sunnah] (Dina bint Muhyi al-Din ibn Abd al-Hamid, n.d.). This study focused on a specific aspect of *Ghulūw*, which is the esoteric aspect and how individuals are sanctified within these sects.
 - "*Taqdīs al-Ashkhāṣ fī al-Fikr al-Ṣūfī: ‘Arḍ wa-Taḥlīl ‘alā Ḍaw’ al-Kitāb wal-Sunnah*" [The Sanctification of Persons in Sufi Thought: A Presentation and Analysis in Light of the Qur'an and Sunnah] (Lūḥ, n.d.). This research highlights the manifestations of *Ghulūw* in the veneration of saints (*awliyāʾ*) within some Sufi currents.
 - "*Mazāhir Taqdīs al-Ashkhāṣ ‘inda al-Shī‘ah al-Ithnay ‘Asharīyah: ‘Arḍ wa-Naqd*" [Manifestations of the Sanctification of Persons Among the Twelver Shia: A Presentation and Critique] (al-Zahrānī, n.d.). This study dealt with the dimensions of *Ghulūw* in the veneration of the Imams among the Twelver Shia.
 - "*Al-Judhūr al-Tārīkhīyah li-Haqīqat al-Ghulū wal-Taṭarruf wal-Irhāb wal-‘Unf*" [The Historical Roots of the Reality of Extremism, Radicalism, Terrorism, and Violence] (al-Shibl, n.d.). This study provides a historical background for *Ghulūw* and radicalism, pointing to its different types and its evolution over the ages, with a focus on doctrinal and political aspects.
 - The book "*Iqtidā’ al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm li-Mukhālafat Aṣḥāb al-Jahīm*" [The Requirement of the Straight Path in Opposition to the Companions of Hell] by Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah (1419 H). This work is considered a primary reference in the critique of innovations and deviations and shows the methodology of the Salaf (predecessors) in dealing with them.
 - The writings of Imam Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, such as "*Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*" [The Book of Monotheism] (n.d.), which focus on clarifying pure monotheism, rejecting polytheism (*shirk*) and its means, and providing a sharp critique of the sanctification of individuals.

These valuable studies offer a deep understanding of the types of *Ghulūw* and its roots in different contexts and highlight its repercussions on doctrine and society. However, they often focus on describing the phenomenon or criticizing it from a direct doctrinal perspective, or they deal with it in the context of historical sects. Although the attached research itself (Lassloom, n.d.) mentions "the negative effects of *Ghulūw* on comprehensive development and the sustainability of the quality of life," it does not provide an applied analytical study in the contemporary context that directly links *Ghulūw* as an impediment to the environmental quality of life in its broad sense.

What distinguishes this research from previous studies is that it does not stop at presenting the types of *Ghulūw*, its roots, or the positions of scholars on it. Instead, it provides an applied analytical study in the contemporary Islamic context, to directly and clearly link the manifestations of *Ghulūw* and the sanctification of individuals in our current reality with their role as a major impediment to the sustainability of the "environmental" quality of life in its comprehensive sense (intellectual, social, psychological, and natural). This new angle adds value

to scientific research, especially in the context of the growing interest in concepts of comprehensive sustainability that go beyond the material dimension of the environment to include human and societal dimensions, and it offers practical solutions to the challenges of contemporary *Ghulūw*.

6. METHODOLOGY

This research is based on a dual methodology to ensure comprehensiveness and accuracy in the analysis and inference within the contemporary context:

- **Analytical Approach:**

- The concept of *Ghulūw* and the sanctification of individuals will be analyzed from a Sharia perspective, with a focus on their meanings and dimensions as they appear in the religious texts and the sayings of reputable scholars.

- The manifestations of *Ghulūw* and the sanctification of individuals in the contemporary Islamic context will be analyzed by observing the behaviors and phenomena prevalent in society, especially through modern media and social networking platforms, which point to this phenomenon (such as the imitation of celebrities, fanaticism for certain groups, absolute submission to the opinions of some symbols).

- The research will analyze the mechanisms through which *Ghulūw* affects the quality of the environmental life, by identifying the causal links between the behavioral phenomena of *Ghulūw* and its negative effects on the intellectual, social, psychological, and environmental (natural) dimensions of society.

- **Applied Approach:**

- The research will focus on providing realistic examples and applications from the contemporary context to illustrate how *Ghulūw* acts as an impediment to the sustainability of the environmental quality of life.

- For example, the impact of the discourse of *Ghulūw* on social and economic stability can be analyzed, and how this hinders comprehensive development efforts, including environmental projects.

- The research will apply the Islamic principles of moderation and temperance and how they can form a practical framework for confronting the challenges of contemporary *Ghulūw* and promoting the comprehensive environmental quality of life.

- The research will provide practical and targeted recommendations for the relevant authorities (religious, educational, and media institutions, and civil society organizations) to apply the solutions derived from the Sharia methodology to combat *Ghulūw* and promote sustainability.

This methodology aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of *Ghulūw* in the contemporary context, to uncover its mechanisms of negative influence on the quality of the environmental life, with a focus on the practical and applied aspects of confronting it.

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

7.1. Manifestations of *Ghulūw* and the Sanctification of Individuals in the Contemporary Islamic Context

The phenomenon of *Ghulūw* in the sanctification of individuals in the contemporary Islamic context is one of the pressing challenges that requires a deep understanding of its renewed manifestations. While the historical roots of *Ghulūw* form an important background, the contemporary environment, especially with technological development, has given this phenomenon new dimensions.

7.1.1. Blind Imitation of Celebrities and Symbols: In the era of social media and media openness, the number of "celebrities" in various fields, including the religious field, has increased. Researchers have noted that *Ghulūw* in them and their imitation has increased (Lassloom, n.d.). This imitation is not limited to permissible matters, but sometimes extends to the point of blind

obedience in matters of religion and the world, where their words and actions are seen as the standard of truth, even if they contradict clear religious texts or sound logic. This is very similar to the concept of "taking their scribes and monks as lords besides Allah," which the Holy Qur'an condemned (At-Tawbah: 31).

7.1.2. Blind Fanaticism for Groups and Currents: *Ghulūw* in the contemporary context is also manifested in the extreme fanaticism for some groups or intellectual and religious currents. Loyalty to the group becomes prioritized over loyalty to the truth, and the leaders of these groups and their ideas are sanctified to a degree that makes it difficult to review or criticize them. This fanaticism creates an environment of exclusion and hostility towards opponents and is a form of *Ghulūw* in persons (the leaders of the group) and ideas (the creed of the group), which leads to division and reprehensible partisanship in the Sharia.

7.1.3. Deification of Religious or Political Symbols in Some Contexts: Although the explicit deification of humans may be less common than in ancient history, some manifestations of *Ghulūw* may approach it, such as attributing absolute infallibility to some imams or leaders, or believing in their supernatural abilities that go beyond the ordinary, or even dedicating specific acts of worship or supplications to them. This is an extension of the historical models of *Ghulūw* in the Saba'iyya or some Sufi sects that deified their imams or saints (Lassloom, n.d.).

7.2. Underlying Causes for the Persistence of *Ghulūw* in the Contemporary Context

Several contemporary factors combine with the historical causes of *Ghulūw* to contribute to its persistence and spread:

7.2.1. Ignorance of the True Religion Amidst an Abundance of False Information: Despite the ease of access to information in the modern era, the abundance of unfiltered and misleading information, and the absence of correct religious guidance, contribute to the spread of ignorance of the true religion. Many people receive their religious information from unreliable sources or from unqualified individuals, which makes them vulnerable to extremist and excessive ideas.

7.2.2. Religious Emotions Aroused Through the Media: The media and social networking sites are powerful tools in arousing religious emotions. Moving stories, enthusiastic sermons, or charismatic personalities may be exploited to stir up religious emotion without providing the necessary jurisprudence and knowledge to control it, which paves the way for *Ghulūw* in persons or ideas.

7.2.3. Intellectual Vacuum and Social Crises: Many individuals, especially the youth, suffer from an intellectual vacuum or face social and economic crises (such as unemployment, injustice, and lack of justice). These circumstances make them vulnerable to being drawn in by extremist groups that offer them quick solutions or leaders in whom they believe they will find salvation, which reinforces the phenomenon of *Ghulūw* in these leaders or their ideas.

7.2.4. Absence of Moderate Role Models and the Weakening Role of Moderate Scholars: When moderate scholars and role models are absent from the scene, or their influence weakens, it opens the way for the emergence of personalities who present an excessive and extremist discourse. People tend to follow those in whom they find strength, charisma, or ready-made solutions, even if those solutions are not legitimate or realistic.

7.3. *Ghulūw* as an Impediment to the Sustainability of Environmental Quality of Life: An Applied Analysis

The negative impact of *Ghulūw* in the sanctification of individuals is manifested as a major impediment to the sustainability of the "environmental" quality of life in its comprehensive sense in the contemporary context, through several applied dimensions:

7.3.1. Stagnation of the Intellect and Creativity: Impact on the Intellectual Environment: *Ghulūw* hinders the development of critical thinking and encourages blind imitation, which leads to stagnation in the intellectual environment of society. This stagnation becomes a fundamental impediment to sustainable development, which requires innovative solutions to the challenges of the era. Societies that sanctify individuals and close the door to independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) and critical thinking become incapable of developing advanced mechanisms for resource

management, confronting climate change, or inventing solutions to pollution, which threatens the sustainability of their environmental well-being (al-Blaihi, n.d.).

7.3.2. Disintegration of the Social Fabric: Deterioration of the Social Environment: *Ghulūw* contributes to the disintegration of the social fabric through:

- **Takfir and Conflicts:** *Ghulūw* leads to the excommunication of opponents and rebellion against rulers, which incites sedition and internal conflicts. These conflicts drain human and material resources and hinder any developmental effort. Societies that suffer from divisions and extremism cannot cooperate effectively to achieve sustainability goals, such as managing shared water resources or protecting ecosystems (Lassloom, n.d.).

- **Absence of Trust and Cooperation:** When hatred and enmity spread among members of society due to creedal differences or personal loyalties, mutual trust collapses. This lack of trust hinders any collective initiatives to preserve common resources or implement development projects that require concerted efforts.

- **Ignorance and Social Backwardness:** *Ghulūw* spreads ignorance and halts the growth of knowledge. Ignorant societies are less aware of the importance of sustainability or the mechanisms for achieving it, which leads to practices that are harmful to the environment and the depletion of resources.

7.3.3. Harm to Mental Health: Impact on the Psychological Environment: The environment dominated by *Ghulūw* creates a climate of fear, anxiety, and apprehension. Individuals living under the pressure of intellectual extremism, or who are forced to submit to certain opinions without thinking, suffer from psychological stress that affects their mental health. This deterioration in mental health reduces their ability to participate positively in society and hinders their personal flourishing, which deprives society of its potential energies for achieving sustainable development.

7.3.4. Obstruction of Economic and Environmental (Natural) Development: *Ghulūw* directly and indirectly affects economic and environmental development:

- **Lack of Stability:** The conflicts resulting from *Ghulūw* drive away investment and halt development projects. Countries that suffer from extremism are usually unattractive for investment and suffer from a brain drain, which reduces their ability for comprehensive economic development.

- **Neglect of Natural Resources:** In the midst of chaos and turmoil, environmental issues (such as pollution, water scarcity, and desertification) become secondary. Natural resources are depleted without supervision or planning, and the implementation of environmental laws is neglected, which leads to serious environmental degradation that threatens future generations.

- **Absence of Environmental Technological Innovation:** *Ghulūw* hinders scientific and innovative thinking, which weakens the ability of societies to develop or adopt modern, environmentally friendly technologies, or to find sustainable solutions to the problems of energy, water, and waste (al-Blaihi, n.d.).

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study confirms that the phenomenon of *Ghulūw* in and the sanctification of individuals is not merely an individual or intellectual deviation, but a deep-rooted societal affliction with devastating effects that touch the core of human life and its sustainability. The analysis has proven that *Ghulūw* transcends mere doctrinal error to become an impeding factor for comprehensive development and a threat to societal stability. By stagnating the intellect, spreading ignorance, fueling conflicts, and devaluing human dignity, *Ghulūw* prevents societies from achieving their goals of prosperity and progress and diminishes their ability to deal effectively with contemporary challenges, including environmental challenges in their comprehensive sense. The Qur'anic and Prophetic directives that call for moderation and balance, and warn against *Ghulūw*, represent the theoretical and practical framework for confronting this phenomenon.

Sheikh 'Aṭīyya Muḥammad Sālim said in his introduction to the book by Sheikh 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Bāz about Sheikh Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb: "While some people glorify men of

thought regardless of their orientations and exaggerate in commemorating them, perhaps even erecting statues for them, we Muslims do not sanctify personalities, nor are we swayed by currents. Rather, we have standards against which men and their works are measured, and according to the weight of their scale, they are granted esteem and status in our souls. These are the standards of da'wa (call to Islam), guidance, and the fields of reform under the umbrella of Islam" (Bāz, 1411 H). In this era where affliction has become widespread, social media is prevalent, the door to fame has opened, celebrities have multiplied, and extremism in and imitation of them has increased, there is a dire need to return to the Holy Qur'ān and the purified Prophetic Sunnah, for it is the balm for every wound, the cure for every disease, and the effective remedy for all forms and shapes of extremism (Lassloom, n.d.).

Recommendations: Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

- **Promoting Moderate Religious Education:** Educational and religious institutions must focus on curricula that entrench the concept of moderation and balance in Islam, highlight the dangers of extremism in individuals, and emphasize the role of reason and critical thinking in understanding religious texts.
- **Activating the Role of Preachers and Mosque Orators:** Preachers and orators should focus their sermons and lessons on warning against extremism and the sanctification of individuals, reminding people of the importance of correctly following the Qur'ān and Sunnah, and rejecting innovation and exaggeration in praising any person.
- **Utilizing Media and Social Networking:** In an age of information proliferation, digital platforms must be used to produce meaningful content that refutes extremist ideas, promotes the values of moderation and coexistence, and highlights the negative effects of extremism on the individual, society, and the intellectual, social, and psychological environments.
- **Supporting Applied Studies and Research:** Encouraging and funding more applied studies that address the phenomenon of extremism from various angles, including studying its roots in the contemporary context, analyzing its mechanisms, and assessing its impact on the comprehensive quality of life, including sustainable development in all its dimensions (Lassloom, n.d.).
- **Affirming the Relationship Between Moderation and Comprehensive Sustainability:** It is necessary to highlight how the intellectual, social, and psychological stability achieved through moderation and the rejection of extremism is an indispensable foundation for achieving sustainable development and preserving environmental resources in all their dimensions for future generations.

We ask Allah the Almighty to show us the truth as truth and grant us the ability to follow it, and to show us falsehood as falsehood and grant us the ability to avoid it, and to protect us from trials, both apparent and hidden.

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