

EXTREMIST CHARACTERISTICS BASED ON ARRESTED CASES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Ahmad Munawar Ismail, Wan Kamal Mujani***

*Research Centre for Theology and Philosophy. Faculty of Islamic Studies. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). 43600. UKM Bangi. Selangor. Malaysia.

**Research Centre for Arabic Language and Islamic Civilization. Faculty of Islamic Studies. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). 43600. UKM Bangi. Selangor. Malaysia.

Email: *munawar@ukm.edu.my

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Abstract

Various aspects such as character, thought, belief, speech, and action were observed to determine the traits of a typical human being. Identifying the characteristics of extremists can be challenging for society, and often only becomes apparent after an individual has been detained as an extremist offender. Religious extremist groups engage in subtle heresy by deviating from the authentic teachings of Islam and promoting these deviations to their adherents as a form of religious reform. This article will examine the transformation of heretics in Southeast Asia by describing extremist characteristics in select countries. This study employed qualitative methods, including content analysis, interviews, and focus group discussions, to investigate the involvement of experts and activists in the process of rehabilitating extremists. Data on the psychological rehabilitation of extremists was gathered and analyzed using authoritative sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and works by Muslim and Western scholars, with a focus on references related to Islam, extremism, and heresy. The study aimed to ascertain the attributes of the extremist who was apprehended and subjected to official scrutiny. The results will be applied to

extremist traits data and indicators identified by national and international religious extremist researchers, including extremism analysts, university academics, and religious department officials. Consequently, this study can establish a standard indicator for identifying the characteristics of this group, aiding society in detecting and containing its associated movement.

Keywords: Heresy; extremism; rehabilitation; characteristic; Southeast Asia.

Khulasah

Perwatakan manusia normal boleh dilihat daripada beberapa aspek termasuk sifat, pemikiran, kepercayaan, pertuturan dan tindakan. Walau bagaimanapun, kepada masyarakat awam, perwatakan ekstremis ini sukar dikenal pasti dan hanya boleh dikenali setelah seseorang itu ditahan sebagai pesalah ekstrem. Kumpulan ekstremis agama melakukan pembaharuan dalam agama secara menyimpang daripada ajaran Islam yang sebenar serta disebarkan untuk diamalkan oleh pengikut, maka dari itu sifat seperti ini dikategorikan juga sebagai satu ajaran sesat secara halus. Justeru, makalah ini akan memberi tumpuan kepada transformasi ajaran sesat melalui pemerihaln perwatakan ekstremis di beberapa negara dalam Asia Tenggara. Kajian berbentuk kualitatif ini menggunakan analisis kandungan, temu bual dan perbincangan meja bulat bersama pakar dan aktivis yang pernah terlibat dengan proses rehabilitasi ekstremis. Data berkaitan rehabilitasi psikologi ekstremis dikumpulkan dan dirujuk kepada kata kunci Islam, ekstremisme and ajaran sesat. Data itu kemudiannya melalui proses analisis kandungan dan dokumen daripada sumber rujukan sahih seperti al-Quran, hadith dan pengkaji dari dunia Islam dan Barat. Tujuannya adalah untuk mengenal pasti karakter individu yang memiliki perwatakan ekstremis yang telah di tahan dan disiasat oleh pihak

berkuasa. Dapatan ini kemudiannya akan disesuaikan dengan maklumat dan indikator berkaitan karakter ekstremis sebagaimana yang telah disenaraikan oleh pengkaji ekstremisme agama di peringkat nasional dan antarabangsa iaitu penganalisis ekstremisme, ahli akademik universiti, dan pegawai di jabatan agama Islam. Perbahasan mengenai hal ini penting supaya pada akhir kajian ini satu indikator standard dapat dibentuk untuk mengenal pasti perwatakan kumpulan ini sekali gus membantu masyarakat mengenal pasti gerakan ini dan mengawalinya daripada merebak ke tahap yang lebih serius.

Kata kunci: Ajaran sesat; ekstremisme; rehabilitasi; perwatakan, Asia Tenggara.

Introduction

Islam is distinctive due to its authentic sources, namely the Qur'an and Hadith. Despite being 1500 years old, these sources remain relevant to contemporary and future events. The sources mention the social transformation of Muslims from the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), his companions, and Tabi'in (successors) to the present day, despite their adherence to the same principles. Among the character changes that have been mentioned by the source include a hadith narrated by al-Hakim which means, "From 'Abd Allah bin 'Amr bin al-'As, he heard Prophet Muhammad PBUH says, among the near signs of the Day of Judgment are the wicked is glorify, the pious is humiliated, opened the word and locked the deed, and recited *al-Mathnat* to a race. None of them dares to deny (their mistake)". It was said: "What is *al-Mathnat*? He replied: "Everything that is used as a guidance other than the words from Allah."

The term *al-Mathnat* in this hadith denotes non-religious literature or words that may resemble religious teachings but are actually the expression of an individual within a group. The term is prioritized above the Qur'an

and Hadith, which are the authentic sources of religion. In conclusion, some individuals will employ religion as a justification for their actions, irrespective of the absence of a religious basis for their arguments, as this era draws to a close. The knowledgeable groups were insulted and accused of infidelity when attempting to provide advice¹.

In Islam, the society that continues to adhere to these two authorized references is called as Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah, which is a Muslim social group that adheres to the Qur'an, Hadith and the views of the companions. This term also a key indicator that the group is guaranteed safe (al-Najiyah) in the Hereafter compared with those who have contradicts belief or faith. In all matters, including words, beliefs and practices, this social group will always refer to the authoritative sources, the Qur'an and Hadith when seeking for solutions to any problem. Besides that, they will precede the interpretation of the Qur'anic verses and Hadith as well. They paid respect to the companions and the Tabi'in (successors) and follow their views after the Qur'an and hadith. Thus, any stream or group in Islam that adheres to the principles that are contrary to the principles of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah is deviant, heretical or similar.²

These heresy and deviant streams were existing diversely. It began to exist since the time after the death of Prophet Muhammad PBUH due to various factors including fanaticism, extremism and greediness. The character of this heresy is changing, evolving and different according to the atmosphere and time. The heresy

¹ Abu 'Abd Allah al-Naysaburi al-Hakim, *al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahihayn* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, n.d).

² Zulkifli Mohamad al-Bakri, *Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah dan Usulnya* (Negeri Sembilan: Pustaka Cahaya Kasturi, 2015), 22; 'Abd al-Qahir Ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi, *Kitab al-Farq bayn al-Firqah wa Bayan al-Firqah al-Najiyah minhum* (Egypt: Matba'at al-Ma'arif, 1910), 19

nowadays cannot get away from the traditional type from the past, but as mentioned in the hadith, but heresy from this period came in more confusing ways. Cult traditions such as animism, the worship of individuals claiming to be the messenger or God has clearly shown their character but heresy in this century come in confusing conditions, tricky, fight through the platform of religion and religious symbols. However, the contents are far contrary to Islam, especially to Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah.

This heresy argues using classical texts literally without looking at the context, reality and socio-culture that exists. They adhere to their method of understanding regardless of the views and advice of contemporary Muslim scholars and become the reference of society such as Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Dr. Wahbah al-Zuhayli, Dr. 'Ali Muhy al-Din al-Qurahdaghi, Dr. Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti and many others. It is even more challenging when this group rejects all views that are contrary to them and all views that do not meet their needs are considered as kufr, apostasy and enemies of Islam³.

Heresy and Extremism

Heretical teachings are those that oppose the beliefs of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah in matters of faith, sharia, and morality. This is a long-standing tradition. Heretical teachings are frequently evident in conventional beliefs and practices concerning mystical subjects and contemporary cultures, including superstitions, heresy, and *shirk*. The occurrences of future predictions, worshipping spirit, and deviant beliefs are readily observable. The characteristics of heresy or cult

³ Ahmad Munawar Ismail et. al, "Liberalism, Extremism and Media in the Era of Convergence," *International Journal of Civil Engineering and Technology (IJCIET)* 9 (2018), 833.; Maszlee Malik, *ISIS* (Selangor: PTS Publishing House, 2016), 25.

movement can be seen in several categories; the first is matters related with sources of Islam, the Qur'an and Hadith which in the form of changing the Qur'anic verses and the meaning. Besides that, believe that the Qur'an has a spiritual meaning that differs to the physical meaning. Secondly, matters related to divinity and prophethood, for example, admit that Allah has incarnated in themselves, believe that their teachers can atone sins with money, admit they know the unknowable things and fortune-telling to someone, admit their teacher as a prophet or Prophet Isa, admit having knowledge of *al-kashf* and others; thirdly, matters related to sam'iyat or supernatural matters such as believing in the spirits of the dead or saints who can incarnate in the body of the living, believing that certain people do not die and will be reborn as Imam Mahdi, a teacher or guru made a confession that they are holding the keys to the gates of heaven and many others; fourth, things associated with sharia or Islamic law, such as abolishment of the obligations in Islam, such as praying, fasting, paying *zakat*, pilgrimage and others as well as creating new obligations, allowing the forbidden, self-submitting to the teacher through spiritual marriage and others; and the fifth, matters related with manner or morality such as solely believe to the teachings of their teacher even though his teacher made mistakes and sins, followers must keep the teachings confidential to prevent themselves afflicted with any problems⁴.

Heresy is a significant issue within the Islamic faith. The status and position of a Muslim is determined by their faith, which is a fundamental aspect. The implications are significant and extend beyond an individual's life to the

⁴ Yusoff @ Abdul Hamdi Yunus, *Penjelasan Terhadap 58 Ciri Ajaran Sesat di Malaysia* (Putrajaya: Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2006), 6.

broader world. These characteristics can potentially challenge an individual's Islamic status and lead to their conversion away from Islam. In Malaysia, dissemination of materials that promote teachings contrary to Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah is prohibited, including through practices such as publication, broadcasting, and distribution of books, pamphlets, films, and videos. Throughout this period, the phenomenon of heresy undergoes various transformations. Modern heresy exhibits traditional characteristics but in a complex context. The distribution is comprehensive, systematic, and well-coordinated. The rapid changes in technology and the diversity of dissemination media that exist make the heresy easily infiltrate the world and influence not only the lower classes but also the professional group. Heresy is now hiding behind modern thinking such as secularism, liberalism and pluralism. It is complicated not to associate these thinking factors with the current development of heresy. The assimilation of the characters of heretical teachings with the characters of thought mentioned succeeded in creating extreme thought interactions thus forming a new face and identity of heretical teachings with misleading titles⁵. This radical thinking has unfair implications for society, race, religion or the perpetrator. Unfair or injustice in this context can be described as the behavior that is contrary to the truth, especially in the effort to defend things that are not true. The Muslim does not realize this assimilation, but it is able to confuse everyone, threaten the religious harmony and unity of the Muslim community.

⁵ Ahmad Munawar Ismail, Wan Kamal Mujani & Ahmad Aiman Zuhaily AM, "Methods of *Da'wah* and Social Networks in Dealing with Liberalism and Extremism," *Islamiyyat: The International Journal of Islamic Studies* 40 (2018), 132.

In the linguistic aspect, extreme means excessive and obsessive views. In Arabic, it is defined as *furtah* or *al-ifrat* which means excessive, exceeding the limits or exceeding the reality. It is also synonymous with the meaning of *ghuluw* which refers to the meaning of extreme, addition and exaggeration⁶. The term extremism refers to a broad characteristic, including the attitude of political and religious actors who go beyond the bounds in defending their political or religious doctrines or ideologies⁷. According to *Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat*⁸, the term extremism has a similar meaning with the term radicalism which means ideology, streams and beliefs that want sudden changes in the political and social arena. Extremism also refers to an ideology that forces mutual agreement regardless of the more practical circumstances. It is often presented in the form of unwanted, bad behaviour and generally against reality. An extremist will not tolerate ideologies and beliefs that are not from them and their group. Beliefs usually occur in the form of religion or politics or a combination of both⁹. However, extremism can also emerge with ideologies that are not based on religion and politics. It is due to environmental factors, social ideologies involving racial questions and others. For example, anti-racist

⁶ Abu al-Husayn Ahmad Ibn Faris, *Mu'jam Maqayis al-Lughah* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1979).

⁷ Elias Antoon Elias, *Elias' Modern Dictionary: English-Arabic; Arabic-English* (Cairo: Elias' Modern Press, 1913).

⁸ Noresah Baharom, "Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat," Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2007, <https://prpm.dbp.gov.my/Cari1?keyword=extremism&d=28648&#LIHATSINI>

⁹ Roger JR Levesque ed., *Encyclopedia of Adolescence* (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2011); Lauren Willis, *Extremism: Opposing Viewpoints* (New York: Greenhaven Press, 2011).

organizations such as the neo-Nazis and the Aryan nation in America were said to like to belittle the dignity of other nations besides them¹⁰.

The existence of extremism in religion is also not something new; in fact the characters are rough, obsess, claiming they are the valid stream has become part of the characteristics of traditional heresy. Extremism refers to the excessive attitude in practicing religious teachings. The extreme attitude of religion often occurs in two scenarios. The first scenario is in Christianity. They glorified the Prophet Isa as Jesus and God. Besides that, Rafidah Shiites who are being extreme by elevating the position of 'Ali compared to other companions (May Allah be pleased with them). Some even consider that there is someone else better than Prophet Muhammad PBUH. The second scenario is extremes in worship such as extreme in practising religious¹¹, including fasting for an extended period or without breaking the fast, and even not allowing themselves to get married¹². Besides that, extremism also defined as the extremists who like to give specific labels to individuals or groups that usually have negative connotations and even worse they use violence to force their beliefs, ideologies or moral values to be accepted by others. Usually, this group does not adhere to the rationale, reason and logic, but adherence to the foundations or rules of religion and ideology of theirs¹³.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Shereeza Mohamed Saniff & Noor Shakirah Mat Akhir, "Views of Selected Malaysian Muslims Academia on Extremism in Islam," *Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam (AFKAR)* 19 (2017), 173.

¹² Sihabuddin Afroni, "Makna Ghuluw Dalam Islam: Benih Ekstremisme Beragama" *Jurnal Ilmiah Agama dan Sosial Budaya* 1 (2016), 73.

¹³ Huma Baqai, "Extremism and Fundamentalism: Linkages to Terrorism Pakistan's Perspective" *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 1 (2011), 242.

Meanwhile, stated that extremism is not limited to individuals or particular groups only but also includes secularists¹⁴. There was also the diversity of groups in extremism including fascism, skinhead fascism, Nazi Party, white supremacy, military group, denial of Holocaust, anti-racist, a religious cult, anti-homosexual, anti-Jewish and others¹⁵.

Extremism and Islam

In Islam, ideology and extreme activities are an act that is strictly forbidden. This prohibition can be seen in some evidence of the Qur'an and Hadith, Allah Almighty says in al-Nisa', verse 171 which means, "O People of the Scripture, do not commit excess in your religion or say about Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was but a messenger of Allah and His word which He directed to Mary and a soul [created at a command] from Him." According to al-Tabari¹⁶, this verse is a warning from Allah Almighty to the Christians not to go beyond the limits in religion. They were also forbidden to give the wrong statement about Jesus and saying something that is not true about Allah Almighty such as saying that Jesus is the son of Allah.

The same prohibition is also found in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH among others as narrated

¹⁴ Mohd Faizal Abdul Khir et al., "Sustaining Tolerance According to Brenda Almond's "Education for Tolerance": An Analysis from Islamic Perspective," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 8 (2015), 48; Brenda Almond, "Education for Tolerance: Cultural Difference and Family Values," *The Journal of Moral Education* 39 (2010), 132.

¹⁵ Lynn Davies, *Education Against Extremism* (United Kingdom: Trentham Books, 2008).

¹⁶ Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil ay al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Pustaka Azam, 2007).

by Imam Muslim¹⁷ in his *sahih*, in the book *ʿIlm*, chapter *Halak al-Mutanati'un* (No. 2670) which means, "Destroy the *al-mutanati'un* people! Destroy the *al-mutanati'un* people! Destroy the *al-mutanati'un* people!" Imam al-Nawawi in interpreting this hadith stated the meaning of *al-mutanati'un* in the hadith above were people who are rough, complicate when discussing a problem until the interpretation and opinion is beyond limits. These extremists are also referred to as people who study in particular knowledge and become obsessive. These people are the ones who go overboard in speech and deeds.

In the same way, al-Qaradawi¹⁸ explained, these extremists are those who are far from justice. On the other hand, the extremists are usually those isolated from the aspect of their thoughts and attitudes towards religion. Clearly, the prohibition of this extreme understanding is prohibited by Allah Almighty through his verses and has been said several times by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. This action is proof that Islam not only dislikes the act but also condemns anyone who does it. Those who are extreme in religion will usually talk about Allah Almighty without rights and talk about religious matters without knowledge until the end, because of their attitudes, they were misled by themselves and influenced others to deviate from the actual teachings of religion and the principles of universal humanity.

For example, ISIS exploits the verses of the Qur'an and hadith about the event of war according to their own beliefs by misleading Muslims into participating the war in the call of *jihad* together with them. However, it is clear

¹⁷ Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj al-Qushayri, *Sahih Muslim* (Jakarta: Publisher Widjaya, 1966).

¹⁸ Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Islamic Awakening between Rejection and Extremism*, ed. A. Al Shaikh Ali (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1991), 22-23.

that the war in Syria was a war among Muslims and it happened because of political clashes¹⁹. The misunderstanding that led to violent can be stopped if Muslim really understand the right teaching of Islam and practiced it according to Allah's commandments.

Research Methodology

This study employs qualitative research methods. The methods utilized are content analysis, document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. This study on rehabilitating extremists in Malaysia used data collected from authorized sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and scholarly works on Islam, extremism, and heresy. Content and document analysis were conducted using these key references.

Ten extremist rehabilitation activists from Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, Thailand, and the Philippines, were chosen for semi-structured interviews. Two interview protocols were created and their data reliability was assessed through expert acknowledgement using Cohen's Kappa coefficient.

Three focus groups were formed for discussions, each consisting of six to ten participants from various agencies including Malaysian extremist analyst, Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), Islamic Religious Council of State in Malaysia, Nanyang Technological University of Singapore, and Fatoni University in Thailand. The experts analyze the characteristics of extremist offenders based on their knowledge, experiences, and perceptions. The study employed semi-structured interview questions with a

¹⁹ Siti Naqiyah Mansor, Salasiah Hanin Hamjah & Izzah Nur Aida Zur Raffar, "Ideologi Gerakan Islamic State of Iraq dan Sham (ISIS) di Malaysia", *ISLAMIYYAT* 40 (2018), 100.

particular focus on the topic. The data was contracted and analyzed using QSR Nvivo-11 software.

Result and Discussion

The article discussed on the characteristics of extremists in the context of Southeast Asia based on several arrests and investigations made by the government of every involved country, especially involving Malaysia Mujahideen Group or *Kumpulan Mujahideen Malaysia* (KMM)²⁰, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)²¹ and DAESH (al-Dawlah al-Islamiyyah fi al-‘Iraq wa al-Sham)²². Some indicators have been taken into account from the Islamic and Western perspectives with local scholars to analyze the character of extremists and things associated with their heretical thoughts.

In the context of Malaysia, the associated extremist behavior is more towards the extreme behavior of individuals or groups representing politics and religion combined, although in general, these extreme attitudes can exist in various perspectives, as mentioned earlier. This trend is also based on the fact by Horgan²³, the extremism

²⁰ Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), 13.

²¹ Mohd Mizan Mohammad Aslam, "Critical Study of Kumpulan Militan Malaysia, Its Wider Connections in the Region and the Implications of Radical Islam for the Stability of Southeast Asia", (Phd. dissertation, University of Wellington, 2019) 97; Elena Pavlova, "Jemaah Islamiah According to PUPJI," in *A Handbook of Terrorism and Insurgency in Southeast Asia*, ed. ATH Tan, (Cheltenham: Edwar Elgar Publishing Limited, 2007) 76-103; Kamarulnizam Abdullah, "The Rise of Radical Political Islam in Southeast Asia: A Malaysian Perspective," International Symposium on The Dynamics and Structure of Terrorist Threats in Southeast Asia, Kuala Lumpur, 2005.

²² Ahmad Sauffiyan Abu Hassan, "Daesh: Kebangkitan dan Pengaruh Media Sosial," *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication* 32 (2016), 382.

²³ John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 199-204.

is an extremist ideology that is based on a specific ideology and threatens others if they are contrary to the ideological groups. In the same vein, Kanade²⁴ also said (in the Islamic context) extremists are those who combine politics and religion by using distorted jihad terms. These individuals or groups use Islam's name to spread ideologies mixed with divisions in religion to legitimize their plans and actions. For some scholars and as of September 2003, the Beyond Intractability listed on its website the initial method of identifying this group is through the activities of individuals or a group whether their beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions and strategies are far beyond limits and habits, especially when interpreting and implementing a rule²⁵.

Extremist Characteristics by al-Qaradawi

The whole idea of representing these extremist characters has a shape of traditional heresy but presented in a new way through the names, such as IS, ISIL, ISIS, Daesh and others. These ideologies are contrary to religion and deviate from the actual teachings of Islam. Moreover, it is the cause of the existence of huge problems. This thought and understanding happened when human beings have free themselves from the correct principles and teachings of Islam or interpret those principles and teachings based on liberal thinking and according to their rationale. The characteristics of this group are difficult to control and

²⁴ Nikhil Kanade, "Tracing Islamic Extremist Ideologies: The Historical Journey of Jihad from the Late Antique Period to the 21st Century" (Senior thesis, Claremont McKenna College, 2016), 6-7.

²⁵ Mohamad Kamil Abd Majid & Rahimin Affandi Abd Rahim, "Perubahan Sosial dan Impaknya Terhadap Pembentukan Modal Insan Menurut Ibn Khaldun," *Journal of Hadhari* 1 (2009) 51, Andrea Bartoli & Peter T. Coleman, "Dealing with extremists," accessed May 14, 2018, https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/dealing_extremists

identify because the names, titles and approaches of this group always changed and moved privately and openly through the war of nerve.

Their characters are changing, the causes are various, and some have not yet been identified and the action against them has also not been finalized. In some cases, they are seen to come up with the image of Islam and carry the teachings of Islam but the reality is far from that. They use Islam to fulfill their needs and lusts of specific individuals or groups. The movements took place throughout and penetrated all over the world. The theory about the dispersal of it was very long, and the analogy continues to evolve. This ideology needs to be addressed collectively, strategically and systematically to avoid unusual chaos in an era of convergence which is hard to read²⁶. In determining the characters of extremists, al-Qaradawi²⁷ put some statements that we can assess whether a person is extreme or otherwise:

1. Fanatic to one opinion and do not acknowledge the views from others. The views presented also do not follow the authority of *shari'ah*, the general human interest and the current reality. Their act of not care about others opinion in holding a discussion make their groups awkward and isolated.
2. It is obligating others with something that is not obligatory by Allah and taking a harsh attitude by rejecting other people space and time.
3. Being rude or harsh on branch problems (*furu'*) and things that are disputed (caliphate) and

²⁶ Ahmad Munawar Ismail et. al, "Liberalism, Extremism and Media in the Era of Convergence" *International Journal of Civil Engineering and Technology (IJCIET)* 9 (2018), 836.

²⁷ Al-Qaradawi, *Islamic Awakening*, 22-23.

forgetting the core thing which is to correct the faith.

4. Rude in a relationship, abusive in speech and harsh in the delivery of *da'wah*.
5. Prejudice against others by making baseless accusations, concealing their virtues and exaggerating the alleged offenses.
6. They are arbitrarily disbelieving others, allowing them to kill and take off their possessions. They disbelieve in every person who commits a great sin, disbelieves in those who do not accept their thoughts and disbelieves in the undisputed (pledge of allegiance) in their congregation.

Extremism Arrested Cases in Southeast Asia from the Views of Experts

Among Asian countries, extremism often begins from Indonesia, although some countries in the Middle East is seen as having a role or influence of its own. In Indonesia, extremism generally referred to as thought and action by someone or some people who support the radical ideology for example, the enforcement of political, religious, and ideological. The involvement of Muslims in Indonesia in the extremist activities is very little despite the long history from their post-independence to post-political reform in 1998. There are two forms of extremism in Indonesia, namely, non-violent extremism such as Hizbut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) or Khilafatul Muslimin (KM) and violent extremism, such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and pro-ISIS groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Jamaah Ansharut Daulah and Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid. These organizations are non-state actors who carry the religious 'flag' in their extremist characteristics.

Meanwhile, the characteristics of extremists in Indonesia also based on the religious-centered thinking

system and articulate religion for political purposes. According to them, only by changing the existing state system to the caliphate system through the Islamic State can solve all questions related to social, economic, and governance problems. There are three main characters listed by the Indonesian government to represent this group, namely, first, in the form of intellectual stimuli that adhere to religion as the single truth that is the solution to all existing defects; second, harsh behavior or acts of violence against any individual who opposed his views; and third, the use of weapons in pursuit of their political ambitions. The organization of this group consists of leaders and cadres of leaders who have views that are contrary to the government, which in them is a Western invention and has a tendency towards the West. Their expertise is extensive, encompassing all walks of life, and has a strong network in all institutions, including education and the bureaucratic structure. Its influence is not only in Indonesia but also in neighboring countries such as Malaysia and Singapore²⁸.

Malaysia

In Malaysia, extremism's interpretation is vague as no specific laws or provisions are defining the term. The standard definition used in the prevention of extremism and radicalism in this country is the definition quoted from the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), which is the understanding of individuals who are fanatics, extreme or excessive towards religion by individuals or groups who basically do not

²⁸ INFID (International NGO Forum on Indonesia Development), "Urgensi dan Strategi Efektif Pencegahan Ekstremisme di Indonesia", accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.infid.org/publication/read/kertas-kebijakan-urgensi-dan-strategi-efektif-pencegahan-ekstremisme-di-indonesia>

have a proper understanding of Islam especially on matters of faith and sharia. This definition is similar to the meaning of radicalism which is an understanding, a stream or a belief that wants a sudden change in the political and social arena. It also refers to an ideology that forces one by one mutual agreement by placing those who adhere to conflicting ideologies as enemies²⁹.

According to Hafiz³⁰, from the perspective of implementation of the enforcement of extremism in the Islamic Religious Council of State, extremists referred to as a cult practitioner who have decreed, enacted and has been ordered by the Malay Rulers. The heretical teachings refer to those that diverge from Islam and oppose the beliefs and doctrines of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah. This group exhibits excessive and extreme levels of faith, worship, and morals. The liberal perspective of fiqh leads to deviation from Islamic teachings. According to Hafiz³¹ again, this group is characterized by two well-known figures: one who is extremely permissive, allowing for all actions, and another who is excessively strict, labeling any Muslim who does not join them as an unbeliever and misguided.

Generally, these two groups do not have a proper religious education. They do not have an official

²⁹ IYRES (Institute for Youth Research Malaysia), "Garis Panduan Pencegahan Fahaman Radikalisme dan Ekstremisme dalam Kalangan Belia dan Masyarakat", Ministry of Youth and Sport, accessed August 1, 2019 <https://www.ippbm.gov.my/dokumen/Garis%20Panduan%20Ekstremisme.pdf>; see Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat, <https://prpm.dbp.gov.my/Cari1?keyword=extremism&d=28648&#LIHATSINI>

³⁰ Abdul Halem Hafiz, "Extremism and Extremist Rehabilitation from A Religious Perspective", interviewed by Ahmad Munawar Ismail, Bangi, October, 2018.

³¹ *Ibid.*

religious foundation, and even the essential things in religion were not relying on correct and precise sources and information. According to Mas'ud³², extremism is an extreme ideology, which violates manners and ethics, which is contrary to the rules of religion and the country and violates humanity's norms. This extremist attitude is violent and can trigger violent acts, thus threatening the safety of the soul, race, and country. Besides that, the main characteristics of this group are extreme or *ghuluw*.

Moreover, according to the local extremist analyst, Dr. Geshina Ayu Mat Saat³³, there are three characters referred to extremism, namely the perpetrator, offender, and criminal. The perpetrator is a normal human being but has extreme symptoms but has not yet translated the situation into action. On the other hand, offenders give the same meaning to the perpetrators; the only difference is that offenders have been arrested and imprisoned but not sentenced. Those in this category will usually be given counselling by the prison or the agency appointed by the prison. Criminals mean those who not only have the characteristics of perpetrators and offenders but translate their understanding and thinking through violent and illegal actions. The group has gone through the legal process and has been sentenced.

However, these three characters are usually involved with excessive understanding, thoughts and attitudes, overstepping the boundaries, and violating discipline.

³² Mohd Aizam Masud, "Extremism and Extremist Rehabilitation from a Religious Perspective", interviewed by Ahmad Munawar Ismail, Bangi, October, 2018.

³³ Dr.Geshina Ayu Mat Saat, "Extremism and Extremist Rehabilitation from a Psychological Perspective", interviewed by Ahmad Munawar Ismail, Bangi, October, 2018.

Hafiz³⁴ also argues, these individuals or groups are usually liberal-minded and force society to accept their liberal and rational arguments extremely or excessively. This extreme characteristic can occur in two situations, namely too loose or too tight. Both return to the basics of liberal thinking earlier, which is to deny the conservative interpretation of Islamic teachings and give their interpretation according to their group's understanding, importance, and direction. The kind of understanding is perilous and can damage the faith and have implications for national and regional security.

According to Masud³⁵ again, individuals in this group have a vindictive nature, fanatic, and do not accept others' views. All group members must swear and set a goal to uphold the caliphate system to realize the existence of Daulah Islamiyyah through any means, including violence. In a television program³⁶ entitled, *Syariah Meja Bulat*, Datuk Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay, a Bukit Aman Special Branch Counter-Terrorism (E8) Principal Assistant Director of Royal Malaysian Police was interviewed and said that the basis of this group's movement is to "defend the dignity of Islam" through a distorted interpretation of the concept of jihad.

The group's utilization of Islamic terminology or Qur'anic verses, subject to their own interpretation, contributes to the difficulty of promptly identifying them.

³⁴ Abdul Halem Hafiz, "Extremism and Extremist Rehabilitation from A Religious Perspective", interviewed by Ahmad Munawar Ismail, Bangi, October, 2018.

³⁵ Mohd Aizam Masud, "Extremism and Extremist Rehabilitation from a Religious Perspective", interviewed by Ahmad Munawar Ismail, Bangi, October, 2018.

³⁶ Datuk Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay, "Syariah Meja Bulat 2019 | Ep 14 - Jihad", interviewed by Ally Iskandar, YouTube TV3MALAYSIA Official, June 25, 2019. Video, 1:00:23, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTwvaSEwXMw>

In-depth studies and reviews were conducted before any arrests were made. His involvement involves all walks of life, including the police, army, teachers, lecturers, and the general public. Nevertheless, almost 80% of them are young people under the age of 30. Their target is Muslim politicians who are against their ideology and are deemed not to defend Islam. These group management methods are structured, and their organization is organized. Efforts to recruit a new generation continue to this day. In the past, they used *usrah* (small group of people were gathering to learn a knowledge), *tamrin* (a program), or the like to recruit old and new members but now they exploit the media to the maximum and will gather at a specific time, especially when the need to attack comes.

In line with this view, Dr. Kamilin Jamilin³⁷ states, history also proves that those involved in this extreme movement are composed of young groups or at an early age because they have a "spirit", feeling smart and the feelings of others who have different views with them are considered wrong. This movement has been going on all along. The main objectives of this group are politics, power, and leadership. To achieve this, they usually use religious elements and misinterpret religious terms according to their understanding. They use the Qur'anic verses but do not understand it properly and use it in the wrong context. This group also describes the perpetrators of major sins as the outcast of religion, must be overthrown and fought in any way. Usually, these individuals or groups often feel they know everything about religion despite not having the right religious

³⁷ Dr. Kamilin Jamilin, "Syariah Meja Bulat 2019 | Ep 14 - Jihad", interviewed by Ally Iskandar, YouTube TV3MALAYSIA Official, June 25, 2019. Video, 1:00:23, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTwvaSEwXMw>

knowledge and even learn about religion in a simple way, such as through technology and social media.

Singapore

In Singapore, extremists are often associated with Malaysia and Indonesia. According to Ahmad Saiful Rijal Hasan³⁸, a Fellow at S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Counter Terrorism Unit, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, the Singapore Government's definition is more open than Malaysia. Here, extremism is a national security issue and the extremists are defined as any individual who provokes quarrels, divisions, and fights that threaten the country regardless of religion, politics, or race. For religious extremists, in particular, Hassan³⁹ argues, there are specific characteristics that can be identified in determining the character of individuals involved with this group including, young, active with internet sites, have an understanding of their own religion, confident that what they do is right and follows the actual teachings of Islam, considering those who are not in line with it as enemies, love challenges, love violence and the desire to do something specific for religion.

However, they do not have the proper knowledge of religion and seek religious-related materials quickly from their own congregation members and social sites. Most of them are influenced by their friends in Indonesia and Malaysia, apart from the following information from social media and related websites. They also have their own spiritual leaders and have manifestos that must be upheld. For this group, countries led by Muslims such as

³⁸ Ahmad Saiful Rijal Hasan, "Extremism in Singapore", interviewed by Ahmad Munawar Ismail, Geylang, January, 2019.

³⁹ Ahmad Sauffiyan, "Daesh: Kebangkitan dan Pengaruh Media Sosial," 393.

Indonesia and Malaysia are infidels that are not an Islamic country.

Thailand

In contrast to Southern Thailand, extremists need to be given a different definition. Violent perpetrators in Southern Thailand, for example, are comprised of citizens who are depressed for demanding regional autonomy. Violence is also the result of provocation by the government or those who hide behind the relaxation of government control. Thus, the perpetrators should not be given the same status as extreme perpetrators such as IS, ISIL, or DAESH. The same is true in Mindanao, Philippines. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ahmad Umar Japakiya, a Deputy Rector of Fatoni University⁴⁰, argues that the armed movement is more appropriately called the Pattani Independence Struggle Movement in Thailand. They are fighting for independence and, at the same time, urge for the independence of Pattani province. The act is not the best option for the Thailand government.

Therefore, the atmosphere is always chaos, and there must be efforts to alleviate the pressure. Giving the title of extremist to this group only adds to the existing pressure. Thus, there is no such thing as an extremist group as the definition of extremism exists in IS, ISIL or DAESH. The most critical steps are the way to control this group of independence fighters from acting more violently. Therefore, the establishment of several institutes such as the al-Slam Institute, the Wasatiyyah Institute, and the Fatoni University itself play a role in providing explanations and 'middlemen' between the fighters and the government.

⁴⁰ Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ahmad Umar Japakiya, "Extremism in Thailand", interviewed by Ahmad Munawar Ismail, Kuching, October, 2018.

Analysis of Extremist Characteristics Based on Extremism Experts in Southeast Asia

Clearly, the analysis of the study findings showed that misguided thinking on extremist characters in the context of Southeast Asia countries can be seen in some of the following characteristics, namely:

1. Moving through an organization which consists of a leader who believed (incorrectly) as a high spiritual level. These leaders are assisted by leadership cadres who have the governments opposite views and the majority of leading Muslim scholars. Its membership is broad, covering all walks of life and careers. The group also continually recruits new members by focusing on the young. It is also not subject to any independent country as long as it follows the same methods of fight and principles.
2. The objective of this organization is to defend the dignity of religion (in their opinion) to restore the caliphate system and uphold the Islamic State. For them, religion (according to their mold or shape) is the only solution to all human problems, including education, economics, and social problems.
3. Their philosophy is liberal, that is, thinking that tries to free Islam from any interpretation of Islamic tradition (the Qur'an and hadith) by interpreting, processing, or denying any Islamic evidence that is not in line with their political thoughts and interests. Its formative covers all aspects of human life, including education, religion, and society. It adheres to the concepts of rationality, openness, and intellectual freedom.
4. The approach used consists of various means including labeling, persuading, forcing, putting pressure through various mediums such as seminar,

article publishing, book publishing, video dissemination, and social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and others.

5. The main character of the members of this organization is lack of in-depth religious knowledge, harsh, vindictive, argumentative, extreme with their own views, fanatical with leaders and groups, overreacting by not accepting permission other than those coming from members of their own group and do not recognize the views of authorized Muslim scholars even though the majority of Muslims has adopted those views.
6. The angle of deviation can be seen through faith, sharia, and morality. From the perspective of faith, this group most likely will talk about God, the Prophet, and matters related to the pillars of faith without the correct and solid foundation of religious knowledge. For example, it promises a guarantee of martyrdom and heaven to those who die in their fight. From a sharia perspective, this group often goes beyond the limits of interpreting a single law. For example, labelling infidels and apostates to anyone who disagrees with their group's arguments and approaches. From a moral perspective, they are made up of fanatical and submissive circles to their leaders and group members. They are violent towards those who disagree with them and legalize the blood of their opponents. They also do not respect the laws of a country. For them, all the politicians or leaders of Islam today are infidels because they do not fulfil the responsibility of preserving Islam's dignity.

Conclusion

The extremists, with all the characteristics mentioned above, which were: deviant leaders, deviant objectives of

organization, liberal philosophy, violent approach in social media, false teaching about Islam, and deviation in all aspects including faith, sharia, and morality gave a bad image to Islam as if Islam is a religion that supports the act of terrorism. In fact, they went beyond their limits and, their fights were against the teachings, guidelines, and laws contained in the Qur'an and Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH.

Same with the traditional heretical teachings, this extremist thought has almost identical characteristics in some characters. Both advocate things that were contrary to Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah such as being fanatical towards the leader. The leaders thought that only their principles and teachings are true, punish anyone who disagrees with their belief as infidels and lastly, translate and interpret the Qur'anic verses and hadith according to their interpretation. A few things that may differ between these two forms of heresy were extremism is more daring to spread their heresy openly through various mediums. Their ideas, concepts, principles, and methods of fighting were spread on social media and shared by anyone interested. The government determines to control the sources of information entry through various mechanisms; otherwise, the situation would have worsened.

Therefore, Muslims must always seek knowledge and understand the teachings of Islam through the correct medium or way. It must come from the original and authoritative sources, adhere to the principles of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah, properly practice effective da'wah methods and continue to pray to Allah Almighty to bestows the strength to continue on the straight and safe path in this world and the Hereafter.

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