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### Emha Ainun Nadjib: Tadabbur Al-Qur'an as a Manifestation of Qur'anic Epistemology in Reading Reality

*Emha Ainun Nadjib: Tadabbur Al-Qur'an sebagai Manifestasi Epistemologi Al-Qur'an dalam Membaca Realitas*

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#### Abstract

Emha Ainun Nadjib's concept of tadabbur al-Qur'an offers a renewed approach to revelation by positioning the Qur'an as a living and contextual source of knowledge. Unlike classical exegesis that tends to be elitist, Nadjib's approach emphasizes dialogue between the sacred text and social reality as an epistemic process accessible to all. This study aims to explain how Nadjib's tadabbur functions as a manifestation of Qur'anic epistemology in understanding human life. The research applies a qualitative method through library research, drawing upon Nadjib's works such as *Mushaf Al-Qur'an Tadabbur Maiyah Padhangmbulan* and his writings on *caknun.com* as primary sources. The findings reveal that tadabbur, in Nadjib's view, is an intellectual and spiritual activity that integrates reason, heart, and social experience, forming a Qur'anic framework of knowledge that is dialogical, inclusive, and transformative toward reality.

**Keywords:** Emha Ainun Nadjib; Epistemology; Indonesian Tafsir; Social Reality; Tadabbur Al-Qur'an

#### Abstrak

Konsep tadabbur Al-Qur'an Emha Ainun Nadjib menawarkan pembacaan baru terhadap wahyu dengan menempatkan Al-Qur'an sebagai sumber pengetahuan yang hidup dan kontekstual. Berbeda dari tafsir klasik yang cenderung elitis, pendekatan Nadjib menekankan dialog antara teks suci dan realitas sosial sebagai proses epistemik yang dapat diakses oleh semua kalangan. Penelitian ini bertujuan menjelaskan bagaimana tadabbur versi Nadjib berfungsi sebagai manifestasi epistemologi Qur'ani dalam memahami kehidupan. Metode yang digunakan bersifat kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi pustaka, menggunakan karya Nadjib seperti *Mushaf Al-Qur'an Tadabbur Maiyah Padhangmbulan* serta tulisan-tulisan di *caknun.com* sebagai sumber utama. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tadabbur dalam pandangan Nadjib merupakan aktivitas intelektual dan spiritual yang mengintegrasikan akal, hati, dan pengalaman sosial, membentuk kerangka pengetahuan Qur'ani yang dialogis, terbuka, dan transformatif terhadap realitas.

**Kata Kunci:** Emha Ainun Nadjib; Epistemologi; Tafsir Indonesia; Realitas Sosial; Tadabbur Al-Qur'an



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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of *tadabbur* in Qur’anic studies is often narrowly understood as a technical term in tafsir, rather than as a concept with an epistemic structure.<sup>1</sup> Classical exegetes—such as Al-Zamakhshari, Al-Qurtubi, and Al-Khazin—generally interpret *tadabbur* as contemplation and deep reflection on the meaning of the Qur’an.<sup>2</sup> Abū Ḥayyan and As-Sa’dī added a dimension of purpose by emphasizing understanding of consequences, while Ibn al-Qayyim highlighted the role of the heart and the integration of reason and intuition. Ibn ‘Āsyūr expanded on this through a hermeneutic approach to uncovering implied meanings.<sup>3</sup> As a synthesis, *Ḥabanakah* defines *tadabbur* as a comprehensive thought process to capture the ultimate purpose of a statement. Thus, *tadabbur* is still understood as a term with a meaning close to *tafakkur*, *ta’ammul*, *tabaṣṣur*, or *nazar*. The scholars have not yet—or even begun to—treat *tadabbur* as a concept that has basic elements that form an epistemological structure.

On the contrary, a study of Emha Ainun Nadjib’s works—including books, the website caknun.com, and video recordings—shows that he developed the concept of *tadabbur* beyond its technical meaning. Referring to Fina and Rafiq, Nadjib distinguishes between “studying the Qur’an” (tafsir) and “learning from the Qur’an” (*tadabbur*).<sup>4</sup> Thus, Nadjib not only positions *tadabbur* as a spiritual practice, but develops it into an Islamic epistemological framework. His *tadabbur* describes the Qur’anic mindset used to interpret reality, making the Qur’an not merely an object of contemplation, but an instrument of knowledge that works together with the subject in interpreting the world.

Meanwhile, in existing literature related to Emha Ainun Nadjib’s interpretation of the Qur’an, Nadjib’s concept is still understood as a form of reception, as seen in studies conducted by Lien Iffah Na’atu Fina and Ahmad Rafiq,<sup>5</sup> and Ayis Mukholik.<sup>6</sup> Or even as a method, as seen in the study conducted by Muhammad Ali Asri Faen,<sup>7</sup> Rohmat Fauzi,<sup>8</sup> and Ullya Romatika.<sup>9</sup> There are also studies that place it as a perspective, as described in the results of studies by Niken Larasingtyas, Adrika Fithrotul Aira, and Salamah Noorhidayati<sup>10</sup> and Yasmin Masyitha

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- 1 Ahmed Zaranggi Ar Ridho, “FROM TAFSIR TO TADABBUR,” *Tanzil: Jurnal Studi Al-Quran* 7, no. 1 (October 14, 2024): 103–20, <https://doi.org/10.20871/tjsq.v7i1.370>.
  - 2 Tazul Islam, “MAQĀSID ĀL-QUR’AN: A SEARCH FOR A SCHOLARLY DEFINITION,” *Al-Bayan – Journal of Qur’an and Hadith Studies* 9, no. 1 (April 26, 2011): 189–207, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-90000026>.
  - 3 Ali Mostfa, “Redefining Qur’anic Hermeneutics: Muḥammad ‘Ābid Al-Jābrī and Nasr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd’s Humanistic Interpretations,” *Religions* 15, no. 3 (February 23, 2024): 278, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030278>.
  - 4 Lien Iffah Na’atu Fina dan Ahmad Rafiq, “The Reception of the Qur’an in Popular Sufism in Indonesia: *tadabbur* among the Maiyah Community”, dalam *Communities of the Qur’an: Dialogue, Debate and Diversity in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Emran El-Badawi dan Paula Sanders (London: Oneworld Academic, 2019), h. 58.
  - 5 Lien Iffah Na’atu Fina dan Ahmad Rafiq, *The Reception of the Qur’an*.
  - 6 Ayis Mukholik, “Emha Ainun Nadjib’s Qur’an Reception on the Maiyah Community”. *Millati: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2022), h. 177-93, Doi: <https://doi.org/10.18326/mlt.v7i2.7046>.
  - 7 Muhammad Ali Asri Faen, “Metode Memahami Alquran Dan Realitas Kehidupan Perspektif Emha Ainun Nadjib”, Tesis (Surabaya: Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel, 2020).
  - 8 Rohmat Fauzi, “Kajian Kritis Mushaf Al-Qur’an Tadabbur Maiyah Padhangmbulan Perspektif Khālid ‘Uṣmān As-Sabt”, Skripsi (Kediri: Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kediri, 2023).
  - 9 Ullya Romatika, “Nalar Hermeneutik dalam Tadabbur Qur’an Surat Al-Fatihah (Kajian Mushaf Al-Qur’an Tadabbur Maiyah Padangmbulan”, Skripsi (Purwokerto: Universitas Islam Negeri Prf. KH. Saifuddin Zuhri, 2022).
  - 10 Niken Larasingtyas, Adrika Fithrotul Aira, dan Salamah Noorhidayati, “The Concept of Leadership in the Perspective of Al-Asmā’ Al-Ḥusnā (Tadabbur QS. Al-Ḥasyr Verses 22-24 in Mushaf Al-Qur’an Tadabbur Maiyah Padhangmbulan)”, *International Conference on Islam, Law, and Society (INCOILS) Conference Proceedings 2023*.

Rismayanti.<sup>11</sup> Thus, no one has yet examined Nadjib's concept of tadabbur Al-Qur'an from an epistemological perspective, which reflects the manifestation of Islamic epistemology, with an emphasis on the Qur'an being positioned as an epistemological instrument. Thus, there is a theoretical gap in understanding Emha Ainun Nadjib's concept of *tadabbur*, requiring an epistemological approach to explain it. This study applies knowledge theory to examine how Nadjib interprets reality by using the Qur'an as a methodological instrument. In this way, Nadjib's *tadabbur* not only produces practical findings but also offers an epistemological construction.

Based on Ibn Rushd's epistemology—which places the Qur'an as an instrument of knowledge through the path from empirical experience to metaphysical truth—this study attempts to reveal the epistemology of the Qur'an in Emha Ainun Nadjib's model of tadabbur. Through the principles of *ikhtirā'* and *ināyah*, Ibn Rushd demonstrates that metaphysical understanding must begin with the orderliness of nature. In line with this, Nadjib not only reads the Qur'an as a text, but also imitates the Qur'anic mindset in understanding reality. Therefore, this study proposes the hypothesis that Nadjib's concept of *tadabbur* is a form of actualization of the epistemology of the Qur'an in reading the world.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative research design using library research as the primary method of data collection.<sup>12</sup> The main data sources consist of Emha Ainun Nadjib's works—including books, essays, and recordings of discussions that contain his reflections on the Qur'an. These materials are analyzed to capture the underlying epistemological framework that shapes his concept of *tadabbur* al-Qur'an. The researcher also examines secondary sources such as theses, journal articles, and interpretive studies that discuss Nadjib's thoughts. Through this method, data are not merely collected but critically selected and interpreted to reveal patterns of meaning that link Qur'anic epistemology to Nadjib's intellectual and spiritual praxis.

The data analysis employs an explanatory-analytical approach, emphasizing the exploration of epistemological dimensions rather than descriptive summaries. This technique enables a deeper understanding of how Nadjib integrates reason, intuition, and revelation as instruments of knowledge. The analysis proceeds through three stages: identifying key epistemic concepts within Nadjib's texts, interpreting their relevance to Qur'anic epistemology, and synthesizing them into a coherent framework. By applying this epistemological lens, the study demonstrates how Nadjib's *tadabbur* operates as a dynamic interaction between text, intellect, and social reality, producing both theoretical insight and transformative spiritual awareness.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Emha Ainun Nadjib: Biographical Analysis

Emha Ainun Nadjib's real name is Muhammad Ainun Nadjib. He is also popularly known as Cak Nun. Born in Jombang, East Java, on May 27, 1953, he studied at Pondok Modern Gontor Ponorogo, East Java, then Muhammadiyah High School in Yogyakarta, and finally completed his first semester at the Faculty of Economics, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta.<sup>13</sup> Nadjib was an “organic intellectual” who was also a cleric, as evidenced by his actions in dedicating

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11 Yasmin Masyitha Rismayanti, “Interelasi antara Nūr dan Nār (Studi Mushaf Al-Qur'an Tadabbur Maiyah Padhangmbulan)”, Skripsi (Surabaya: UIN Sunan Ampel, 2022).

12 Mestika Zed, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2008).

13 Ian L. Betts, *Jalan Sunyi Emha*, cet. 1, (Jakarta: Penerbit Kompas, 2006), h. 1.

himself and his life to society.<sup>14</sup> In his involvement with the community, Nadjib highly values the authenticity of religious diversity in society in general, which has made him popular among the community.<sup>15</sup> Emha Ainun Nadjib's uniqueness has made him known as a preacher, artist, cultural figure, and columnist all at once. Unlike most preachers, he combines religious values with art, culture, and nationalism. His religious thinking connects normative Islamic teachings with social reality through an integrative approach to preaching. Epistemologically, he also combines the scientific traditions of *bayani* (text), *burhani* (reason), and *'irfani* (intuition), thus aligning with an integrative-interconnective paradigm that encompasses religious, philosophical, and scientific dimensions.<sup>16</sup>

## Definition, Concept, and Practice of Tadabbur Al-Qur'an of Emha Ainun Nadjib

Historically, the concept of *tadabbur Al-Qur'an* (contemplation of the Qur'an) initiated by Emha Ainun Nadjib began to develop in the 2000s, along with the emergence of the Maiyah community. In this context, the *tadabbur* approach is seen as a more relevant and applicable method than conventional interpretation for making the Qur'an a practical solution to the problems of a heterogeneous society.<sup>17</sup> As stated by Lien Iffah Na'atu Fina and Ahmad Rafiq, Nadjib's model of *tadabbur* was initially a form of reception or acceptance of the Qur'an by Nadjib and the Maiyah community. The core concept revolves around "learning from the Qur'an," which is fundamentally different from "studying the Qur'an" in the context of interpretation. Implicitly, this model of *tadabbur* functions as a counter-discourse that challenges the common perception that limits understanding of the Qur'an to academics and scholars. This conceptual distinction is evident in the various definitions of *tadabbur* expressed by Nadjib, in which he often contrasts or compares it with the concept of *tafsir*.<sup>18</sup> This can be seen from Nadjib's own definition of *tadabbur*, which in several places always associates *tadabbur* with interpretation.

In one of his writings, Nadjib emphasizes that *tadabbur* is not merely an intellectual process, but rather a holistic activity that integrates intellectual capacity and the spiritual dimension of the heart. Furthermore, based on Q.S. Al-Anbiyā' [21]: 107, he emphasizes that the Qur'an is a universal blessing that is accessible to all levels of society, not only limited to those with special scientific competencies such as interpretation or Arabic language. Thus, his concept rejects the elitist limitation of understanding the Qur'an. He writes:

*"Allah describes Tadabbur as not being done by people whose 'hearts are locked.' This means that while Tafsir only focuses on understanding meaning, Tadabbur is a process that is highly moral and spiritual, more than just intellectual. Tadabbur requires that the end result is a greater inclination towards Allah. For example, becoming closer, more faithful, improving one's akhlaqul-karimah, living a better life, and behaving more piously... Once again, there is no need to give examples here of the reality that, due to the tradition of Tafsir, the Qur'an has become the 'property,' 'right,' and 'monopoly' of the 'Ulama.' The monopoly of the Ulama and the intellectual*

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14 Wardah Hafiz, "Nun, Kanjeng Kiai", dalam *72 Tahun Cak Nun*, ed. Helmi Mustofa, Prayogi R. Saputra, Achmad Saifullah Syahid, cet. 1, (Pustaka TujuhDua, 2025), h. 104-107, h. 107.

15 Haidar Bagir, "Menggugat Kemapanan, Memenangkan Hati Rakyat Jelata: Catatan Personal untuk Emha Ainun Nadjib", dalam *72 Tahun Cak Nun*, ed. Helmi Mustofa, Prayogi R. Saputra, Achmad Saifullah Syahid, cet. 1, (Pustaka TujuhDua, 2025), h. 168-173, h. 173.

16 M. Amin Abdullah, "72 Tahun Nadjib: Integrasi-Interkoneksi Dakwah dan Seni", dalam *72 Tahun Cak Nun*, ed. Helmi Mustofa, Prayogi R. Saputra, Achmad Saifullah Syahid, cet. 1, (Pustaka TujuhDua, 2025), h. 314-321, h. 318.

17 Larasingtyas, Aini, dan Noorhidayati, *The Concept*, h. 7.

18 Fina dan Rafiq, *The Reception*, h. 57-58.

*elite over the Qur'an and within Muslim culture is like the power of a religious oligarchy. Yet Islam is not only for all human beings, but a "mercy for all the worlds." "And We have not sent you except as a mercy to all the worlds".<sup>19</sup>*

However, it should be emphasized that Nadjib offers *tadabbur* Al-Qur'an not to reject tafsir as an approach to reading the Qur'an, but rather to reconstruct the meaning of tafsir itself. In this regard, Nadjib writes::

*"Interpretation is inevitable and very important, because Allah has equipped humans with a tool called reason to think. Therefore, tadabbur does not reject interpretation, but rather opens up the widest possible space for humans to interpret, but with the bond of tadabbur. Reflection is the freedom to read, respond, appreciate, love, or do anything else that humans do with regard to the words of Allah, as long as the outcome is that they become closer to Allah and do more good and are more beneficial to their fellow humans and other creatures of Allah. The principle of tadabbur is not bound by the scientific truth of interpretation, but rather by the requirement of improving the akhlaqul karimah (good character) of those who practice tadabbur".<sup>20</sup>*

As for interpretation, according to Nadjib, it refers to Q.S. Al-Furqān [25]: 33, which he understands to mean that the subject of interpretation is Allah Himself, not humans. Allah's encouragement to humans to interpret the Qur'an is not explicit.<sup>21</sup> Thus, he emphatically stressed that the *tadabbur* activity he referred to was not intended to interpret the Qur'an—an assertion that rejected the possibility of the formation of a new school of interpretation.<sup>22</sup>

Nadjib's interpretation of the Qur'an is oriented towards democratizing access to understanding the Qur'an, making it relevant and open to all circles. In practice, the Qur'an functions as an integral foundation of values in every Maiyah Community meeting and as a framework for solving contemporary problems such as secularism and materialism. As the main marja' (reference figure), Nadjib acts as a mediator who bridges the sacred text with the community. Essentially, his concept of *tadabbur* aims to contextualize the Qur'an so that it is relevant to the reality of Muslims in the 21st century.<sup>23</sup> He uses verses from the Qur'an as a framework for interpreting reality through a contemplative approach. The method he uses is dialectical: both analyzing specific verses through the lens of social reality and reading reality and then interpreting it based on the perspective of the Qur'an.<sup>24</sup> From an epistemological perspective, Nadjib's approach does not refer to existing tafsir texts, but rather relies on empirical observations of social phenomena.<sup>25</sup>

According to Nadjib, Tadabbur Al-Qur'an has a unique characteristic in that it deepens meaning through comprehensive reflection on divine decrees. The approach is multidimensional, not fixated on a single method or point of view, but integrates various perspectives within a holistic and non-dogmatic framework of thought.<sup>26</sup> Systematically, the construction of Nadjib's

19 Emha Ainun Nadjib, "Oligarki Keagamaan", *caknun.com*, (27 Sept 2017), <https://www.caknun.com/2017/oligarki-keagamaan/>, diakses pada 8 Juli 2025.

20 Emha Ainun Nadjib., "Plonga-Plongo Alif Lam Mim", *caknun.com*, (14 Sept 2020) <https://www.caknun.com/2020/plonga-plongo-alif-lam-mim/>, diakses pada 8 Juli 2025.

21 Ahmad Fuad Effendy dan Muhammad Ainun Nadjib, *Mushaf Al-Qur'an Tadabbur Maiyah Padbangmbulan*, (Malang: Yayasan Maiyah AL-MANHAL, 2021), h. 38.

22 Caknun.com, "Kenduri Cinta | Fundamentalisme Khandaq | Part 1/2", *CakNun.com*, (17 Feb 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bgZVS-4jWCo>, diakses pada 17 Juli 2025.

23 Fina dan Rafiq, "The Reception, h. 57-58.

24 Larasingtyas, Aini, dan Noorhidayati, "The Concept, h. 20.

25 Faen, Metode, h. 77-80.

26 Faen, Metode, h. 46.

interpretation of the Qur'an can be understood from the results of studies by Niken Larasingtyas, Adrika Fithrotul Aini, and Salamah Noorhidayati as follows:

- a) Believing that the Qur'an is guidance for all human beings, not just the educated.
- b) Believing that all verses of the Qur'an—including promises and threats—are addressed to humanity universally.
- c) There is no specific method in *tadabbur*; the main thing is the result in the form of increased faith, morals, and closeness to Allah.
- d) Basmalah and istigfar are used as guidance throughout the *tadabbur* process.
- e) The main focus of *tadabbur* is the positive changes that arise after a person internalizes the verses of the Qur'an.<sup>27</sup>

As for Nadjib's method of *tadabbur* Al-Qur'an, the author agrees with Muhammad Ali Asri Faen's analysis as follows:

- a) *Tadabbur* requires reading that goes beyond literal meaning to symbolic or implied meaning, for example, not understanding the *tasbih* of mountains rigidly like the *tasbih* of humans.
- b) The verses of the Qur'an are dialogued with reality, so that stories about people who were destroyed or glorified become material for reflection on current conditions.
- c) *Tadabbur* encourages personal contemplation, as if the verses being read had just been revealed and were addressed directly to the reader; for example, Q.S. Al-Hujurat [49]: 10 raises questions about the brotherhood of faith.

According to Muhammad Ali Asri Faen, Nadjib's concept of *tadabbur*, which positions the Qur'an as an epistemological construct, offers a new way of understanding reality and has a transformative impact on individuals, because Nadjib makes the Qur'an the main instrument for interpreting life.<sup>28</sup>

## Concrete Examples of Reality Interpretation Based on Al-Qur'an Epistemology

Emha Ainun Nadjib explicitly states that in interpreting the realities of life, there is an epistemology in the Qur'an that is highly relevant as a framework for human thinking, namely in Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 216:

وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“It may be that you dislike something, even though it is good for you, and it may be that you like something, even though it is bad for you. Allah knows, but you do not know.”

In addition to playing a role in the validation of knowledge, Nadjib believes that this verse also directs people to contemplate the Qur'an. In this regard, Nadjib writes:

*“Intellectual arrogance, the supremacy of intellectualism and intellectualism, the legitimacy of intelligence and education or scholarship or piety that is ‘instilled’ culturally, becomes a very strong barrier so that their monopoly over the Qur'an, Islam, and all values of truth can become a solid structure of power that dominates the era. That*

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27 Larasingtyas, Aini, dan Noorhidayati, “The Concept, h. 7.

28 Faen, “Metode, h. 73-75.

*is why we lean toward Tadabbur. Without rejecting Tafsir. Because within the mechanism of tadabbur, tafsir is also necessary, even though it is bound by the principles of tadabbur”.*

Nadjib’s argument is based on two verses from the Qur’an related to tadabbur: Q.S. Muhammad [47]: 24 (So do they not ponder the Qur’an, or are their hearts locked?) and Q.S. An-Nisā’ [4]: 82 (So do they not ponder the Qur’an? If it were not from Allah, they would surely find in it much contradiction).<sup>29</sup>

In Nadjib’s perspective, the Qur’an functions as a comprehensive methodology that can be applied in various disciplines—from science and leadership to practical fields such as soccer strategy.<sup>30</sup> In line with this, within his epistemological framework, Nadjib views reality as a manifestation of God’s creation and signs that must be interpreted through the methodology of the Qur’an. One application of this can be seen in his interpretation of human rights issues through the *tadabbur* approach. Through this method, Nadjib constructs a Qur’anic framework of thinking by basing his analysis on a number of verses from the Qur’an, offering a Qur’anic epistemology in understanding social reality. In conducting tadabbur of the Qur’an related to the reading of the reality of human rights, Nadjib bases his interpretation on several verses from the Qur’an, including:

**Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 26**

﴿ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَعِجِ أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَّا بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا ۚ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ ۚ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا ۖ يُضِلُّ بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا ۚ وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا الْفَاسِقِينَ ﴾

“Indeed, Allah does not shy away from making an analogy of a mosquito or something even smaller than that. As for those who believe, they know that it is the truth from their Lord. However, the disbelievers say, “What does Allah mean by this analogy?” With it, many are led astray. Through it, many are also guided by Him. Yet, none are led astray by it except the wicked.”

In Nadjib’s tadabbur approach, the verse about the mosquito analogy is not only understood literally, but also as an affirmation of the nature of Allah the Almighty and transcendence. The main emphasis lies on the recognition of sunatullah regarding hierarchy in creation—represented by the symbol of the “mosquito” as the weakest entity. This concept of hierarchy is universal, including in the structure of human society, which encompasses differences in social, economic, and intellectual status. However, according to Nadjib, the fundamental problem lies in humanity’s failure to manage this natural hierarchy fairly and wisely. He states:

“Yang kaya menyombongi yang miskin, yang pandai merendahkan yang bodoh, yang berkuasa arogan kepada yang dikuasai, yang kuat meremehkan yang lemah, yang alim merasa lebih tinggi dari yang ia klaim sebagai kurang alim. Itu semua berlangsung hampir di semua wilayah kehidupan manusia.”

In the context of human rights, Nadjib offers a theocentric perspective by emphasizing that characteristics such as greatness, pride, and arrogance are the exclusive rights of God, not

29 Emha Ainun Nadjib, “Monopoli Al-Qur’an”, *caknun.com*, (5 Juli 2023), <https://www.caknun.com/2023/monopoli-al-quran/>, diakses pada 8 Juli 2025.

30 Achmad Saifullah Syahid, “Sinai Bareng Membentangkan Cakrawala Berpikir Qur’aniyah: Catatan Sinai Bareng CNKK di Pesantren Supercamp La Raiba Hanifida, Jombang, 1 Mei 2019”, *caknun.com* (3 Mei 2019), <https://www.caknun.com/2019/sinai-bareng-membentangkan-cakrawala-berpikir-quraniyah/2/>, diakses pada 8 Juli 2025.

attributes inherent in humans. According to him, the authority to establish hierarchies, glorify, or demean an entity lies solely within the domain of divine sovereignty. When humans claim these divine rights for themselves, the result is a disorientation of social relations in the form of conflict, hostility, and mutual contempt. The root of the problem, according to Nadjib, lies in the anthropocentric attitude of humans who tend to interpret reality based on their subjective point of view, rather than referring to the divine perspective.<sup>31</sup>

**Q.S. Asy-Syu'arā' [26]: 29**

قَالَ لَئِنِ اتَّخَذْتَ إِلَهًا غَيْرِي لِأَجْعَلَنَّكَ مِنَ الْمَسْجُورِينَ

“He (Pharaoh) said, “If you worship any god other than me, I will surely put you in prison.”

Based on his reading of Q.S. Asy-Syu'ara: 29 above, Nadjib reflects his critical view of human rights in an essay entitled “Non-Fundamental Human Rights.” He argues that the conceptualization of human rights in the form of legislation represents a form of theological anthropomorphism—where humans position themselves as if they possess divine attributes as eternal *khāliq* (creators). In fact, according to Nadjib, the reality of human helplessness is evident in their inability to control the body’s metabolic processes, grow plants, or even predict events a few minutes into the future. Thus, claims to human rights actually ignore the rights of Allah as the only entity that is truly independent and sovereign.<sup>32</sup>

In Nadjib’s analysis, the narrative of human rights is reflected in the words of Pharaoh in Q.S. Asy-Syu'ara: 29, which represent radical anthropocentrism—a paradigm that places humans at the center of the universe. Pharaoh, as a human figure who claimed divinity, forced worship upon himself and imprisoned those who rejected him, becoming the prototype of modern polytheism. According to Nadjib, the essence of polytheism lies in the neglect of Allah’s rights by placing human sovereignty on par with divine prerogatives,<sup>33</sup> which exemplifies self-ignorance, feeling that one has fundamental rights. In Nadjib’s view, the behavior of 21st-century humans reflects a lack of serious recognition of God’s existence, His role, and His divine prerogative. This phenomenon is manifested in global political policies, patterns of economic exploitation, and cultural recklessness that ignore the transcendental perspective.<sup>34</sup> In conclusion, for Nadjib, the main disease of humans throughout the ages is “not knowing oneself.”<sup>35</sup>

**Q.S. Al-Fatihah [1]: 4-5**

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ۗ إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

“Owner of the Day of Reckoning. We worship only You and seek help only from You.”

Based on this epistemological foundation, Nadjib concludes that the rights inherent to humans are essentially artificial—a concept he refers to as Artificial Human Rights. Only God possesses fundamental rights, so claims about human rights are rationally unfounded (*lā burhāna bib*). This argument is reinforced by the assertion that humans are not “*Māliki Yaumiddīn*” (Owner of the Day of Judgment) at all, but rather entities that are inherently weak, limited in knowledge, and have no true authority over their own existence.<sup>36</sup>

31 Effendy dan Nadjib, *Mushaf*, h. 46-47.

32 Effendy dan Nadjib, *Mushaf*, h. 181.

33 Effendy dan Nadjib, *Mushaf*, h. 182.

34 Effendy dan Nadjib, *Mushaf*, h. 184.

35 Effendy dan Nadjib, *Mushaf*, h. 185.

36 Emha Ainun Nadjib, “HAM, Hak Artifisial Manusia”, *caknun.com* (12 Mei 2023), <https://www.caknun.com/2023/ham-hak-artifisial-manusia/>, diakses pada 16 Juli 2025.

**Q.S. Al-Wāqī'ah [56]: 59, Al-Qamar [54]: 49, Al-Muddaṣṣir [74]: 11**

ءَأَنْتُمْ تَخْلُقُونَهُ أَمْ نَحْنُ الْخَالِقُونَ

“Did you create it, or did We create it?” (Q.S. Al-Wāqī'ah [56]: 59)

إِنَّا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَاهُ بِقَدَرٍ

“Indeed, We have created everything according to measure.” (Q.S. Al-Qamar [54]: 49)

ذَرْنِي وَمَنْ خَلَقْتُ وَحِيدًا

“Let Me (act) towards the one I created in solitude.” (Q.S. Al-Muddaṣṣir [74]: 11)

These three verses affirm the concept of creation as proof of God's oneness and omnipotence. In Nadjib's perspective, these verses fundamentally negate the epistemological claims of human rights and the anthropocentric assumption that humans have full authority over their creations. According to him, modern civilization—which developed since the 14th century and reached its peak in the 20th-21st centuries—was built on two flawed paradigms: first, the belief that humans created the universe and themselves; second, the assumption that humans have human rights and therefore have the authority to regulate life based on their own desires and standards. Nadjib predicts that humans will eventually realize that what they have is only “Pseudo-Human Rights”—a fictitious construct that has no valid ontological basis.<sup>37</sup>

## Epistemological Analysis of Tadabbur Al-Qur'an by Emha Ainun Nadjib

### *The Epistemological Framework of the Qur'an*

Broadly speaking, “Al-Qur'an epistemology” can be defined as the construction of the nature of knowledge and the means of acquiring knowledge as presented in the Al-Qur'an. Following Miska Muhammad Amien's conception, this definition is approached using a subjective approach, in which the Qur'an is positioned as the subject or foundation of thought, while epistemology is the object of discussion.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the epistemological discussion here does not examine “the correct way to understand the Qur'an,” but rather “the way the Qur'an understands (reality).” For this reason, the epistemology offered by the Qur'an can be termed “Qur'anic epistemology” or “epistemology of the Qur'an”.<sup>39</sup>

Ibn Rushd was one of the important Muslim figures in the development of Qur'anic epistemology, especially through his ideas about the Qur'an's knowledge of God's existence. As a rationalist thinker, he formulated the concept of divinity logically—an approach that is even more appreciated in the West than in the Islamic world. He viewed philosophy as the highest form of religious knowledge and as a path to God, but only suitable for the intellectual elite. This view was related to his interpretation of the Qur'an: all believers must understand it literally, while philosophers are given the space to interpret it symbolically as long as they remain within the confines of doctrine. In Ibn Rushd's view, the existence of Allah, as explained in the Qur'an,

37 Emha Ainun Nadjib, “PSEU-DO-HAM”, *caknun.com* (11 Desember 2017), <https://www.caknun.com/2017/pseu-do-ham/>, diakses pada 16 Juli 2025.

38 Miska Muhammad Amien, *Epistemoogi Islam: Pengantar Filsafat Pengetahuan Islam*, (Jakarta: UI-Press, 2006), h. 11-13.

39 Alfirdaus, Rasya', Moh. Nor Ichwan, and Muhammad Yusuf Pratama. 2025. “Makna Qaṣd As-Sabīl Dalam Al-Qur'an: Analisis Semantik Toshihiko Izutsu”. *Jurnal Ilmiah Religiosity Entity Humanity (JIREH)* 7 (2), 480-98. <https://doi.org/10.37364/jireh.v7i2.458>.

cannot be known directly but only through “maujud” (existence),<sup>40</sup> existence or something that exists in nature. This is based on two arguments (principles) from the Qur’an as follows:

a) The Argument of Maintenance (*‘Ināyah*) or (*‘Ināyah al-Ilāhī*)

Nature and all of God’s creations were created to support human existence. For example, animals have functions that suit human needs, and this suitability cannot be a coincidence, but rather the result of the will of the Creator. To reinforce this argument, Ibn Rushd refers to verses from the Qur’an, such as Q.S. An-Naba’ [78]: 6–16, Q.S. Al-Furqān [25]: 61, and Q.S. ‘Abasa [80]: 24–32.<sup>41</sup>

b) The Argument of Creation (*ikhtirā’*)

That every being exists because it was created. And the one who created it is none other than Allah.<sup>42</sup> In other words, everything that can be perceived by reason and the senses is a creation, and creation necessitates a creator. Based on several verses of the Qur’an, such as Q.S. Al-Ḥajj [22]: 73, Q.S. At-Ṭāriq [86]: 6, Q.S. Al-Gāsyiyah [88]: 17, and Q.S. Al-An’ām [6]: 79, the creator of all things is God.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to the verses mentioned above, Ibn Rushd quotes other verses such as Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 21–22, Q.S. Yāsīn [36]: 33, and Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 191 to reinforce his two arguments.<sup>44</sup> For example, through Q.S. Al-Gāsyiyah [88]: 7, Ibn Rushd understood that the existence of mountains—as pegs that maintain the balance of the earth and support human life—did not occur by chance, but was the result of Allah’s will. From this phenomenon, he concluded the existence of the Creator.<sup>45</sup> Thus, in his reasoning process, Ibn Rushd relied not only on reason, but also on verses from the Qur’an, so that the Qur’an served as an epistemological framework for understanding reality.

### ***Constructing the Interpretation of Reality with Tadabbur as a Manifestation of the Epistemology of the Qur’an***

An analysis of the construction of reality through the tadabbur approach as an epistemological framework of the Qur’an will reveal the harmony between Emha Ainun Nadjib’s tadabbur model and the previous epistemological tradition of the Qur’an, as exemplified by Ibn Rushd, who developed the epistemology of the Qur’an through two theological arguments: *dalil ikhtirā’* (creation) and *dalil ināyah* (preservation), which move from empirical observation to metaphysical truth. This empirical-metaphysical approach shows a fundamental similarity to Nadjib’s epistemology of the Qur’an, which is realized through *tadabbur* of the Qur’an. The pattern of harmony is clearly seen in the way Nadjib applies Qur’anic reasoning when reading contemporary reality. Fundamentally, both figures place the Qur’an not merely as a source of law (*aṣl al-ḥukm*), but more fundamentally as an epistemological basis for thinking (*aṣl al-‘aql*).

The concept of *tadabbur Al-Qur’an* offered by Nadjib is not merely a lexical definition, but rather an epistemological construct that offers a Qur’anic framework for understanding reality. As a paradigm, *tadabbur* in Nadjib’s thinking functions as a worldview formed from active reading of

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40 Aksin Wijaya, *Teori Interpretasi Al-Qur’an Ibnu Rusyd: Kritik Ideologis-Hermenentis*, cet. 1, (Yogyakarta: LKiS Yogyakarta, 2009), h. 184.

41 Wijaya, *Teori*, h. 186.

42 Wijaya, *Teori*, h. 185.

43 Mustofa, *Tradisi*, h. 89–90.

44 Wijaya, *Teori*, h. 186.

45 Wijaya, *Teori*, h. 187.

the Qur'an. Within this framework, the Qur'an is not only positioned as a passive object of study, but also plays an active role in shaping methods of thinking, ways of viewing reality, and even constructing frameworks of knowledge. Based on an analysis of the definition and examples of its application, the fundamental elements (pillars) of Qur'anic reflection that reflect Qur'anic epistemology can be identified as follows:

- a) The subject (tool) of knowledge, namely humans. Emha Ainun Nadjib as the subject of knowledge uses tools or instruments of knowledge in the form of reason, heart, senses, and the Qur'an.
- b) The object of knowledge. In the process of reflecting on the Qur'an, Nadjib seems to utilize the Qur'an as an instrument of knowledge in reflecting on reality. Thus, the object of knowledge here is the realities of life.
- c) The process of knowing, the interaction between the subject and object of knowledge. Reflecting on the epistemology of Ibn Rushd, who uses the arguments of 'ināyah and ikhtirā' in acquiring knowledge about reality, Nadjib uses the procedure of contemplating the Qur'an in acquiring knowledge..

Thus, Nadjib's construction of the Qur'an as an epistemological framework forms a paradigm for reading reality that is sourced from revelation. This approach not only applies the teachings of the Qur'an in the dimensions of faith, jurisprudence, and morals, but more fundamentally—adopts the epistemology inherent in the Qur'an itself. The construction of reasoning in Nadjib's interpretation of the Qur'an has a fundamental difference from the conventional framework of interpretation. Although contemporary interpretation has adopted an interdisciplinary approach that engages in circular dialogue between text, reality, and reason—with the aim of capturing the spirit (*ruh*) of the Qur'an, its significance (*maqṣūd*), and social transformation—there remains an essential difference with Nadjib's model of tadabbur. The main difference lies in the epistemological object: the epistemology of contemporary interpretation places the Qur'an as the object of study, while Nadjib's tadabbur makes the Qur'an and reality as equal epistemological objects in a dialectical relationship. The Qur'an is not confined to its position as an object of knowledge, but also as an instrument of knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Emha Ainun Nadjib conceptualizes *tadabbur al-Qur'an* as an open, participatory, and transformative epistemic process that unites intellect, spirituality, and social awareness. Unlike classical interpretations that tend to be hierarchical and scholarly-centric, Nadjib's *tadabbur* enables every individual to engage in a dialogical relationship with the Qur'an and reality. Through this model, the Qur'an functions not only as an object of reflection but also as an epistemological subject that guides the formation of meaning. This approach constructs a living hermeneutic where revelation interacts dynamically with experience, reason, and intuition.

This research contributes theoretically to the discourse on Qur'anic epistemology by framing *tadabbur* as a praxis that integrates the *bayānī*, *burhānī*, and *'irfānī* traditions into a unified model of knowing. It highlights that Nadjib's epistemology transcends textual exegesis by operationalizing revelation as an active instrument of knowledge production. Practically, this perspective democratizes Qur'anic understanding, allowing ordinary believers to internalize divine guidance through moral improvement and communal dialogue, as exemplified in the

Maiyah gatherings. Therefore, Nadjib's *tadabbur* offers a paradigm for reading reality through a Qur'anic lens that is both critical and transformative.

Future research may focus on comparing Nadjib's Qur'anic epistemology with other contemporary Muslim thinkers, such as M. Amin Abdullah or Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, to examine points of convergence and divergence in their integrative hermeneutics. Such a comparative study would deepen the understanding of how modern Muslim intellectuals reinterpret revelation in response to social and epistemological challenges. It could also reveal the potential of *tadabbur* as a bridge between classical Islamic epistemology and modern human sciences, thereby enriching interdisciplinary approaches to Qur'anic studies in the 21st century.

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