



From *Qitāl* to Moral Transformation: A Genealogy of War Verse Interpretations in Qur'anic Exegetical History

This study explores the transformation of the concept of *qitāl* within the historical discourse of Qur'anic exegesis, particularly in relation to verses often associated with warfare. The issue has gained increasing relevance in the context of Islamophobia and widespread misconceptions that frequently link Islam to violence. By employing a genealogical approach to Qur'anic exegesis, this research aims to trace the transformation of the meaning of *qitāl* from the pre-Qur'anic era to contemporary exegesis. The findings reveal that while *qitāl* initially referred to physical combat with a violent connotation, it evolved into a concept imbued with moral and spiritual dimensions within Islamic teachings. This shift continued across the exegetical discourse from the classical to contemporary periods, where *qitāl* no longer solely emphasizes physical warfare but encompasses non-physical struggles that contribute to discussions on social justice and global peace. This transformation has been shaped by various social and political contexts, as well as by the agents involved. These influences indicate an ongoing dynamism in Qur'anic interpretation, reflecting its adaptation to global developments, particularly in response to Islamophobia and the narratives that associate Islam with violence.

Keywords: Concept of *qitāl*, war verses, genealogy of Qur'anic exegesis

Penelitian ini membahas transformasi pemaknaan konsep *qitāl* dalam diskursus sejarah penafsiran al-Qur'an, khususnya ayat-ayat yang kerap dihubungkan dengan perang. Isu ini menjadi kian relevan dalam konteks Islamofobia dan kesalahpahaman yang sering mengaitkan Islam dengan kekerasan. Melalui pendekatan genealogi tafsir, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menelusuri transformasi pemaknaan *qitāl* dari era pra-Qur'anic hingga era tafsir kontemporer. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *qitāl* yang pada awalnya menggambarkan perang fisik dengan nuansa yang brutal, kemudian berkembang menjadi konsep yang bernuansa moral dan spiritual dalam ajaran Islam. Transformasi makna ini berlanjut dalam diskursus perkembangan tafsir dari era klasik hingga era kontemporer, di mana konsep *qitāl* tidak lagi hanya terfokus pada perang fisik, tetapi juga mencakup perjuangan non-fisik yang berperan dalam wacana keadilan sosial serta perdamaian global. Transformasi ini dipengaruhi oleh konteks sosial, politik, serta agen-agen yang terlibat di dalamnya. Tidak dapat dilepaskan bahwa pengaruh-pengaruh tersebut menunjukkan adanya dinamisasi penafsiran al-Qur'an yang merefleksikan adaptasi terhadap perkembangan global, dalam hal ini Islamofobia atau narasi-narasi tentang Islam dan kekerasan.

Kata kunci: Konsep *qitāl*, ayat-ayat perang, genealogi tafsir al-Qur'an.

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Introduction

In recent years, the issue of Islamophobia has sparked discussions about “removing violent verses from the Qur’an”, particularly those related to war (*jihād* and *qitāl*), with the aim of deradicalization.¹ This notion stems from claims that extremist groups often exploit these ‘war verses’ by interpreting them literally to propagate their ideology of ‘holy war’.² However, considering the historical context, the concept of war in the Qur’an carries a far more nuanced meaning than its literal interpretation focused solely on physical confrontation.³ In pre-Islamic Arab society (*jāhiliyyah*), terms associated with war, such as *jihād* and *qitāl*, were used to depict violent conflicts, lacking any moral dimension.⁴ With the advent of Islam, while the Qur’an retained these terminologies, it reframed them to emphasize their spiritual, moral, and social dimensions.⁵ This study aims to trace the roots of these terms as used in the Qur’anic text, particularly focusing on the meaning of war from a synchronic and diachronic perspective—spanning from the pre-Qur’anic and Qur’anic eras to its interpretation in classical and contemporary exegesis through a genealogical lens.

The preliminary data we have gathered reveals that the term *qitāl* emerges as a key representative word relevant for describing the concept of war in the Qur’an. While this research also identifies several other vocabulary terms related to the notion of war, such as *jihād*, *ḥarb*, *ghazwah*, *irhāb*, *ḍarb*, and *naḥar*, these terms do not always explicitly refer to war in the physical or combative sense. In contrast, the term *qitāl* has a clear and specific literal meaning that refers distinctly to physical warfare. In the context of the Arabic language, *qitāl* is consistently interpreted within the framework of conflict and battles involving physical contact. This clarity of meaning makes *qitāl* an appropriate key term for analyzing the concept of war in the Qur’an, as it provides a more accurate depiction of armed conflict situations compared to other terms that may carry broader or ambiguous connotations. Consequently, this study selects *qitāl* as the primary focus of analysis to understand how its dynamics and dialectics of interpretation have evolved throughout history, both synchronically and diachronically.

In the context of Qur’anic exegesis, several prior studies have explored the concept of war, notably those conducted by Sri Mulyati⁶, Saleh Hanzadeh⁷, and Javier Albarrán⁸, who empha-

¹ Abdul Muiz Amir et al., “From Framing to Flaming in the Cross-Theological Debate: How Are Christian Prince’s Commentaries Represented the Qur’an on Youtube?,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 23, no. 1 (2023): 110–131. Mohammed Wajihuddin, “Remove 26 Verses from Quran, Says PIL, Draws Backlash,” <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>, last modified March 2021, accessed July 17, 2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/remove-26-verses-from-quran-says-pil-draws-backlash/articleshow/81477452.cms>. Fitriyan Zamzami, “Hapus 300 Ayat, Benarkah Alquran Kitab Kekerasan?,” <https://rihlah.republika.co.id/>, last modified 2022, accessed July 29, 2023, <https://rihlah.republika.co.id/posts/78837/hapus-300-ayat-benarkah-alquran-kitab-kekerasan->.

² Abdul Muiz Amir, “How Muslims-Christians-Jews Relations in the Qur’an?(Critical Interpretation of Q. Al-Baqarah/2: 120 Using Ma’nā-Cum-Magzā Approach),” *Al-Hikmah: International Journal of Islamic Studies and Human Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2022): 100–123. Asma Afsaruddin, “Competing Perspectives on Jihad and ‘Martyrdom’ in Early Islamic Sources,” in *Witnesses to Faith?* (Routledge, 2016), 29–46. Anjad A

Mahasneh, “The Translation of Jihad Verses after the Emergence of ISIS: Distortion or Reality,” *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 10, no. 5 (2021): 129–140.

³ Abdul Rouf, “Jihad: Between Text and Context,” *Mumtaz: Jurnal Studi Al-Quran dan Keislaman* 4, no. 01 (2020): 69–85.

⁴ Ali Mostfa, “Violence and Jihad in Islam: From the War of Words to the Clashes of Definitions,” *Religions* 12, no. 11 (2021): 966.

⁵ Sri Mulyati, “The Meaning of Jihad: Textual and Contextual Interpretations,” *PERTANIKA Journals* 27, no. 1 (2019): 423.

⁶ Mulyati, “The Meaning of Jihad: Textual and Contextual Interpretations,” 419–424.

⁷ Saleh Hanzadeh and Ali Abedi Renani, “A Peaceful Interpretation of Jihad in the Qur’an,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 46, no. 12 (2023): 2501–2520.

⁸ Javier Albarrán, “The Almohads and the ‘Qur’anization’ of War Narrative and Ritual,” *Religions* 12, no. 10 (2021): 876.





size the importance of understanding *jihād* within the dimensions of spiritual and moral values (*jus ad bellum*). Additionally, research by Ahmad Murodi⁹, Ali Mostafa¹⁰, and Brandon Colas¹¹ highlights the often distorted meanings in the translation of war verses in the Qur'an within a modern context. Further investigations into *jihād* and *qitāl* have been undertaken by Abdul Wahab¹², Bahruddin¹³, Suhaimi¹⁴, and Umi Nur Zahidah Mohd Kaslan¹⁵; however, their focus has remained limited to the contemporary implementation of war terminologies in the Qur'anic texts, neglecting the diachronic roots of these terms. An analysis of the existing literature reveals a significant gap, particularly in studies that specifically address the historical development and transformation of the term *qitāl* as a crucial aspect of the concept of war in Islam.

This study aims to provide a historical analysis of the transformation of the term *qitāl* and the factors influencing it in Islamic history. First, it investigates the evolution of the meaning of *qitāl* from the pre-Qur'anic era to contemporary interpretations; second, it examines the various forms of transformation in the understanding of *qitāl* over time; and third, it explores the reasons behind these transformations. The analysis employs a genealogical approach based on the ideas of Johanna Pink in her work *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today: Media, Genealogies and Interpretive Communities*. This approach views interpretation as a dynamic discursive tradition, emphasizing the connection between contemporary interpretations and the long history of Qur'anic exegesis.¹⁶ The

methodology involves three steps: identifying key terms (with *qitāl* as the primary focus), analyzing the chronology of the meanings of these terms within their historical context, and exploring the processes and factors that influence their transformation. Through this framework, the study aims to deepen the understanding of the development of *qitāl* interpretations throughout the history of exegesis.

We argue that the meaning of *qitāl* has undergone significant transformation throughout the evolving discourse of Qur'anic exegesis, from the classical period to the contemporary era. This transformation has expanded the understanding of *qitāl*, which was initially limited to physical combat, to include non-physical struggles related to social justice and global peace. Social and political factors, as well as the role of interpretive agents, have played a crucial role in shaping these changes, reflecting the dynamic nature of Qur'anic interpretation in response to global shifts. Particularly in addressing modern challenges such as Islamophobia and negative narratives surrounding violence in Islam, this interpretive shift demonstrates the necessity of adapting the concept of *qitāl*. Thus, contemporary exegesis must continue to explore how Islamic teachings relate to current global issues and to assess the potential implications that arise from these evolving interpretations in the broader discourse surrounding the understanding of Islam today.

⁹ Ahmad Murodi, "Translating Procedures of Islamic Terms in Islam between War and Peace," *Journal of Language and Literature* 20, no. 1 (2020): 80-91.

¹⁰ Mostafa, "Violence and Jihad in Islam: From the War of Words to the Clashes of Definitions," 966.

¹¹ B. Colas, "Understanding the Idea: Dynamic Equivalence and the Accurate Translation of Jihadist Concepts," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* Vol. 42, no. 9 (2019): 779-797.

¹² Abdul Wahab, Jaka Ghianovan, and Mohamad Mualim, "Indoktrinasi Konsep Jihad Radikal Dalam Al-Qur'an: Telaah Penafsiran Muhammad Abduh Dalam Tafsir Al-Manar," *Jurnal Semiotika-Q: Kajian Ilmu al-Quran dan Tafsir* 4, no. 2 (2024): 463-485.

¹³ Bahruddin Bahruddin, "Religious Radicalism: Deconstructing The Interpretation Of The Verse Of Jihad In The Qur'an," *International Journal Of Research* 1, no. 1 (2023): 61-84.

¹⁴ Suhaimi Suhaimi, "Reinterpretasi Dan Reformulasi Makna Jihad Dan Qital (Studi Historis Islam Dalam Tafsir Tematik)," *El-Furqania: Jurnal Ushuluddin dan Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 3, no. 01 (2017): 1-15.

¹⁵ Umi Nur Zahidah Mohd Kaslan and Benny Teh Cheng Guan, "Explaining ISIS: Differences and Misconception of Jihad and Qital," *Geografia* 17, no. 4 (2021): 153-163.

¹⁶ Johanna Pink, *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today: Media, Genealogies and Interpretive Communities* (Bristol: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2019), 7.





A Chronological Exploration of *Qitāl* in Historical Contexts

Etymologically, the term *qitāl* embodies a multifaceted and nuanced significance within the Arabic lexicon. Derived from the verb “*qātala-yuqātilu*”, this concept is extensively elaborated in Ibn Manẓūr’s seminal work, *Lisān al-‘Arab*. He elucidates that the terminology of *qitāl* encompasses two interconnected primary meanings: “*ādāhu*” (to oppose) and “*ḥārabahū al-‘adū*” (to combat the enemy). However, the scope of this terminology extends beyond these definitions. Ibn Manẓūr further clarifies that “*qatala*”, as the root term, specifically denotes the act of taking a life. This act can manifest in various forms, including striking, throwing, or utilizing specific instruments, contingent upon the intention to kill. Notably, Ibn Manẓūr also examines variations of the term, such as “*qattala*”, which carries distinct nuances. The term *qattala* is utilized within the Arab community to describe acts of murder perpetrated by groups devoid of remorse, thereby reflecting the psychological and social dimensions inherent in this concept.¹⁷ This multiplicity of meanings and functions underscores the intricate nature of *qitāl* within the linguistic and intellectual framework of Arab society, concurrently mirroring the diverse facets of conflict and violence prevalent in their historical context.

In a similar vein, the employment of *qitāl* in the Qur’an consistently denotes warfare in a tangible sense, contrasting with other terms that may encompass broader implications, such as non-combative struggles or moral and spiritual dimensions. This study underscores the critical importance of contextualizing and comprehending the usage of such terminology within the Qur’an. Although several other terms, including *jihād*, *ḥarb*, *ghazwah*, *irḥāb*, *ḍarb*, and *naḥar*, also relate to the concept of warfare, not all of these explicitly denote physical confrontation. The term *qitāl*, in contrast, distinctly articulates a clear and specific connotation of physical

warfare, offering profound insights into the articulation of the concept of war in the Qur’an. This specificity indicates that when the Qur’an employs the term *qitāl*, it refers explicitly to warfare involving armed conflict and tangible acts of hostility, differentiating it from other more general or contextual terms.

Nevertheless, in historical contexts, the interpretation of *qitāl* as a symbol of physical warfare has undergone substantial transformations across the pre-Qur’anic, Qur’anic, and post-Qur’anic periods. During the pre-Qur’anic epoch, *qitāl* was perceived as brutal power struggles devoid of moral justification. In contrast, the Qur’anic era reframes *qitāl* as a morally grounded resistance against oppression, emphasizing defensive warfare aimed at upholding justice and safeguarding the oppressed. In the post-Qur’anic period, scholars expand the interpretation of *qitāl* to include not only defensive actions but also as a mechanism for propagating Islamic beliefs, with certain interpretations highlighting offensive *jihād* as a means to assert religious dominance. This study subsequently investigates how the evolving meanings of *qitāl* are shaped by the intertwining historical, social, and political realities, along with the implications for contemporary Muslim understandings of the concept of war throughout history.

a. *Qitāl* as a Struggle for Power

The interpretation of *qitāl* as a mere power struggle that tends to overlook moral and humanitarian values occurred in the pre-Qur’anic era, before the advent of Islam. In this context, the term *qitāl* is understood as armed conflict between tribes or groups in contention within the society of *Jāhiliyah* Arabs, aimed at seizing power and noble status. This is reflected in the poetry of that era, which represents the meaning of *qitāl* from various perspectives, including *al-ḥarb* (battle), *al-ma’rakah* (the battlefield), *al-nizāl* (duel), *al-waqī’ah* (assault), *al-*

¹⁷ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1990), 547.





ghārah (raid), *al-ghazwah* (expedition), *al-hijā'* (turmoil), *al-ma'mā'ah* (commotion), *al-waghā* (fierce battle), and *al-karihah* (calamity), as well as expressions that refer to weapons and their equipment, such as *al-saif* (sword), *al-rumh* (spear), *al-qaus* (bow), *al-sahm* (arrow), and *al-dira'* (shield).¹⁸

In this context, the meaning of *qitāl* extends beyond mere physical combat; it also encompasses various strategies aimed at defeating the enemy, including psychological tactics and strategic alliances with other tribes. This vocabulary reflects the harsh and conflict-ridden reality of life in pre-Islamic Arabia, where bravery and skill in *qitāl* or battle were often regarded as measures of honor and social status. Furthermore, the terminology surrounding *qitāl* within Arab society was closely tied to the concepts of revenge and the preservation of tribal dignity, where every act of violence required a reciprocal action to maintain balance and justice.¹⁹ This is evident in the poetry of the time, which illustrates the brutality of warfare in the pre-Qur'anic era through the use of the term *qitāl*, as seen in the following poetic excerpts:

قَتَلْنَا مِنْهُمْ مَائَتِينَ حُرًّا * وَالْقَا فِي الشَّعَابِ وَفِي الْهَضْبِ²⁰

*We slew two hundred free-born men of theirs *
A thousand more in valleys, hills, and lairs.*

قَاتَلْتُ فُرْسَانَهُمْ حَتَّى مَضَوْا فِرْقًا * وَالطَّعْنُ فِي إِثْرِهِمْ أَمْصَى مِنَ
الْأَجْلِ²¹

*I fought their knights till scattered, one by one *
The spear's sharp thrust outpaced the death they shun.*

These pre-Islamic *jāhili* poems represent the wartime conditions of Arab society in the pre-

Qur'anic era, characterized by brutal violence and an incessant cycle of revenge. During this period, human lives were often deemed cheap, if not worthless. Additionally, the poetry from this era depicts mass killings and fierce battles that devastated communities as a whole, with pride placed on the ability to annihilate enemies entirely. For the Arab society of that time, killing in warfare was regarded as a source of satisfaction and honor, reflecting a culture deeply entrenched in revenge and bloodshed.²²

وَإِنْ يَقْتُلُوا فَيُشْتَفَى بِدِمَائِهِمْ * وَكَانُوا قَدِيمًا مِنْ مَنْيَابِهِمُ الْقَتْلُ²³

*If they are killed, then there will be satisfaction in their blood *
For long has death come to them by murder's flood.*

أَلَا يَا بَنِي كِنْدَةَ أَقْتُلُوا بِأَبْنِ عَمِّكُمْ * وَإِلَّا فَمَا أَنْتُمْ قَبِيلٌ وَلَا حَوْلُ²⁴

*O sons of Kindah, slay your cousin with might *
Else you are neither a people of honor nor of right.*

وَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ إِلَّا الْقِتَالُ فَإِنَّا * نُقَاتِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ الْعُرُوضِ وَخَتَعَمَّا²⁵

*And if battle is the only course that remains *
We shall fight them among 'Urūd's mountains and the tribe of Khath'am.*

In the context of these verses, war and death resulting from battles are viewed as an almost inescapable fate. The Arab society of that time had become accustomed to creating a life filled with violence and destruction. These poems reflect their perspective on the importance of tribal loyalty, honor, and war as means of preserving dignity. In their culture, failing to avenge or demonstrate strength was seen as a threat to social status and tribal identity. Social pressure compelled tribes to act decisively;

¹⁸ Nāzīm Khalīl al-Lūqah, "Alfāz al-Qitāl fī al-Shi'r al-Jāhili: Dirāsāt Dilāliyah" (Al-Azhar University, 2011), 12.

¹⁹ al-Lūqah, "Alfāz al-Qitāl fī al-Shi'r al-Jāhili: Dirāsāt Dilāliyah," 2-3.

²⁰ 'Antrah bin Shaddād, *Dīwān 'Antrah bin Shaddād* (Beirut: Dār Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1985), 14.

²¹ bin Shaddād, *Dīwān 'Antrah bin Shaddād*, 109.

²² al-Lūqah, "Alfāz al-Qitāl fī al-Shi'r al-Jāhili: Dirāsāt Dilāliyah," 13-15.

²³ Zuhair bin Abī Salamā, *Dīwān Zuhair bin Abī Salamā*, ed. 'Alī Ḥasan Fa'ūr (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1988), 59.

²⁴ Imrū' al-Qais bin Ḥujr al-Kindī, *Dīwān Imrū' al-Qais* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'āfir, 2014), 479.

²⁵ Labīd bin Rabī'ah al-'Āmirī, *Dīwān Labīd bin Rabī'ah al-'Āmirī*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Kuwait: Dār al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1962), 283.





otherwise, they risked losing respect and power in the eyes of other tribes. War was also regarded as a symbol of bravery and masculinity, where valor on the battlefield became a mark of honor for a man and his tribe.²⁶

From this, it can be understood that the use of the term *qitāl* (to fight) in the cited verses of Jahili Arab poetry directly connects the act of killing with the outcomes of battle or warfare. In that era, *qitāl* encompassed the entire spectrum of military actions and armed conflict. These poetic excerpts also reflect the absence of humanitarian moral values in the context of warfare.²⁷ The usage of words such as “*qatalnā*” (we killed), “*qaltu*” (I killed), and “*yaqtulu*” (he kills) emphasizes the power of the warring parties and conveys the impression that the battle situations were brutally intense, involving numerous casualties. Thus, these poems provide insight into how warfare was glorified in pre-Qur’anic Arab culture. In fact, the number of casualties and the scale of battles often served as measures of victory and honor for their people.

b. Qitāl as Moral Resistance Against Oppression

With the emergence of Islam, the concept of *rahmatan li al-‘ālamīn* unfolded, reflecting a structured approach to conflict resolution. This is evident in the articulation of the term *qitāl* within Islamic teachings, which signifies not merely physical warfare but also encompasses spiritual and social dimensions. A thorough exploration of the Qur’anic texts reveals 170 derivations of the word *qatala* spread across 33 surahs. The breakdown is as follows: First, the form *qatala - yaqtulu* appears 95 times; second, *qatala* in the form of *mufa’alah* occurs 67 times; third, in the *taf’īl* form, it is mentioned 5 times; and fourth, *qatala* in the *ifti’āl* form appears 4 times. Additionally, the term *qitāl* is specifically referenced in 5 different surahs, totaling 19 occurrences, as detailed in the following table:

Surah	Verse(s)	Word <i>Qitāl</i> and Its Derivatives
al-Baqarah [2]	190, 191, 193, 217, and 244	<i>Qātilū, yu-Qātilūnakum, wa-Qtulūhum, al-Qatl, yu-Qātilūnakum fih, Qātalūkum, fa-Qtulūhum.</i>
Āli ‘Imrān [3]	167	<i>Qātilū, Qitālan.</i>
al-Nisā’ [4]	77, 84, 90, and 91	<i>al-Qitāl, al-Qitāl, fa-Qātil, yu-Qātilūnakum, yu-Qātilū, fala-Qātalūkum, yu-Qātilūkum.</i>
al-Taubah [9]	13 and 36	<i>tu-Qātilūn, wa-Qātilū, yu-Qātilūkum.</i>

Table 1.

Verses of the Qur’an that use the term *qitāl* to mean war

Historically traced and referencing the consensus of the interpreters, it is found that among the verses containing the term *qitāl*, the first verse revealed according to *tartīb al-nuzūl* (the chronological order of the revelation of the Qur’anic verses during the period of revelation) that embodies the representation of the meaning of war is Q. al-Baqarah [2]: 190-193. This verse was revealed during the Medinan period as a form of legality for Muslims to engage in battle against the aggression and oppression perpetrated by the polytheists of Mecca. Here is an excerpt of the verse:

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُفَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ (190) وَاقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ ثَقِفْتُمُوهُمْ وَأَخْرِجُوهُمْ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَخْرَجُوكُمْ وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ وَلَا تُفَاتِلُوهُمْ عِنْدَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ حَتَّى يُفَاتِلُوكُمْ فِيهِ فَإِنْ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فَاقْتُلُوهُمْ كَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ (191) فَإِنْ انْتَهَوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (192) وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ لِلَّهِ فَإِنْ انْتَهَوْا فَلَا عُدْوَانَ إِلَّا عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ (193)

²⁶ al-Lūqah, “Alfāz al-Qitāl fī al-Shi’r al-Jāhili: Dirāsāt Dilāliyah,”13-15.

²⁷ al-Lūqah, “Alfāz al-Qitāl fī al-Shi’r al-Jāhili: Dirāsāt Dilāliyah,”13-14.





“Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors. [190] And kill them wherever you overtake them and expel them from wherever they have expelled you, and fitnah is worse than killing. And do not fight them at Masjid al-Haram until they fight you there. But if they fight you, then kill them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers. [191] And if they cease, then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. [192] Fight them until there is no [more] fitnah and [until] worship is [acknowledged to be] for Allah. But if they cease, then there is to be no aggression except against the oppressors. [193]”

Although the existence of the term *qitāl* in these verses retains its original meaning of physical (combative) warfare, the wording and literal meaning of the verses indicate that *qitāl* in the Islamic perspective is bound by fundamental principles of purpose and strategy in warfare. Islam teaches that war is a struggle to establish justice (*alladhīna yuqātilūnakum*), defend faith (*al-fitnah ashaddu min al-qatl*), and protect human rights from oppression and aggression (*wa qātilūhum ḥattā lā takūna fitnah*).

In terms of warfare strategy, moral values such as prohibiting the killing of civilians, children, women, and the elderly are absolute rules within Islamic teachings (*walā tuqātilūhum 'inda al-masjid al-ḥarām ḥattā yuqātilūkum fih*). This limitation in meaning is significantly different from the understanding of *qitāl* held by Arab society in the pre-Qur'anic era. A semantic analysis of these verses reveals a clear boundary regarding the articulation of *qitāl* within Islamic teachings, emphasizing that war is permitted in a defensive context (*fa in qātalūkum, faqtulūhum*) and must adhere to strict ethical and moral limits (*wa lā ta'tadū*).

This understanding is further corroborated by the interpretations of Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68 AH/687 CE) and Muqātil bin Sulaymān (d. 105 AH/767 CE), who lived in the first and second centuries of Hijrah, respectively, and were

among the earliest generations closest to the prophetic era. Both scholars elucidate that this verse establishes the boundaries of warfare in Islamic teachings. War is permissible only under the condition of being attacked (defensive), rather than engaging in aggression (offensive).²⁸ Moreover, warfare must be conducted with a righteous intention and within the limits set by Sharia (Islamic law), such as the prohibition against attacking civilians, excessive destruction of war property, environmental degradation, and violation of peace treaties.²⁹ Similar clarification is echoed by later commentators, such as al-Farrā' (d. 207 AH/808 CE) and al-Ṣan'ānī (d. 211 AH/827 CE), who adopt the views of the earlier commentators.

While the text of the Qur'an still employs the term *qitāl* as a representation of the meaning of war, as understood by pre-Qur'anic Arab society, the limitations of its articulation and interpretation are markedly different. In the pre-Qur'anic era, the meaning of *qitāl* did not represent a strict system of rules to constrain the ethics of warfare. In fact, they operated freely in committing murder, robbery, and plunder, which were regarded at that time as legitimate strategies of war. The concept of civilian protection was nonexistent, leading to battles that were often brutal and devoid of mercy. From this, it is evident that while Islamic teachings maintain certain aspects of pre-Qur'anic Arab traditions, Islam introduces moral values within this framework. This simultaneously demonstrates that Islam does not reject the existence of war; rather, it teaches moral values even within the context of warfare.

c. *Qitāl* as Defense of Faith and Establishment of *Tawḥīd*

The interpretation of the term *qitāl* as a defense of faith and the establishment of monotheism emerged in the late 3rd to 4th centuries AH, or the 10th century CE. While

²⁸ Fairūz Ābādī, *Tarwīr al-Miqbās min Tafṣīr Ibn 'Abbās*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1992), 26.

²⁹ Muqātil bin Sulaymān, *Tafṣīr Muqātil bin Sulaymān*, ed. 'Abdullāh Muḥammad Syahātah (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā' al-Turāth, 2002), vol. 1, 167-169.





earlier commentators focused on placing Q. al-Baqarah [2]: 190-193 as a legal basis for resisting aggression and the oppression of the polytheists of Mecca, commentators in this period tended to view these verses as legitimizing the defense of theological beliefs. This can be seen primarily in Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310 AH/923 CE) understanding of verses 190-193, where he states:

فَتَأْوِيلُ الْآيَةِ - إِذَا كَانَ الْأَمْرُ عَلَى مَا وَصَفْنَا -: وَقَاتِلُوا أَهْلَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ، وَسَبِيلُهُ: طَرِيقُهُ الَّذِي أَوْضَحَهُ، وَدِينُهُ الَّذِي شَرَعَهُ لِعِبَادِهِ، يَقُولُ لَهُمْ تَعَالَى ذِكْرُهُ: قَاتِلُوا فِي طَاعَتِي وَعَلَى مَا شَرَعْتُ لَكُمْ مِنْ دِينِي، وَادْعُوا إِلَيْهِ مَنْ وُلِيَ عَنْهُ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ بِالْأَيْدِي وَالْأَلْسُنِ، حَتَّى يُنِيبُوا إِلَى طَاعَتِي، أَوْ يُعْطَوْكُمُ الْجِزْيَةَ صَعَارًا إِنْ كَانُوا أَهْلَ كِتَابٍ.³⁰

The interpretation of this verse—if the matter is as we have explained—is: O believers, fight in the way of Allah, and His way is: the path He has clarified, and the religion He has prescribed for His servants. Allah commands them: Fight in obedience to Me and based on the religion I have explained to you, and call to it those who have turned away from it and have arrogantly opposed it with hands and tongues, until they return to obedience to Me, or they give you the jizyah with humility, if they are people of the Book.

Similarly, when al-Ṭabarī explains part of verse 193, “*Wa qātīlūhum ḥattā lā takūna fitnah*,” he interprets it by saying, “*Ya’nī, ḥattā lā yakūna shirkun bi-llāh wa ḥattā lā yu’bada dūnahu aḥad*” (This means until there is no more polytheism with Allah, and until no one is worshiped besides Him).³¹ Al-Ṭabarī’s explanation indicates a shift in the understanding of the meaning of qitāl. While the commentators of the first and second centuries interpreted the phrase “*alladhīna yuqātīlūnakum*” as a directive to cease fighting those who do not fight you anymore, al-Ṭabarī rather interprets it as ceasing to fight them until they worship Allah. These two understandings

implicitly have a difference: the first interpretation positions the verse in the context of defensive warfare, while the second leans more toward offensive warfare.

This interpretation aligns with al-Ṭabarī’s views regarding the meaning of the verses on qitāl or warfare, and can also be found in the works of other classical scholars from subsequent periods. For instance, al-Baghawī (d. 516 AH/1122 CE) affirms that the meaning of qitāl in Q. al-Baqarah [2]: 190-193 serves as a means to uphold the religion of Allah and to oppose those who obstruct the spread of Islam. Like al-Ṭabarī, al-Baghawī understands qitāl not merely as a defensive act but also as an offensive action to subjugate those who refuse to submit to Allah, compelling them to accept Islam or pay jizyah.³² Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597 AH/1201 CE) follows the interpretative patterns of his predecessors, stating that the concept of qitāl in the context of these verses aims to uphold the truth of Islam and to destroy polytheism. He explains that the command to engage in warfare in the Qur’anic verses is not only intended for self-defense but also to establish the authority of Islam over all other religions.³³

Furthermore, al-Qurṭubī (d. 671 AH/1273 CE) also interprets Q. al-Baqarah [2]: 190-193 as an instrument for establishing Islam and fighting against those who reject the truth of Islam. He reinforces the view that jihād in the meaning of qitāl is not only a form of self-defense but also a means to compel opposition to submit to Islamic authority, emphasizing that jihad must be carried out until there is no longer any ‘fitnah’ (polytheism) and Allah’s religion is established comprehensively.³⁴ In agreement with this perspective, Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH/1373 CE) continues to follow the interpretations of his

³⁰ Muḥammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān fi Ta’wīl Āyi al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Mu’assasah al-Risāl, 2000), vol. 3, 563-564.

³¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān fi Ta’wīl Āyi al-Qur’ān*, 570.

³² Abū Muḥammad bin al-Ḥusain bin Mas’ūd al-Baghawī, *Ma’ālim al-Tanzīl fi Tafṣīr al-Qur’ān* (Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī’, 1997), vol. 1, 236-237.

³³ Jamāluddīn ‘Alī bin Muḥammad al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Masīr fi ‘Ilmi al-Tafṣīr*, ed. ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabī, 2001), 110-111.

³⁴ Abū ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi’ al-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Misriyah, 1964), vol. 2, 347-354.





predecessors concerning Q. al-Baqarah [2]: 190-193. He interprets that the war against the polytheists must continue until they accept Islam or at least submit under the authority of Islam by paying *jizyah*, also stressing the importance of making the word of Allah the highest and ensuring the supremacy of the Islamic religion.³⁵

These interpretations by the scholars illustrate a consistency in the approach to exegesis that follows in the footsteps of al-Ṭabarī, wherein *jihād* in the meaning of *qitāl* is understood as more than merely defensive warfare; it is recognized as a legitimate instrument in the endeavor to establish the truth of Islam and eliminate all forms of associating partners with Allah. However, it is important to note that despite this shift in the meaning of *qitāl* during this era, the principles of warfare, encompassing social and moral values, peace, and justice, remain firmly upheld as the substantive message of these verses. This is evident when interpreting the phrase “*wa lā ta’tadū*,” which delineates the prohibitions against fighting those who are not involved in combat.

d. *Qitāl* as Defense of Sovereignty and Liberation from Colonialism

During the colonial era, Islamic scholars’ interpretations of *qitāl* verses in the Qur’an evolved significantly, particularly in the context of resistance to colonization. Prominent scholars such as Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1323 AH/1905 CE) and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1354 AH/1935 CE) approached Q. al-Baqarah [2]: 190-193 as providing strict guidelines for warfare in Islam, stressing that *qitāl* is permitted only in self-defense or to end oppression that threatens religious and national sovereignty. They firmly rejected aggressive warfare, underscoring that it is allowed only when Muslims are attacked,

provided it remains within the bounds of Sharia, such as refraining from attacking civilians or committing atrocities.³⁶ This interpretation reflects their reformist outlook, which sought to make Islamic teachings relevant to modern challenges while upholding principles of justice and peace.

This perspective was followed by later commentators, such as al-Qāsimī (d. 1332 AH/1913 CE)³⁷, Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1387 AH/1966 CE)³⁸, and Ibn ‘Āshūr (d. 1393 AH/1973 CE)³⁹, who interpreted Q. al-Baqarah [2]: 190-193 as legitimized warfare to establish justice and fight against oppression. *Qitāl*, in their view, was seen as an integral part of *jihād* aimed at protecting Islam and the Muslim community from aggression. They emphasized that warfare in Islam is not for expansion or domination but as a means to eliminate *fitnah*—any form of oppression that obstructs religious freedom and sovereignty—and to ensure the comprehensive application of Islamic law. While supporting the concept of *jihād*, they also underscored the importance of ethical limits in warfare, including the prohibition of violence against non-combatants such as women, children, and the elderly. For them, the ultimate goal of *qitāl* is to create peace and stability, with warfare continuing only as long as necessary to restore just and peaceful order, in accordance with the moral principles taught in Islam. As such, these three scholars positioned the *qitāl* verses as instructions aligned with high moral principles, emphasizing justice and peace in every situation.

The scholars’ interpretation of *qitāl* verses during the colonial era was deeply influenced by the political and social conditions faced by Muslims under European colonial rule. In this context, these scholars interpreted *qitāl* as a call to *jihād* against colonialism, viewing it as a form

³⁵ Abū al-Fidā’ ‘Imāduddīn Ismā’īl bin ‘Umar bin Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, ed. Sami bin Muḥammad Salamah, (Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī’, 1999), vol 1, 523-525.

³⁶ Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Muḥammad bin Rāsyīd Riḍā, *Al-Manār: Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Ḥakīm* (Cairo: Al-Hay’ah al-Miṣriyah al-‘Āmmah li al-Kitāb, 1990), vol. 2, 167-170.

³⁷ Jamāluddīn bin Muḥammad Sa’īd bin Qāsim, *Maḥāsīn at-Ta’wīl li al-Qāsimī* (Beirut: Dār at-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1994), vol. 2, 474-478.

³⁸ Sayyid Quṭb, *Tafsīr fi Zilāl al-Qur’ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2003), vol. 1, 187-191.

³⁹ Muḥammad Ṭāhir bin ‘Āsyūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* (Tunis: Dār Tuṅīsiyah li al-Nashr, 1984), vol. 2, 199-209.





of oppression that must be resisted to preserve the sovereignty and dignity of the Muslim community. Q. al-Baqarah [2]: 190-193, which speaks about fighting in the way of Allah, was often reinterpreted as theological support for resistance against colonial powers, seen as violating sovereignty rights and moral humanitarian values. They viewed colonization as a form of oppression and deprivation of territorial sovereignty, justifying *qitāl* as a legitimate form of *jihād*.

e. *Qitāl* as a Non-Physical Civilizational War

The interpretation of *qitāl* has shifted as the global context moved away from physical warfare towards a consensus on world peace. In this era, the understanding of warfare in the Qur'an has become more inclusive. Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988 CE) and Muḥammad Shaḥrūr (d. 2019 CE), two prominent contemporary Islamic scholars known for their progressive approaches, have introduced new dimensions to the interpretation of *jihād* and *qitāl*, utilizing modern hermeneutical methods. Rahman, with his historical approach, argued that *qitāl* verses must be understood within the framework of the struggle for social justice and the application of Islamic ethics in daily life. He stressed that these verses should not be interpreted literally but rather contextualized according to the challenges faced by the Muslim community in different eras. In today's context, social injustice, poverty, and corruption are seen as more relevant struggles.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, Shaḥrūr, in his work *Tajfif Manābi' al-Irhāb*, explained the *jihād* and *qitāl* verses as a call for intellectual freedom and expression, which he regarded as the foundations for civilizational progress. Shaḥrūr argued that in the modern era, the most important struggle is against authoritarianism and intellectual repression, which hinder progress and innovation. For him, *jihād* and *qitāl*

are not solely about physical warfare but are more about the collective effort to free individuals from the chains that prevent their intellectual and moral development.⁴¹ Thus, he interpreted *qitāl* as part of a broader *jihād*, where the main struggle is not against external enemies but against oppressive power structures that stifle freedom of thought and creativity—elements necessary to drive innovation and progress in modern times.

Wahbah al-Zuḥaylī (d. 2015 CE) expanded the understanding of *qitāl* by introducing non-physical dimensions, such as the struggle against one's desires, spiritual growth, and the dissemination of knowledge. For al-Zuḥaylī, *jihād* is not only about fighting external enemies but also about internal efforts to overcome personal weaknesses and maximize human potential. He argued that the greatest contribution Muslims can make to modern civilization is through the advancement of knowledge, technology, and education—all of which are deeply rooted in Islamic teachings that encourage the pursuit of knowledge and service to humanity.⁴²

In the realm of international law and global ethics, Mohammad Hashim Kamali and Khaled Abou El Fadl brought the discussion of *qitāl* to a broader level. Kamali emphasized the importance of understanding these verses in the context of modern diplomacy and peaceful conflict resolution. He linked the concept of *jihād* to diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving global peace and resolving conflicts through dialogue and international cooperation. Kamali believed that Islam has great potential to contribute to the creation of a more just and peaceful world order, particularly through approaches that respect the

⁴⁰ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of The Qur'an*, 2nd Edition. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 107-110.

⁴¹ Muḥammad Shaḥrūr, *Tajfif Manābi' al-Irhāb* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Dirāsah al-Fikriyah al-Mu'āsirah, 2008), 55-90.

⁴² Wahbah bin Muṣṭāfa al-Zuḥaylī, *Tafsīr al-Munīr fī al-'Aqīdah wa al-Sharī'ah wa al-Manhaj*, (Damaskus: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu'āsir, 1997), vol. 2, 182.





rights of all parties involved in conflicts.⁴³ Meanwhile, El Fadl connected the *qitāl* verses to contemporary issues such as human rights, the protection of minorities, and the development of democratic governance systems. He argued that the greatest struggle for Muslims today is ensuring that universal values such as justice, freedom, and equality are respected and implemented in public policies, both in Muslim-majority countries and on the global stage.⁴⁴

Indonesian scholar M. Quraish Shihab, through his commentary *Al-Mishbah*, also provided an interpretation that emphasizes that the essence of struggle in modern Islam is not merely physical warfare, but rather the effort to build a moral and ethical society. Shihab highlighted the importance of integrating social values into religious practices, including intercultural dialogue, improving education, and socio-economic development. He argued that the concept of *qitāl* in today's society should be understood as a collective struggle to achieve social justice, welfare, and harmony within society. Shihab emphasized that in the era of globalization, the Muslim community's struggle should focus on peaceful and constructive efforts that bring positive change to human civilization as a whole.⁴⁵

The evolution of *qitāl* interpretation by contemporary scholars reflects their efforts to respond to the dynamics of the times and the global challenges faced by the Muslim community. Through their reinterpretations, they aimed to demonstrate that Islamic teachings possess flexibility and relevance in modern life. They affirmed that *jihād*, in the context of modern warfare, is directed toward constructive efforts to build a just, peaceful civilization that contributes positively to universal humanity. These scholars enriched the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis and provided a theological foundation

for Muslims to participate actively in global development and intercivilizational dialogue, positioning Islam as a source of inspiration for human advancement worldwide.

***Qitāl* Through Time: Transformation and Its Driving Factors**

Building upon the previous discussion, this study delineates the concept of *qitāl* throughout history in both chronological and synchronic frameworks. This section seeks to elucidate the significant transformations in the meaning of *qitāl* over time, approached from a diachronic perspective. Spanning from the pre-Qur'anic era to contemporary times, the interpretation of *qitāl* has evolved, mirroring the dynamic social, political, and intellectual contexts within the Muslim community. Such transformations highlight the adaptability of Islamic teachings in response to the challenges posed by different historical epochs, all while upholding essential values of humanity and justice. To facilitate a clearer understanding of these shifts, the table below encapsulates the evolution of the concept of *qitāl* across various historical periods.

Era	Transformational Factors	Characteristics
Pre-Qur'anic	Power struggles, revenge, and maintaining the status quo.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brutal and devoid of moral boundaries; - A source of honor and social status; - A cycle of revenge.
Qur'anic (1st-2nd Century)	Resistance against the immorality of oppression, alongside the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Defensive and rooted in morality; - Advocating for justice and

⁴³ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Islam and Peace: Principles, Realities and Aspirations," *The Journal of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations* 20, no. 1 (2021): 1–19.

⁴⁴ Khaled Abou El-Fadl, *The Great Theft; Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2005), 215-236.

⁴⁵ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian Al-Quran* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), vol. 5, 655.





	cultivation of social, spiritual, and moral values within the context of conflict.	pro- tecting the oppressed; - Strict rules of engagement.
Post-Qur'anic (Classical Era)	Struggles to defend faith, promote, and uphold monotheism.	- Offensive in establishing God's religion; - A means to subdue those who reject Islam; - Upholding moral principles in warfare.
Colonialism	Warfare as a foundation for defending sovereignty and liberating from colonial aggression.	- Resisting colonization and oppression; - Upholding religious and national sovereignty; - Contextualizing modern challenges.
Contemporary	Non-physical struggles aimed at building civilization.	- Pursuit of social justice and ethics; - Incorporating spiritual and intellectual dimensions; - Diplomatic efforts and inter-civilizational dialogue.

Table 2.

The diachronic flow of the transformation of *qitāl*'s meaning

In table 2, the transformation of the concept of *qitāl* from the pre-Qur'anic era to the contemporary period is clearly illustrated, highlighting significant shifts in its meaning and characteristics across each period. During the pre-Qur'anic era, *qitāl* was understood as a form of brutal and bloody physical combat, lacking a clear moral foundation, where war served as the primary means of attaining social status and pride. Victories were achieved through the total destruction of enemies, a theme captured in ancient Arab poetry that depicted violence and an unending cycle of revenge. These poems emphasized courage and physical strength on the battlefield as the paramount values cherished within the tribal culture of the Arabs at that time. Abbas Yazdani, in his research, corroborates these findings, noting that ancient Arab poetry often romanticized war as a venue for showcasing bravery, resilience, and individual glory in defending the honor of one's tribe or family.⁴⁶ Similarly, Adhraa Al-Saede explains that pre-Islamic Arab poetry intricately depicted the sounds of weapons, the cries of warriors, and the blood and wounds sustained as symbols of honor and strength, while also expressing grief over the loss of comrades or brothers who fell in battle.⁴⁷

However, following the advent of Islam, a significant transformation occurred in the interpretation of *qitāl*, which emerged amidst the pre-Qur'anic Arab society where brutal warfare without rules had become the norm. The Qur'an introduced a different conceptualization of *qitāl*, regulating warfare according to strict moral and ethical principles. This shift marked a transition from uncontrolled violence to a more structured system. Islamic teachings infused substantive meaning into the concept of warfare by emphasizing justice and self-defense. In this context, verses discussing *qitāl* in the sense of warfare—such as in Q. al-Baqarah [2]: 190-193—explicitly assert that war is only permissible as a response

⁴⁶ Abbas Yazdani, "The Culture of Peace and Religious Tolerance from an Islamic Perspective," *Veritas* 47, no. 2 (2020): 151-168.

⁴⁷ Adhraa Ouda Hussain Salih Al-Saede, "Arabic Pride Poetry in the Pre-Islamic Period: Types and Motives," *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 6, no. 5 (2022): 530-540.





to oppression and aggression, with the primary objective of protecting human rights. This aligns with findings from Ali Mostafa, whose research reveals that, in Islamic teachings, moral values are central to the concept of warfare or *jihād*. The Qur'an clearly establishes ethical boundaries and moral rules in warfare, contrasting with the brutal practices of pre-Islamic warfare. Principles such as justice, protection of the vulnerable, and respect for human life became fundamental tenets of Islam, making this interpretation highly relevant to the Arab society of that time, which frequently engaged in inter-tribal conflicts.⁴⁸

In the post-Qur'anic era or during the canonization of classical interpretations, this study has demonstrated how the forms of interpretation concerning the concept of *qitāl* evolved alongside the rapid expansion of Islamic territories and the new challenges faced by the Muslim community. The commentators of this period began interpreting the verses on *qitāl* not merely as defensive actions but also as a means to uphold the religion of Allah and combat those obstructing the spread of Islam. In this context, *qitāl* started to be understood as *jihād*, encompassing not only physical warfare but also the struggle to uphold truth and justice, in accordance with the needs of an era when Islam began shaping a broader and more complex socio-political order. This finding aligns with the analysis by Ottuh and Idjakpo, who elucidate the transformation of the concept of *jihād* throughout the history of Islamic thought, illustrating that key concepts have shown inclusive interpretations over time. They explain that the concept of *jihād* in Islam has undergone significant developments in meaning throughout history. Initially, *jihād* was often narrowly understood as physical struggle or holy war. However, over time, Muslim scholars began interpreting *jihād* within a broader and more inclusive context.⁴⁹

During the era of colonialism, Muslims in many regions faced colonization and exploitation by European colonial powers such as Britain, France, and the Netherlands. This oppressive situation compelled scholars, including many commentators, to reinterpret the verses on *qitāl* within the context of the struggle against colonialism. They emphasized the importance of defending the sovereignty and dignity of the Muslim community, viewing *qitāl* as a legitimate *jihād* against foreign domination that violated humanitarian moral values and territorial sovereignty. During this period, their efforts to interpret the verses on *jihād* reflected the necessity of making Islamic teachings relevant in facing complex modern challenges. This finding corresponds with Zhalgas Askhatuly's explanation that scholars endeavored to make Islamic teachings relevant in confronting complex modern challenges, leading to the evolution of interpretations of religious concepts in response to changing social and political contexts.⁵⁰

In the contemporary era, the transformation of the concept of *qitāl* is increasingly evident in interpretations that are more inclusive and non-physical. Commentators and Muslim scholars contextualize the term *qitāl* within the struggles for social justice, freedom of thought, and the application of Islamic ethics in everyday life. They respond to modern challenges such as social injustice and human rights violations through modern hermeneutics, emphasizing the importance of combating intellectual oppression and authoritarianism. They seek to broaden the concept of *jihād* by incorporating non-physical dimensions, such as the struggle against base desires and the dissemination of knowledge, emphasizing that *jihād* encompasses the development of human potential to contribute to civilization through education. Similarly, in the context of international law and global ethics,

⁴⁸ Mostafa, "Violence and Jihad in Islam: From the War of Words to the Clashes of Definitions," 966.

⁴⁹ Peter Ottuh and Damilola T Otuyemi, "Islamic Missiology: The Rise of 'Procreative Jihad' and Islamophobia in

Nigeria," *East African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 6, no. 1 (2023): 107–122.

⁵⁰ Zhalgas Askhatuly et al., "The Phenomenon of Jihad: Historical Transformation and Modern Interpretation," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 19, no. 1 (2024): 133–144.





Muslim scholars strive to bring discussions about *qitāl* into the realms of diplomacy and human rights. They underscore the importance of dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution as forms of modern *jihād*, focusing on the protection of minorities and the development of democratic governance systems. They place the essence of contemporary struggles towards building a moral, ethical, and harmonious society, emphasizing intercultural dialogue and socio-economic development.

This diachronic transformation of the concept of *qitāl* reflects the flexibility and dynamism of Islamic teachings in responding to changing times. The advent of Islam has proven capable of interacting with socio-cultural life while fostering the spirit of building a better civilization. From the concept of brutal physical warfare in the pre-Islamic era, *qitāl* has evolved into a moral, spiritual, and intellectual struggle within a broader and constructive modern context, evidencing Islam's role in the advancement of human civilization. Contemporary interpretations emphasize that *jihād* in the modern sense of warfare is more oriented towards efforts to build a just and peaceful civilization that positively contributes to universal humanity. This evolution in meaning provides a robust theological foundation for Muslims to actively participate in global development and inter-civilizational dialogue, positioning Islam as a source of inspiration for the progress of humanity worldwide. *Qitāl* in Islam is no longer confined to the battlefield but expands into a holistic struggle to create a better world, in accordance with the noble values taught by this religion.

In line with these findings, Asma Afsaruddin also reveals through her research results regarding the transformation of the concepts of *jihād* and *shahīd* in Islamic history. Furthermore, she explains that post-September 11, the terms *jihād* and *shahīd* are often associated with Islam and Muslims, but there is frequently a misunder-

standing regarding the actual meanings of these two concepts. History shows that the meaning of *jihād* in early Islamic sources, from the Qur'an to the hadith, has undergone semantic transformation over time. The term '*jihād fi sabīli-llāh*' initially had a variety of meanings, encompassing not only Islamic military defense but also the pursuit of knowledge, lawful livelihood, and righteous deeds. However, by the 9th century CE, the meaning of *jihād* as 'armed struggle' became dominant within administrative and legal circles, although some scholars understood it more broadly.⁵¹

These findings further emphasize the synthesis of Johanna Pink's perspective, which asserts that Qur'anic interpretation is a dynamically evolving discursive tradition (*al-mutaghayyirāt*), rather than a static entity (*al-thubūt*). Furthermore, Pink explains that contemporary Qur'anic interpretations cannot be separated from the long historical tradition of prior interpretations, from the revelation era to its institutionalization in the literature of exegesis. Qur'anic interpretation inherits and adapts symbols and intellectual resources from the past; however, its meanings and functions can change according to the contexts faced by each commentator.

"Qur'anic interpretation takes place in power fields. It is not merely about the things that are being said or written; it is just as much, sometimes more so, about the person who says them, the reasons for which they are said, the place in which they are said or published and the opposing parties against whom they are directed."⁵³

In this regard, Pink emphasizes that Qur'anic interpretation occurs within realms of power, where the process relates not only to what is said or written but also to who states it, the historical context behind those statements, the location or time of their delivery, and the parties that oppose the commentator. Therefore, Qur'anic interpretation not only reflects the normative truth of the text but also the dynamics of power, politics, and

⁵¹ Afsaruddin, "Competing Perspectives on Jihad and 'Martyrdom' in Early Islamic Sources," 29-46.

⁵³ Pink, *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today: Media, Genealogies and Interpretive Communities*, 7-9.





ever-changing social interests. Interpretation becomes an arena where various interests interact and influence one another, resulting in interpretations that are shaped not only by the sacred text but also by the contemporary context in which the interpretation takes place.

Conclusion

The transformation of the meaning of *qitāl*—from brutal acts of violence to a symbol of moral and intellectual struggle—illustrates a radical evolution in Islamic thought that has reshaped the trajectory of Islamic history. This change can be analyzed both chronologically and synchronically, revealing a significant shift from the pre-Qur’anic era, when *qitāl* was understood by Arab society as a power struggle without moral boundaries, to the Qur’anic era, which focused on resistance against oppression within strict ethical principles. During the classical period of exegesis, *qitāl* was interpreted as the enforcement of monotheism, while in the colonial era, it was seen as a fight to defend sovereignty against imperialism. In contemporary interpretations, however, *qitāl* has evolved beyond physical combat to encompass a broader notion of civilizational struggle, often of a non-physical nature. These historical shifts demonstrate the diachronic transformation of the term, reflecting its adaptation to the changing social and political contexts faced by the Muslim community, while also underscoring the role of exegetes as intellectual actors who reinterpret *qitāl* to ensure its relevance in different eras.

This study maps the evolution of the meaning of *qitāl* within the discourse of Qur’anic interpretation, demonstrating the flexibility of Islamic teachings in adapting to changing times without compromising their moral essence. These findings also provide a basis for more constructive dialogue regarding the discourse on Islam and violence in the contemporary global context, while underscoring the importance of historically informed Qur’anic exegesis. To further enrich this discussion, future research should explore how the transformation of *qitāl*

has influenced religious practices and socio-political policies in modern Muslim-majority countries, such as Indonesia. Additionally, comparative studies across different schools of thought, sects, and theological traditions concerning the evolution of similar concepts throughout history would be worthwhile to investigate.

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