

***Khaira Ummah* as an Ethical Framework for Militant Muslim: a Contextual Reading of QS. Āl 'Imrān [3]: 110 in Indonesia**

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ABSTRACT

The term militant Muslim in the Indonesian context is often associated with hardline Islam, radicalism, and confrontational actions, whereas religious militancy is not necessarily synonymous with violence. This article aims to reconstruct the concept of militant Muslims based on QS. Āl 'Imrān [3]: 110 and explain its relevance to socio-religious life in Indonesia. This study employs a qualitative-library research method with a conceptual-normative analysis-intertextual approach. The main corpus of the study refers to interpretive tendencies, namely the exegeses of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, Ibn 'Āshūr, and Wahbah al-Zuhailī. The interpretation is conducted through the identification of the textual meaning of QS. Āl 'Imrān [3]: 110, the mufasssirs' emphasis on the concept of *khaira ummah*, followed by normative analysis to formulate the characteristics of militancy that are consistent with the values of the verse. The results show that militant Muslims from the perspective of QS. Āl 'Imrān [3]: 110 are not determined by the level of confrontation or violence, but by steadfastness in carrying out *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* and faith in Allah consistently, proportionally, and with an orientation toward public welfare. This article offers a conceptual construction that places Muslim militancy within three components, namely steadfastness in faith, an ethical commitment to *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*, and an orientation toward social welfare. This construction is limited to a conceptual-normative reading of QS. Āl 'Imrān [3]: 110 and differs from previous studies that tend to discuss *khaira ummah* in general, as it specifically operationalizes the verse to formulate a concept of non-coercive and contextually relevant religious militancy for Indonesian society. The reconstruction of this concept demonstrates that Muslim militancy remains relevant when manifested through preaching that is courteous, contextual, peaceful, and constructive for social life.

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Introduction

Throughout the history of the development of Islam in Indonesia, one of them gave rise to radical political Islamic movements (Bruinessen et al., 2002). This mainstream movement, in fighting for the banner of Islam, has always shown several terrorist activities (Venkatraman, 2007). This can be seen from the confrontational tactics in the form of violence carried out and the targets of such actions, such as bombings at places of worship, hotels, and other public facilities (Sahal & Bayuseto, 2021). Data from the decade of 1999 to 2009 show that Indonesia was a relatively “fertile” place for the development of hard-line Islamic ideology. Interestingly, Islamic movements that use resistance through “terrorism” emerged in Indonesian society after the collapse of the New Order with its repressive political system (Harahap et al., 2023).

In practice, hard-line Islamic movements often use the *takbir* phrase as part of their religious expression when carrying out their actions. Such an expression is essentially part of Islamic teachings, but in certain contexts, its meaning may shift when accompanied by excessive actions, violence, or coercive actions against others (Abidin, 2015). Such practices not only cause material losses but also have non-material impacts, such as the emergence of fear, social unrest, strained relations between groups, and the strengthening of negative stigma toward Islam. The actions they undertake are often understood as a consequence of their religious commitment to uphold *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*. Furthermore, they may view the courage to undertake such actions as a form of religious militancy that is believed to have legitimacy from the practices of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions (Abdullah, 2016).

This construction of understanding subsequently gave rise to the use of the term “militant Muslim,” which in the Indonesian context is often attached to groups or individuals characterized by a harsh, firm, and confrontational religious orientation (Temby, 2019). However, conceptually, the term “militant” is not always synonymous with violence or extremism. Militancy can also be understood as seriousness, steadfastness, consistency, and strong commitment to implementing religious values (Rasyid et al., 2024). Therefore, the important issue to be examined is not whether a Muslim possesses militancy in religious practice, but rather how such militancy is manifested, what values orient it, and what ethical boundaries govern its implementation. This distinction is important so that the concept of a militant Muslim is not automatically equated with hard-line Islam.

This article specifically examines the concept of militant Muslims from the perspective of QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 110. The verse positions Muslims as *khaira ummah*, with the main characteristics of commanding what is *ma'ruf*, preventing what is *munkar*, and believing in Allah (Rasyid et al., 2024). These three elements indicate that the

excellence of the Muslim community is determined not only by its Islamic identity but also by the moral and social qualities manifested in communal life. This verse can serve as an important foundation for reassessing the concept of Muslim militancy, particularly in distinguishing between militancy oriented toward public benefit and militancy that instead produces destruction and social conflict.

In the Indonesian context, this study becomes increasingly relevant because the term “militant Muslim” has developed within social spaces and religious discourse with various connotations, particularly in the post-Suharto era (Hasan, 2008). The term is often used to describe groups with strong religious zeal, but at the same time is associated with exclusivist, intolerant, or even violent attitudes. Therefore, this article seeks to explore the meaning of militant Muslims through the perspective of QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 110, as well as other Islamic literature, in order to obtain a more proportionate understanding of the characteristics of militancy within the Islamic tradition. This historical inquiry is necessary so that the concept of militancy is not understood solely on the basis of contemporary group phenomena, but is also situated within the development of Muslim thought and practice since the early period (Abdullah, 2016).

Studies on Muslim militancy in the Indonesian context show that religious militancy is not necessarily synonymous with violence, radicalism, or confrontational attitudes. Ashadi, for example, found that tolerance and militancy can coexist among Muslim students at Don Bosco Senior High School in Padang, where they live in a predominantly Christian school environment. In this context, militancy is more evident as steadfastness in religious identity and commitment while remaining open to diversity (Ashadi, 2020). Meanwhile, Ahyar and Alfitri demonstrate that contemporary Islamic activism has also developed through digital spaces, as seen in the *Aksi Bela Islam* movement, indicating that expressions of militancy can take the form of social mobilization and religious propaganda without necessarily being manifested through physical violence (Ahyar & Alfitri, 2019). At the normative level, Kusnadi and Zulkarnain’s study of Muhammad Asad demonstrates that *amar ma’rūf nahi munkar* can be understood as an ethical principle for building a good social life (Kusnadi & Zulkarnain, 2017).

In Indonesia’s pluralistic society, the issue of militancy is also related to how religious commitment is situated within civic life and social welfare. Siswanto and Islamy demonstrate that the perspective of *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* can strengthen the understanding of religious moderation through an orientation toward public welfare, national commitment, and civic life (Siswanto & Islamy, 2022). These findings indicate that militancy can be understood more constructively as a religious commitment manifested through ethical action and social engagement. However, these studies have not fully addressed the hermeneutical question concerning the Qur’anic basis of this concept, particularly how QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 110 should be understood in relation to *khaira ummah*. This issue is important because QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]:110 emphasizes *amar ma’rūf nahi*

munkar and the prohibition of division as the basis for the formation of *khaira ummah*. Thus, *khaira ummah* should not be understood merely as a claim of Muslim identity superiority, but as an ethical predicate characterized by the practice of *amar ma'rūf, nahi munkar*, and faith in Allah.

Based on this gap, this study examines QS. Āl 'Imrān [3]: 110 through a comparative reading of the exegeses of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, Ibn 'Āshūr, and Wahbah al-Zuhailī. This study offers a conceptual construction of Muslim militancy as an ethical commitment encompassing steadfastness in faith, the practice of *amar ma'rūf nahi munkar*, and an orientation toward social welfare. Unlike previous studies that discuss *khaira ummah* in general or examine militancy from the perspectives of social relations and religious movements, this study specifically connects the meaning of *khaira ummah* with a non-coercive and contextually relevant construction of militancy for Indonesian society.

This article can make a theoretical contribution by reconstructing the concept of militant Muslims based on Qur'anic values and distinguishing it from radical and confrontational expressions of religiosity. Practically, this study demonstrates that QS. Āl 'Imrān [3]: 110 can serve as an ethical framework for directing religious militancy toward the practice of *amar ma'rūf nahi munkar* in a courteous, contextual, and welfare-oriented manner. Thus, it can serve as a reference for developing religious preaching and religious life that remains grounded in Islamic principles while being responsive to Indonesia's pluralistic and dynamic society.

Method

This research employs a qualitative design using a contextual *tafsīr tahlīlī* approach with an intertextual perspective to QS. Āl 'Imrān [3]: 110. The primary corpus consists of the exegeses of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, Ibn 'Āshūr, and Wahbah al-Zuhailī, which were purposively selected to represent classical, medieval, and modern exegetical tendencies. Supporting sources include scholarly books and journal articles, particularly those addressing religious militancy, ethical activism, nonviolent da'wah, and contextual Qur'anic interpretation. The descriptive-analytical analysis is conducted in three stages: first, examining the historical context, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, and *munāsabah* of QS. Āl 'Imrān [3]: 110; second, exploring the interpretations of the four exegetes concerning *khaira ummah*, *amar ma'rūf, nahi munkar*, and faith in Allah through intertextual analysis of related Qur'anic verses and exegetical sources; and third, establishing a normative bridge between these Qur'anic values and the socio-religious context of Indonesian society. The interpretation is further examined through counter-readings to avoid reducing *khaira ummah* to claims of religious superiority or militancy to acts of coercion.

Results and Discussion

Understanding of Militant Muslims

The term “militant Muslim” or *militant Islam* has received attention in modern literature, one of which is through G. H. Jansen’s work entitled *Militant Islam: An Informed and Incisive Analysis of Islam’s Confrontation with the Western World Today*, first published in English in 1979 by Pan Books. In this work, Jansen discusses the phenomenon of Islamic militancy from historical and political perspectives, particularly in relation to the resurgence of Islamic movements and Muslim responses to the development of the modern world and the West (Jansen, 1979). Jansen’s work is important because it contributed to shaping the early discourse on Islamic militancy in modern literature, although the concept of *militant Islam* that he employed has a particular historical and political context.

Etymologically, “militant Muslim” is a form of *mudhaf ‘ilaih* consisting of the words “Muslim” and “militant.” The word Muslim in the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* means a person who adheres to or embraces Islam (Nasional, 2008). By embracing Islam, such a person must submit himself to Allah SWT by worshiping and seeking help only from Him regarding everything that exists in the universe (QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 83). Meanwhile, militant itself is defined as “full of enthusiasm, very passionate, and strongly determined.” Militancy is defined as enthusiasm and eagerness in striving (to face certain problems (Nasional, 2008).

According to Ingo Wandelt, the meaning of militant refers to always being enthusiastic in striving to achieve victory, seeking to become the winner, and being determined to achieve success as part of an armed force (Wandelt, 2009). Meanwhile, according to Webster, militant can mean being directly involved in warfare or combat, being active and aggressive in dealing with a problem, and having an enthusiastic attitude (Webster, 2006). Thus, militant refers to a condition in which a person is engaged in matters of war, whether attacking or defending.

Based on the explanation above, militant means an enthusiastic attitude that Muslims should possess in order to succeed in their struggle, whether in peaceful conditions or during war, by committing themselves totally and continuously. In this context, militancy can be directed toward a highly noble attitude because it is manifested in the personality of Muslims in promoting truth. Therefore, for Muslims, an attitude of militancy needs to be applied in both peaceful and wartime (critical) conditions. In peaceful conditions, militancy seeks to implement and spread religious teachings completely and peacefully, accompanied by intensive efforts. Meanwhile, in conditions of war or crisis, specific actions are required in accordance with the circumstances and needs.

Historiography of Militant Muslims in Indonesia

Being born as a Muslim is an inevitability that is highly profitable. However, this inevitability must be accompanied by an intense attitude of striving to become a true

Muslim by always drawing closer to Allah SWT. The level of piety of a true Muslim will always be strong and spread alongside the actualization of worship values in social life. Included as an act of worship is the struggle of Muslims to spread the religion they believe in to all corners of the world. The expansion of Islam as carried out by the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions in the past can be used as a guideline and reference for doing the same with the aim of upholding *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*.

The struggle for the advancement of Islam in the past needs to be emulated in the contemporary context, even though Muslims are often insulted, cursed, and fought by unbelievers. The attitude of militancy among Muslims who have reached the highest level of piety can serve as a benchmark in striving to uphold the banner of Islam. This is because the presence of piety within Muslims certainly entails a sense of fear of their Lord (Zulfikar, 2019), which can be used as a fighting spirit to strengthen the religion of Islam. Throughout history, it can be seen how the Prophet Muhammad propagated Islam and orally preserved the *Kitabullah* (the Qur'an), as well as demonstrated very high enthusiasm in receiving revelation. When a verse was revealed to him, the Prophet immediately memorized it because he did not want to lose even a single letter of the word of Allah (Zulkarnaini, 2022). This is revealed in QS. al-Qiyamah [75]: 16–18 as follows:

لَا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ فَإِذَا قَرَأَهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ

“Do not move your tongue, [O Muhammad], with it to hasten with its recitation. Indeed, upon Us is its collection [in your heart] and [to make possible] its recitation. So when We have recited it, then follow its recitation.”

Furthermore, enthusiasm for strengthening Islam through memorizing the Qur'an was also deeply rooted in the hearts of the Companions. They participated in memorizing the Qur'an by listening to the Prophet memorize it. The Prophet then instructed them to write down the verses of the Qur'an they had memorized on palm branches, stones, bones, and other materials. Until the Prophet's death, the Qur'an continued to be memorized by the Companions and Qur'an memorizers at that time. Then, when the Battle of Yamamah resulted in the deaths of many Qur'an memorizers, Umar ibn al-Khattab suggested to Abu Bakr that the Qur'an, which was still in the form of manuscripts, be compiled, and eventually the Qur'an was compiled into a single collection. However, a problem arose once the Qur'an had been compiled into one collection, namely during the time of Uthman ibn Affan. Specifically, in the 15th Hijri year, differences in recitation emerged because of the various dialects used in different regions. Therefore, Uthman sent three Quraysh men to copy the Qur'anic manuscripts so that there would no longer be disputes among Muslims, and these copies were distributed to various regions of the Islamic world (Al-Qaththan, n.d.). From this, the militancy of Muslims during the time of the Prophet and the Companions can be clearly observed, along with the widespread spirit of struggle among militant Muslims.

In general, militant Muslims are understood as individuals who possess a strong spirit in defending the truth and sanctity of Islam. The term “militant Muslim” first emerged as a designation for the Muslim population of the Rohingya when their ethnic group came under severe attacks by the Myanmar military (Sebastian & Yusuf, 2013). As is known, Myanmar is a country whose population is predominantly Buddhist, and the discrimination carried out by the people of Myanmar against the Rohingya ethnic group caused militant Rohingya Muslims to become outraged because of their oppression. The existence of the Rohingya population has been described as a diaspora that is not recognized by the Myanmar state due to various conflicts (Siba, 2018).

As a result of this discrimination, many Rohingya people fled to other countries, including Indonesia. However, many Rohingya people also remained in the province to defend and obtain their rights, as well as to seek advocacy from other countries. Eventually, a group called ARSA (*Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army*) was formed. It is known as an armed group commanded by Ata Ullah, a Rohingya who was born in Pakistan. ARSA was established following anti-Muslim unrest that resulted in the deaths of 200 people in Rakhine Province. The Myanmar government accused this group of being a terrorist network. The strong determination of the Rohingya people to fight for their rights as citizens attracted considerable attention from the international community, and from that point onward, the essence of militant Muslims began to become known internationally (Nanda, 2020).

In Indonesia, Muslim militancy can be observed during the New Order era, particularly under the leadership of President Suharto. Reportedly, between May 1998 and 2005, two incidents of violence occurred in Indonesia, specifically in Maluku Province, located in the central part of the Maluku Islands, and in Poso. In these areas, shootings and bombings occurred, triggered by ethnic and religious disputes as well as intense conflict between Muslim and Christian communities. This illustrates how militant Muslim groups developed into movements or groups that were trained and experienced in combat within conflict areas. Following Suharto’s resignation from the presidency in May 1998, ethnic and religious disputes became a legitimate form of warfare for militant Muslim groups in Indonesia, as well as for a small number of foreign individuals.

In early 2002, Vice President Jusuf Kalla, who at that time served as Coordinating Minister for People’s Welfare, initiated a peace agreement and succeeded in minimizing the escalation of violence. However, shootings and bombings still occurred occasionally and could not yet be completely stopped. On May 16, 2005, on Seram Island, Maluku, eight armed men consisting of local residents and outsiders attacked a security post, killing five police officers and a cook. Then, on May 28 of the same year, at Tentena Market, Poso Regency, two bombs were detonated, killing 22 people, where the majority of the population in the town was Christian. Although the identities of those responsible for the Tentena bombing could not be determined, it was certain that militant Muslims were involved in cooperation with other parties (Safi, 2017).

The militancy of Muslims continues to spread in Indonesia to this day. With an extraordinary spirit of struggle, militant Muslims continue to seek to uphold *amar ma'ruf* and *nahi munkar* as the central objectives in preaching Islam. Activities aimed at spreading the teachings of Allah are carried out in ways that they consider good, in accordance with religious teachings that encompass moral, spiritual, material, and intellectual dimensions. The slogans promoted in preaching Islam are to practice Islamic teachings earnestly (*mujahadah*) and with *istiqamah*. Their main call is “return to the Qur'an and Sunnah” (Solihin, 2023). They seek to enforce the law through the concept of the Caliphate and promote a form of religious practice that requires Muslims to become *kaffah* Muslims. Of course, such movements can cause militancy to exceed its limits, leading toward radicalism and terrorism.

Variants of Militant Muslims in Indonesia

Islam teaches each of its followers to always be persistent and enthusiastic in living life. On the one hand, “militant,” which means persistent and enthusiastic, can serve as a spiritual basis related to how *da'wah* activists respond to various religious, communal, and national problems. In other words, militancy among Muslims can serve as a basis for understanding “revivalism and puritanism.” On the other hand, militancy can also be associated with an understanding of “fundamentalism and radicalism” (Mataram, 2015; Sumbulah, 2019). If we return to the meaning of militancy as described above, it becomes apparent that militancy can give color to the values of modernity while adopting an antagonistic character.

It cannot be denied that militancy is a spirit for spreading Islamic teachings associated with the revivalist movement, because it views Islam as capable of responding to the challenges and demands of the times even without any correlation with modern science and technology. When elaborated in the context of the struggle for Islam, which is full of challenges, it is certainly associated with “fundamentalism and radicalism,” except that in the latter two terms, the field of struggle is directed toward the meaning of *jihad* and a fundamental understanding of Islamic teachings. Militant Muslims in Indonesia respond to the challenges of the times through *da'wah* in different ways. Such conditions constitute an enduring dynamic, in which changes occur and are anticipated to the fullest extent by pursuing various efforts to struggle in the path of Allah (*jihad fi sabilillah*) (Akbar et al., 2022). In its development, militant Muslims have four variants that continue to exist in Indonesia today, namely (Safi, 2017):

First, the radical militancy variant. This group understands Islamic teachings in black-and-white terms, in which Islamic teachings are understood scripturally. Cultural factors are not well understood and tend to be neglected, including adherence to Fundamentalism and Radicalism. This group often encourages Muslims to practice Islamic teachings in a firm and harsh manner, sometimes accompanied by feelings of anger and agitation. They use verses concerning *qital* as the basis for understanding non-Muslim,

polytheist, and hypocritical groups. They also seek to eliminate groups that fight against Muslims. The Front Pembela Islam (FPI) group represents this category. The messages conveyed by this group refer to rules held by its leaders to encourage others to carry out the commands of Allah purely and consistently (Syaefudin, 2014).

Second, the Salafi-style militancy variant. This group views the prophetic tradition and the *Khulafa' al-Rashidun* as the primary basis for Muslims to re-examine *da'wah* activities. The expansion of Islam is carried out through several appropriate methods and strategies. They emulate the Prophet Muhammad in conducting *sirriyah da'wah* and *jahriyah da'wah*, establishing the *Darul Arqam* educational institution, following the example of the Prophet's first migration to Abyssinia, and participating in monumental pledges of allegiance (*bai'ah*) in forming individuals who are loyal and highly committed to Islamic *da'wah*. The text is understood as it is, without much dialogue with contemporary realities. They focus more on interpreting the circumstances in which a verse was revealed and the context in which the Prophet's hadith was conveyed. This variant is associated with puritanism because it approaches Islamic teachings through an in-depth understanding. In seeking to practice Islamic teachings, they rely on textual and scriptural issues in the Qur'an and Sunnah, balanced by a reflective understanding of Islamic history. It places emphasis on practicing Islamic teachings peacefully and avoiding external symbols that are devoid of substance. This is because it is based on morality and *sharia*, which are carefully interpreted. They believe that by practicing Islam correctly and peacefully, the revival of Islam will emerge in the present era. Representatives of this group include Jamaah Tabligh and Lembaga Dakwah Islam Indonesia (LDII) (Dodi, 2017).

Third, the moderate militancy variant. In carrying out *da'wah*, this group views Islamic teachings as being grounded in Islamic *aqidah*, with *tauhidullah* serving as the primary basis for addressing religious, communal, and national issues. Worship is operationalized in everyday life and influences various aspects of their lives. Its distinctive characteristic is its effort to integrate religion with science and technology for human activities. Likewise, the practice of Islamic teachings is carried out by utilizing various available technological means. This group seeks to find compromises to the greatest extent possible by filtering various discoveries and innovations in science and technology through religious values (Maftukhin, 2017). Those who belong to this group include figures such as Muhammad Iqbal, Syed Amir Ali, Muhammad Natsir, and Hamka in the past. In the contemporary period, they include B. J. Habibie, Ahmad Syafii Ma'arif, Emha Ainun Najib, M. Quraish Shihab, and others. Every Islamic teaching that is practiced correctly (based on the Qur'an and Sunnah and understood through rational and reflective approaches) will be accompanied by Allah's assistance.

Fourth, the liberal-style militancy variant. This group consists of Muslims who seek to understand the content of the Qur'an without necessarily adhering to its textual meaning, but rather by seeking the essence of its teachings and engaging them in dialogue with contemporary conditions. (Amin & Syarifah, 2021) They interact with aspects of life

within a pluralistic society. *Jihad* is regarded as an effort to think constructively, speak positively, and act productively. Therefore, in explaining Islamic teachings, they place greater emphasis on the role of reason by presenting various clear opinions without blaming others. Violence in words and actions, according to this group, must be avoided because, in essence, human beings possess reason and the ability to communicate well.

Of the four variants above, the first is the most prominent and widely recognized as representing militant Muslims in Indonesia. They are highly enthusiastic in carrying out actions, referring to them as *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*. Nevertheless, what they have done in various regions of Indonesia has generated controversy within society. They are often criticized because their actions are considered inconsistent with the militancy exemplified by the Prophet, the Companions, and earlier Muslim scholars. Because the actions they carried out often violated public order and security, the Indonesian government officially dissolved FPI as an organization on June 21, 2019 (Putri, 2022).

Relevance of Militant Muslims in the Indonesian Context: An Analysis of QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]: 110

When hearing the term “militant Muslim,” it seems that most people’s understanding is directed toward women who wear the veil, men who have long beards and wear short trousers, as well as young men and women who loudly shout “*Allahu Akbar*” when carrying out demonstrations. For certain groups, militant Muslims are viewed as people who organize themselves as agents who determine the future and transform civilization for the better (Karim, 2024). However, in the contemporary context, militant Muslims are often regarded as belonging to radical, extremist, and fundamentalist groups, and even as terrorists. Particularly in Indonesia, militant Muslims are often associated with HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia), which was dissolved during President Joko Widodo’s administration because it was considered incompatible with Pancasila. Militant Muslims appear to seek to transform Indonesia into a completely Islamic state through extreme means (Arif, 2012).

In Indonesia, militant Muslims are clearly often viewed negatively by society, with some even considering them disruptive to comfort and tranquility and causing ordinary people to become fearful of the term “militant Muslim.” Factually, militant Muslims currently visible in Indonesia do indeed appear to represent trans-Islamic movements. The Front Pembela Islam (FPI) is the group most frequently identified as militant. In their struggle for Islam, they often mobilize through violence to reject things considered immoral and reprehensible. In addition to national campaigns, such as the 212 movement that opposed Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) in the 2016 Jakarta gubernatorial election, they also actively mobilized at the local level by targeting government institutions and various regions (Septiana et al., 2020).

Based on this, the meaning of militant Muslims is often equated with radicalism, even though the two are clearly different. Radicalism is an ideology of extreme social and

political change or reform. This ideology seeks immediate change and often employs violence (Adnan & Amaliyah, 2021). Militancy, on the other hand, refers to a struggle carried out consistently and continuously to bring about change through hard work and patience. The Prophet Muhammad and his Companions were figures who exemplified a militant attitude in propagating Islam. Had there been no militant attitude at that time, it is possible that Islam would not be known today.

One of the verses that can appropriately serve as a reference for understanding militant Muslims is the word of Allah in QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 110 as follows:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ ۚ وَلَوْ آمَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ ۚ مِنْهُمْ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

“You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. If only the People of the Scripture had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are defiantly disobedient.”

This verse outlines at least four important points. *First*, Muslims are the best community created by Allah on earth, whose task is to practice *amar ma'ruf* and *nahi munkar*. *Second*, the Prophet Muhammad SAW was instructed to encourage Muslims to strive to uphold the banner of Islam and not to be afraid. *Third*, Muslims must strive intensively in the path of Allah. *Fourth*, Muslims must improve their attitudes, behavior, and acts of worship, as well as their *aqidah*, *sharia*, and morals. These four aspects can serve as basic guidelines in preaching Islam. Based on this verse, the essence of militancy means possessing a high spirit of struggle and not easily becoming discouraged, while continuously seeking opportunities to incorporate Islamic values into every aspect of life.

In *Tafsir al-Munir*, Wahbah al-Zuhaili explains the *asbab al-nuzul* of the verse above by citing the opinions of ‘Ikrimah and Muqatil. The revelation of QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 110 was related to Ibn Mas‘ud, Ubay ibn Ka‘b, Mu‘adh ibn Jabal, and Salim Mawla Abu Hudhayfah, as well as Malik ibn Shaif and Wahab ibn Yahudha, both of whom were of Jewish descent. They said, “Indeed, our religion is better than the religion you follow. Our religion is superior to your religion.” Then Allah revealed QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 110 (Al-Zuhaili, 2009).

According to Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, the verse above contains two opinions regarding the meaning of the word *ummah*. The first opinion explains *ummah* as referring to those who migrated with the Prophet from Mecca to Medina (the Muhajirun). This explanation is based on narrations transmitted from Ibn ‘Abbas through Sa‘id ibn Jubayr, al-Suddi, and ‘Ikrimah. The second opinion, based on narrations from Abu Hurairah and Mujahid, states that *ummah* in the verse can refer to anyone who fulfills three important criteria: *amar ma'ruf*, *nahi munkar*, and belief in Allah, as mentioned in the verse (Al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Ibnu Katsir, 1998).

Meanwhile, Ibn ‘Ashur, in his commentary, explains that the superiority of the Companions over previous communities was because they lived during the time when the Prophet SAW had been sent as a Messenger. The superiority of the Prophet’s community after his death, however, lies in their fulfillment of the three pillars mentioned above, namely *amar ma’ruf*, *nahi munkar*, and belief in Allah (Ibnu ‘Āshūr, 1984). Of course, the Prophet’s best community cannot be separated from their conduct and the provisions of the preceding verses: by continuing to uphold universal goodness (Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 104) and maintaining unity (Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 105). Thus, humanity is regarded by Allah as the best community when it is characterized by faith in Him, upholding *amar ma’ruf* and *nahi munkar* with enthusiastic striving, and making every possible effort to preserve everything beneficial to the religion of Islam.

Referring to QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 110 above, the best community can also be described as Muslims who possess a high degree of militancy. In other words, militant Muslims are those who earnestly carry out *amar ma’ruf* and *nahi munkar*, while demonstrating full patience in achieving the advancement of Muslim civilization. A militant Muslim *is the best* (a positive Muslim, an exemplary Muslim); however, in reality, militant Muslims are often marginalized, trapped, oppressed, and isolated. In terms of public image, militant Muslims are viewed as harsh, cruel, rough, accused, backward, and so forth. In fact, militant Muslims are believed to have highly positive aspirations, although a number of individuals have contributed to creating a negative image of militant Muslims.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that militant Muslims will surrender to everything that happens. Quite a number of militant Muslims have successfully contributed to the advancement of civilization, including Ibn Sina, a Muslim scientist who made major contributions to the field of medicine. Through his spirit of militancy, Ibn Sina was able to contribute to the advancement of Muslim civilization (Starr, 2023). Another example is Jabir Ibn Hayyan, a Muslim scientist known as “*The Father of Modern Chemistry*,” who mastered the fields of chemistry and pharmacy (Amr & Tbakhi, 2007). In Indonesia, there is B. J. Habibie, the third president of Indonesia, who was highly accomplished in aerospace engineering and directly engaged in the social and political spheres. Through his militancy, he contributed to significant changes in Indonesia, including his role as a unifying figure among Indonesian Muslim intellectuals, and his name became widely recognized internationally (Kurniawan et al., 2021).

The struggle undertaken by militant Muslims is essentially consistent with what the Prophet Muhammad conveyed as follows:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: الْمُؤْمِنُ الْقَوِيُّ خَيْرٌ وَأَحَبُّ إِلَى اللَّهِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِ الضَّعِيفِ، وَفِي كُلِّ خَيْرٍ، إِحْرَصْ عَلَى مَا يَنْفَعُكَ وَاسْتَعِزْ بِاللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْجِزْ، وَإِنْ أَصَابَكَ شَيْءٌ فَلَا تَقُلْ: لَوْ أَنِّي فَعَلْتُ كَذَا وَكَذَا، وَلَكِنْ قُلْ: قَدَّرَ اللَّهُ وَمَا شَاءَ فَعَلَ، فَإِنَّ لَوْ تَفْتَحُ عَمَلَ الشَّيْطَانِ.

“Abu Hurairah RA reported that the Rasulullah SAW said: A strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, than a weak believer, although there is good in both. Strive for that which benefits you, seek the help of Allah in all your affairs, and never feel helpless. If something befalls you, do not say, ‘If only I had done such and such, it would have been such and such.’ Rather, say, ‘Allah has decreed, and He does whatever He wills,’ because the word ‘if’ opens the door to the work of Satan”(Al-Ḥajjāj, n.d.).

It is clear that the hadith above describes the strong believer (one who constantly strives and struggles) as being more beloved to Allah than the weak believer. Allah has commanded believers to always possess a strong spirit of struggle in spreading goodness that provides benefits both for themselves and for others. Allah also commands believers not to feel weak or fearful when something bad befalls them, because Allah knows best the capacity of each of His servants.

Jihad through upholding *amar ma'ruf* and *nahi munkar* is clear evidence of Muslim militancy. Everyone is encouraged to engage in *jihad* based on piety toward Allah and to remain in an orderly ranks, like a solid structure that is not easily destroyed. At least three main characteristics can be identified among militant Muslims in upholding the banner of Islam through *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*: first, their hearts are alive and unwilling to turn away from Allah toward anything else. This is as mentioned in QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]: 191:

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَٰذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ

“Those who remember Allah while standing, sitting, or lying down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], ‘Our Lord, You have not created this without purpose. Glory be to You! So protect us from the punishment of the Fire.’”

Second, they make the Qur'an the primary guide in life, thereby being protected from an impure heart, as stated in QS. al-Qamar [54]: 17:

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ

“And We have certainly made the Qur'an easy for remembrance, so is there anyone who will take heed?”

Third, they constantly engage in *jihad* and strive with all their strength for the sake of religion. *Jihad*, understood as *al-qital* (war), is no longer applied in the contemporary context; rather, it is implemented through dialogue, *da'wah*, discussion, and debate with gentleness, caution, and the best possible approach. This is stated in QS. al-Taubah [9]: 41:

انْفِرُوا خِفَافًا وَثِقَالًا وَجَاهِدُوا بِأَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَنْفُسِكُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۚ ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

“Go forth, whether you are light or heavy, and strive with your wealth and your lives in the cause of Allah. That is better for you, if only you knew.”

Thus, militant Muslims do not mean striving to uphold the banner of Islam through violence, extremism, or mass mobilization for particular interests. Rather, it means bringing about social change in a courteous manner, understanding the prevailing conditions and circumstances, and engaging in *da‘wah* accompanied by strong faith in Allah SWT. Therefore, this attitude of militancy is highly relevant and should be instilled among Muslims in Indonesia, because being a militant Muslim constitutes a resource for achieving the advancement of Muslim civilization in the world. The more advanced civilization becomes, the more steadfast the spirit of Muslim youth should be in facing the future. The attitude of militancy exemplified above also needs to be practiced without resorting to violence; otherwise, Muslim militancy may manifest itself in the form of radicalism.

Conclusion

This study concludes, *first*, that the concept of *khaira ummah* in QS. Āl ‘Imrān [3]: 110 should not be understood as a claim of religious superiority or collective militancy. Rather, its status is conditional upon faith in Allah and the ethical practices of *amar ma ‘rūf* and *nahi munkar*, which are further understood within the Qur’anic emphasis on unity, social welfare, and the avoidance of coercion. Accordingly, the positive dimension commonly associated with Muslim militancy is more appropriately expressed through *istiqāmah*, *mujāhadah*, ethical activism, and civic virtue. This reconstruction also indicates that commitment to Islamic values does not require confrontation or coercive action, but can be manifested through peaceful, contextual, and socially constructive engagement.

Second, the intertextual and contextual reading of QS. Āl ‘Imrān [3]: 110, together with the exegetical interpretations of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, Ibn ‘Āshūr, and Wahbah al-Zuhailī, demonstrates that *khaira ummah* is fundamentally associated with ethical responsibility rather than identity-based superiority. This meaning is relevant in the Indonesian context because it places religious commitment in the life of a plural society through peaceful preaching, social responsibility, respect for human dignity, and orientation towards the welfare. Therefore, the term “militant Muslim” requires careful use because of its historical and contemporary associations with violence and political confrontation. In the Indonesian context, the Qur’anic ideal is more appropriately articulated through the ethical qualities of *khaira ummah* rather than through militancy as a group identity.

This study is limited by its reliance on a selected exegetical corpus and relevant secondary literature, which may introduce selection bias and does not fully represent the diversity of Qur’anic interpretation or contemporary Muslim movements in Indonesia. Future research should therefore examine empirically how these Qur’anic values are

interpreted and practiced across different Muslim communities, particularly in relation to ethical activism, civic engagement, peaceful da‘wah, and religious pluralism in Indonesia.

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