

# Al-Jabiri's Epistemological Critique of Kufr in Tafsir Al-Misbah: Implications for Transforming Islamic Contemporary

Dasim<sup>1</sup>, Mohammad Syifa Amin Widigdo<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia; [dasim20771@gmail.com](mailto:dasim20771@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia; [syifamin@umy.ac.id](mailto:syifamin@umy.ac.id)

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## Abstract

This study uses Mohammed Abed Al-Jabiri's framework of Arab reason critique to critically analyze the epistemological construction of kufr (disbelief) in M. Quraish Shihab's *Tafsir Al-Misbah*. This study examines the hermeneutical techniques and epistemological justifications that underlie Shihab's interpretation of kufr-related verses using a qualitative library research methodology. The results show that Shihab's interpretation dialectically shifts toward Burhani epistemology, which is marked by logical and moral reasoning, even if it is based on Bayani epistemology, which is focused on textual authority and linguistic analysis. His inclusive, contextual interpretation that combines social plurality with religious purity is one way that this metamorphosis is demonstrated. By illustrating the potential epistemological growth within Islamic reasoning, the research theoretically advances Qur'anic hermeneutics. Practically, it advances Islamic by suggesting curriculum reform based on epistemological plurality. The study highlights how tolerance, pluralism, and religious moderation are encouraged in contemporary Islamic when kufr is understood within an open, critical, and contextual framework. In order to create inclusive and transformational pedagogical models in Muslim institutions, it is imperative that Bayani and Burhani epistemologies be integrated.

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## Kata kunci:

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## Abstrak

Penelitian ini menggunakan kerangka kritik nalar Arab Mohammed Abed Al-Jabiri untuk menganalisis secara kritis konstruksi epistemologis kufur (ketidakpercayaan) dalam *Tafsir Al-Misbah* karya M. Quraish Shihab. Penelitian ini mengkaji teknik hermeneutika dan justifikasi epistemologis yang mendasari penafsiran Shihab terhadap ayat-ayat terkait kufur dengan menggunakan metodologi penelitian kepustakaan kualitatif. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa penafsiran Shihab secara dialektis bergeser ke arah epistemologi Burhani, yang ditandai oleh penalaran logis dan moral, meskipun didasarkan pada epistemologi Bayani, yang berfokus pada otoritas tekstual dan analisis linguistik. Penafsirannya yang inklusif dan kontekstual yang menggabungkan pluralitas sosial dengan kemurnian agama adalah salah satu cara metamorfosis ini ditunjukkan. Dengan menggambarkan potensi pertumbuhan epistemologis dalam penalaran Islam, penelitian ini secara teoretis memajukan hermeneutika Al-Qur'an. Secara praktis, penelitian ini memajukan pemikiran Islam dengan menyarankan reformasi berdasarkan pluralitas epistemologis. Studi ini menyoroti bagaimana toleransi, pluralisme, dan moderasi beragama didorong dalam Islam kontemporer ketika kufur dipahami dalam kerangka yang terbuka, kritis, dan kontekstual. Untuk menciptakan model pedagogi yang inklusif dan transformatif di lembaga Muslim, integrasi epistemologi Bayani dan Burhani menjadi sangat penting.

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Corresponding Author:

Dasim

Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia; [dasim20771@gmail.com](mailto:dasim20771@gmail.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

The discussion of *kufr* (disbelief) in Islamic tradition constitutes a complicated theological theme with considerable societal ramifications throughout the history of Islamic culture (Tayeb, 2018; Jubaidi & Khoirunnisa, 2023). This idea pertains not only to theological and doctrinal aspects but also has tangible implications for the dynamics between Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as for the formation of the religious identity of the Muslim ummah (Fouz Mohamed Zacky & Moniruzzaman, 2024). In the modern environment, comprehending *kufr* is increasingly vital due to the dynamics of a global society marked by religious heterogeneity, intercultural communication, and the pressing necessity for fostering religious tolerance (Yusuf et al., 2025) (Mala et al., 2024). Nonetheless, interpretations of the concept of *kufr* frequently become ensnared in literalist and ahistorical analyses that seek to foster religious exclusivism and may even incite religious radicalism (Habibulloh, 2024). Tafsir Al-Misbah by M. Quraish Shihab is a significant modern Indonesian Quranic commentary frequently cited in the Islamic discourse of the Nusantara (Kurniawan, 2020).

Quraish Shihab, an exegete with a background in tafsir from Al-Azhar University in Cairo and many Western institutions, offers a hermeneutical approach that seeks to reconcile classical heritage with contemporary requirements. In his interpretation of scriptures concerning *kufr*, Shihab exhibits interpretive subtleties that are more inclusive than the rigid traditional comments. To thoroughly comprehend the epistemology underpinning the development of such interpretations, a critical analytical framework is necessary to dismantle the reasoning structure inherent in the tafsir text. The significance of Mohammed Abed Al-Jabiri's critique of Arab reason (*naqd al-'aql al-'arabi*) emerges as an indispensable analytical tool.

Al-Jabiri, a modern Moroccan philosopher, conceived an extensive intellectual endeavor in his significant four-volume critique of Arab reason: *Takwin al-'Aql al-'Arabi* (The Formation of Arab Reason), *Bunyat al-'Aql al-'Arabi* (The Structure of Arab Reason), *al-'Aql al-Siyasi al-'Arabi* (Arab Political Reason), and *al-'Aql al-Akhlaki al-'Arabi* (Arab Ethical Reason) (Iftikhar & Rabia, 2024). In his critical endeavor, Al-Jabiri delineates three predominant epistemological systems within the Arab-Islamic intellectual tradition: Bayani epistemology (demonstrative-linguistic), 'Irfani epistemology (gnostic-mystical), and Burhani epistemology (rational-philosophical). He asserts that the prevalence of Bayani epistemology, characterized by its literalist and textual approach, has led to intellectual stagnation in Islamic thought, as Bayani reasoning is overly focused on textual authority and disregards the historical and contextual aspects of religious interpretation (Zohdi, 2017a) (Tamami et al., 2024).

Al-Jabiri's critique of Arab reason transcends methodological criticism; it embodies an endeavor for epistemological emancipation, seeking to reconstruct Muslim thought to be more rational, critical, and attuned to modern circumstances (Munandar & Amin, 2023). Applying Al-Jabiri's epistemological framework to the analysis of Tafsir Al-Misbah, especially regarding the concept of *kufr*, raises essential epistemological inquiries: What is the function of reasoning in Quraish Shihab's interpretation of verses pertaining to *kufr*? Is the interpretation still confined to the supremacy of literalist Bayani reasoning, or has it transitioned towards a more reasonable and contextual Burhani reasoning? In what manner is the interplay between textual authority (*nas*), historical context (*asbab al-nuzul*), and contemporary reality navigated in the interpretive process? The significance of these concerns lies in their potential to ascertain if modern tafsir can yield a progressive and inclusive interpretation of Islam that addresses contemporary requirements, or merely repackages traditional dogma.

The epistemological examination of the idea of *kufr* in *Tafsir Al-Misbah* holds considerable significance for the evolution of modern Islamic (Muawwanah, 2024a). Islamic in numerous Muslim nations, including Indonesia, continues to encounter significant obstacles in imparting religious tolerance and pluralism (Dalimunthe et al., 2025) (Razzaq, 2023). Islamic religious curriculum frequently prioritize doctrinal and ritual elements in isolation, perceiving communication with other religious traditions as a potential danger to the integrity of *aqidah* (Petersen & Ackfeldt, 2022). A stringent interpretation of *kufr* within an *al* framework might engender a binary mindset between "us" (Muslims) and "them" (*kafir*), so obstructing the development of students' character traits such as tolerance, empathy, and the ability to coexist in a diverse community. Consequently, the epistemological reconstruction of the concept of *kufr* is crucial not only for theological and philosophical debate but also holds practical significance in the reform of Islamic *al* pedagogy (Aijaz, 2024) (Muawwanah, 2024b). In Indonesia, the imperative for the change of Islamic is more pressing, given that it possesses the largest Muslim population globally, alongside significant ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity (Muawwanah, 2024b). *Pancasila*, as the foundational principle of the state, enjoins the tenet of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), which recognizes and honors plurality.

The investigation of the epistemology of *tafsir* and its ramifications for Islamic is not a novel endeavor. A number of scholars have analyzed modern *tafsir* methodology, especially Quraish Shihab's contributions, from diverse viewpoints. Nevertheless, research employing Al-Jabiri's epistemological framework to examine the concept of *kufr* in *Tafsir Al-Misbah* and its relation to the evolution of current Islamic is notably scarce. Most studies on *Tafsir Al-Misbah* are predominantly descriptive-apologetic, elucidating Shihab's perspectives without engaging in thorough epistemological analysis. Simultaneously, Al-Jabiri's philosophy, despite being translated and examined in Indonesia, has not been methodically utilized as an analytical framework for Indonesian Islamic intellectual outputs. This research seeks to address that gap by giving a critical-epistemological approach that can enhance modern *tafsir* discourse and contribute theoretically and practically to the advancement of Islamic. The importance of this research can be observed from multiple perspectives: first, from the theoretical-epistemological dimension, this research will enrich Quranic hermeneutical studies by applying Al-Jabiri's critique of Arab reason framework that has been more widely used to analyze Islamic philosophy and political thought; second, from the methodological dimension, this research will demonstrate how epistemological analysis can be used as an instrument to deconstruct basic assumptions operating in a *tafsir* text, thereby revealing layers of meaning not apparent in surface reading; third, from the practical-pedagogical dimension, the research findings are expected to provide valuable input for developing curricula and teaching methods in Islamic that are more inclusive, critical, and contextual; fourth, from the socio-religious dimension, this research contributes to efforts at deradicalization of religious understanding and strengthening religious moderation that is currently an important agenda of the government and Islamic organizations in Indonesia.

This paper is written to address that gap. Its specific purpose is to **complete the shortcomings of existing research** by conducting a critical epistemological analysis of the concept of *kufr* in *Tafsir Al-Misbah* using Al-Jabiri's framework of Arab reason. Unlike earlier studies that focus on normative conclusions or thematic content, this research concentrates on the *structure of reasoning* that informs Shihab's interpretation. By doing so, the paper positions itself not merely as another study of *kufr* or *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, but

as an epistemological inquiry that explains why and how Shihab's interpretation produces inclusive and contextual outcomes, and how this differs from more rigid traditional approaches.

The main argument tested in this study is that although Quraish Shihab's interpretation of *kufr* is grounded in Bayani epistemology—characterized by textual authority and linguistic analysis—it undergoes a dialectical transformation toward Burhani epistemology, which emphasizes rational, ethical, and contextual reasoning. This paper seeks to demonstrate that Shihab does not abandon textual authority; rather, he reinterprets it through critical reasoning that allows the concept of *kufr* to function constructively within a pluralistic society. The hypothesis advanced is that this epistemological shift enables *Tafsir Al-Misbah* to maintain theological commitment while simultaneously promoting tolerance and religious moderation.

By situating this research within prior tafsir studies, Islamic epistemology, and contemporary Islamic education discourse, this paper clearly establishes its scholarly position. It contributes theoretically by extending Al-Jabiri's epistemological critique into Qur'anic hermeneutics, methodologically by applying epistemological analysis to tafsir literature, and practically by offering insights relevant to the transformation of Islamic education. In this way, the study responds to both academic gaps and pressing socio-religious challenges, demonstrating the relevance of epistemological inquiry for understanding and reforming contemporary Islamic thought.

## METHOD

This research utilizes a qualitative methodology, specifically library research, to thoroughly comprehend and analyze the epistemological framework influencing the interpretation of the concept of *kufr* in Tafsir Al-Misbah, as critiqued through Al-Jabiri's analysis of Arab reason. The qualitative approach enables researchers to investigate meanings, interpretations, and understandings within texts without the constraints of numerical measurements or statistics, whereas library research depends on bibliographic sources as primary and secondary data, which are subsequently analyzed critically and comprehensively to address research questions (Salvatore, 2007a) (Fourie, 2012).

This research utilizes two types of data sources: primary data consisting of Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an by M. Quraish Shihab, specifically volumes containing interpretations of verses related to the concept of *kufr* including key verses such as and other relevant verses, as well as Al-Jabiri's major works on epistemology and critique of Arab reason, particularly the trilogy Naqd al-'Aql al-'Arabi comprising Takwin al-'Aql al-'Arabi (The Formation of Arab Reason), Bunyat al-'Aql al-'Arabi (The Structure of Arab Reason), and al-'Aql al-Siyasi al-'Arabi (Arab Political Reason); and secondary data including other works by M. Quraish Shihab discussing tafsir methodology such as Membumikan Al-Qur'an, Wawasan Al-Qur'an, and Kaidah Tafsir, classical and contemporary tafsir works including Tafsir al-Tabari, Tafsir al-Qurthubi, Tafsir Ibn Katsir, and Tafsir al-Manar for comparative analysis, literature on Islamic epistemology and Quranic hermeneutics by scholars such as Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Hassan Hanafi, Muhammad Arkoun, Abdullah Saeed, and Khaled Abou El Fadl, literature on Islamic, religious pluralism, religious tolerance, and transformation of contemporary Islamic, as well as scientific journal articles, dissertations, and theses relevant to the research theme.

Data collection techniques are conducted through documentation methods involving systematic collection, identification, and categorization of written data

relevant to the research focus through several stages: identification and inventory of sources through comprehensive literature searches in university library catalogs, national libraries, and online journal databases such as JSTOR, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, and Google Scholar.

Data analysis utilizes content analysis techniques alongside hermeneutic-critical methodologies and epistemological examination carried out through multiple interconnected and iterative phases: descriptive analysis systematically delineating the interpretation of the concept of kufr in Tafsir Al-Misbah by identifying interpreted verses, employed interpretative methods, referenced authoritative sources, formulated arguments, and conclusions reached by Quraish Shihab, while concurrently elucidating Al-Jabiri's epistemological framework, particularly the attributes of Bayani, 'Irfani, and Burhani epistemologies. A comparative investigation of the interpretation of the idea of kufr in Tafsir Al-Misbah alongside interpretations in other classical and modern tafsir works to discern the originality, continuity, and discontinuity in Quraish Shihab's hermeneutical approach.

Epistemological analysis as the core stage applying Al-Jabiri's critique of Arab reason framework to dissect the epistemological structure operating in the interpretation of the concept of kufr by identifying indicators of Bayani, 'Irfani, and Burhani epistemologies in the tafsir text such as ways of using textual authority (nas), the role of reason ('aql) in interpretation, use of analogy (qiyas), orientation toward tradition versus innovation, attitude toward historical context, and ways of handling ambiguity or contradiction in texts; critical-deconstructive analysis conducting critical reading to identify inconsistencies, ambiguities, or internal tensions in argumentation, revealing ideological or contextual biases that may influence interpretation, and evaluating methodological strengths and weaknesses; synthesis and interpretation integrating findings from previous analytical stages to construct comprehensive understanding of the epistemology of the concept of kufr in Tafsir Al-Misbah and its implications.

Data authenticity is guaranteed by various verification methods suitable for the characteristics of qualitative research: Credibility is upheld through continuous observation via extensive and thorough examination of primary data sources, source triangulation employing diverse primary and secondary data sources, peer debriefing through discussions of research methodologies and findings with colleagues or experts in tafsir, Islamic epistemology, and Islamic , and member checking by validating interpretations of Quraish Shihab's works against other writings by the same author. Transferability is upheld by offering a comprehensive description of the research context, analytical procedures, and findings, allowing readers to evaluate the applicability of the results to other settings.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### The Construction of the Concept of Kufr in Tafsir Al-Misbah

The examination of Tafsir Al-Misbah indicates that M. Quraish Shihab develops the concept of kufr using a sophisticated and multifaceted hermeneutical method. Shihab commences his interpretation of passages about kufr with a comprehensive linguistic and etymological analysis of the term kafara and its derivatives in Arabic (Qosim & Amin, 2025a) (Alatas, 2005). Shihab elucidates that etymologically, the term kafara originates from a root signifying "to cover" or "to conceal," thus defining kafir as "one who obscures the truth." This linguistic perspective illustrates Shihab's significant focus on the linguistic aspect of the Quranic text as the foundation for interpretation. In

the interpretation of QS. In Al-Baqarah verses 6-7, Shihab elucidates the literal interpretation of kufr while also examining its diverse semantic nuances within the context of the verse and the Quran overall. He differentiates between kufr as an active repudiation of truth that is unequivocally recognized, and disbelief arising from ignorance or intellectual uncertainty (Abou El Fadl, 2014).

This distinction is significant as it reflects Shihab's awareness of the psychological and epistemological intricacies of the phenomena of disbelief. Shihab cites the perspectives of classical scholars, including al-Tabari, al-Qurthubi, al-Razi, and Ibn Kathir, to illustrate the interpretative diversity within the Islamic tafsir tradition; however, he transcends mere description and compilation by engaging in critical analysis and contextualization.

A notable feature of Shihab's interpretation is his endeavor to contextualize the notion of kufr within modern realities. Regarding QS. In Al-Kafirun, Shihab does not understand this surah as a justification for animosity or discrimination against non-Muslims; rather, he views it as an assertion of spiritual identity that allows for tolerance and discourse. He underscores that variations in belief are a recognized and respected fact within Islam, advocating for the stance of "lakum dinukum waliya din" (to you your religion and to me my religion), which signifies an acknowledgment of religious plurality without endorsing theological relativism. In analyzing verses regarding the punishment of disbelievers, as seen in QS. In verses 4 and 10 of Ali Imran, Shihab differentiates between kufr as a theological-eschatological concept with repercussions in the afterlife, and the socio-political interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims, which should adhere to principles of justice, humanity, and mutual welfare. This differentiation between theology and socio-political aspects illustrates Shihab's endeavor to prevent the direct and mechanical imposition of theological classifications on social interactions, which frequently leads to exclusivism and intolerance.

Al-Jabiri's framework delineates Bayani epistemology as an epistemological system founded on three principles: the principle of authority (sulthah), which legitimizes knowledge through reference to textual authority or authoritative figures; the principle of discontinuity (inqitha'), which perceives knowledge as heritage that must be preserved in its unadulterated form from deviant innovation; and the principle of conformity (mujanesah), which asserts that reality must be aligned with text, rather than the reverse. Shihab's approach to the idea of kufr exemplifies these three concepts, wherein the definition and criterion of kufr are established based on Quranic and Hadith sources, together with authoritative academic interpretation.

Conversely, by extending the concept of kufr to modern situations, Shihab ironically exhibits a propensity for open-mindedness that surpasses the confines of Bayani epistemology. Shihab's assertion that Islam cherishes religious plurality, advocates for tolerance of differing beliefs, and mandates equitable and humane interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims serves to dismantle the traditional, exclusive, and inflexible interpretation of kufr. Shihab contends that while the Quran theologically differentiates between mu'min and kafir, this distinction should not serve as a foundation for discrimination, animosity, or violence in everyday interactions. He cites Quranic passages that mandate fairness for all individuals, irrespective of their beliefs, such as QS. Al-Ma'idah verse 8 asserts, "and let not the hatred of a people prevent you from being just." Shihab's reasoning illustrates that he transcends a mere textual-doctrinal interpretation of kufr, incorporating the historical context of revelation, maqasid al-shari'ah (objectives of Islamic law), and the contemporary social reality marked by plurality and global interdependence.

This epistemological conflict is elucidated when Shihab addresses contentious topics, such as the theological status of the People of the Book (Jews and Christians), the standing of individuals who have not encountered Islamic doctrines, and the criterion for *kufr* within the framework of religious pluralism. Regarding QS. In Al-Baqarah verse 62, it is stated that believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabians who have faith in Allah and the Last Day, and engage in virtuous actions, will be rewarded by their Lord. Shihab presents a comparatively inclusive interpretation, highlighting that salvation in the afterlife is not exclusively contingent upon formal adherence to a specific religion, but rather on genuine faith in God and the performance of righteous deeds. While Shihab maintains that Islam is the ultimate religion, he refrains from adopting an exclusive stance that asserts all non-Muslims will inevitably enter hell, without regard for their epistemic and existential circumstances. This perspective illustrates Shihab's endeavor to reconcile theological adherence to Islamic truth with an acknowledgment of the intricacies of human religious experience. In Al-Jabiri's worldview, this bridging endeavor is perceived as a shift from a closed Bayani epistemology to a more open and logical Burhani epistemology.

The construction of the concept of *kufr* in Tafsir Al-Misbah is noteworthy because, despite its epistemological foundation being Bayani—marked by a focus on textual authority, tradition, and linguistic literalism—the resulting hermeneutical implications foster a Burhani approach that is more open, critical, and contextual. This phenomenon can be elucidated through Al-Jabiri's epistemological examination of the potential for internal alteration inside epistemological frameworks. Al-Jabiri posits that Bayani epistemology can evolve into Burhani when the concept of literary authority is interpreted not literally and mechanically, but rather via rational analysis and contextual understanding. In Shihab's case, while he commences with Bayani premises—specifically acknowledging Quranic and Hadith texts as ultimate authority—his interpretative process incorporates critical reasoning, historical contextualization, and an assessment of social-ethical ramifications, which are emblematic of Burhani epistemology. This transformation arises from Shihab's application of the concept of *kufr* in a non-dogmatic manner, which refrains from categorically designating all non-Muslims as adversaries to be opposed or marginalized. Instead, it facilitates rational and ethical discourse regarding the appropriate Muslim engagement with religious diversity in modern contexts.

**Epistemological Examination: Transitioning from Closed Bayani to Open Burhani**  
Shihab's interpretation of *kufr* reveals an epistemological framework that transitions from closed Bayani reasoning to open Burhani reasoning. This dialectical movement does not entirely forsake Bayani epistemology; instead, it represents an internal shift wherein Bayani principles are reinterpreted and augmented through Burhani reason. To comprehend this shift, it is essential to analyze the attributes of Bayani and Burhani epistemologies within Al-Jabiri's framework and their respective functions in Tafsir Al-Misbah. According to Al-Jabiri, Bayani epistemology is an epistemological framework that emerged within Arab-Islamic civilization, particularly through the disciplines of linguistic sciences (*'ulum al-lughah*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and theology (*kalam*). This epistemology is characterized by the generation of knowledge through the linguistic examination of authoritative texts, specifically the Quran and Hadith. In the Bayani system, language serves not only as a means of communication but also as the fundamental medium for comprehending reality and constructing knowledge. Consequently, interpretation (*ta'wil*) and explanation (*tafsir*) of texts emerge as fundamental methodologies in the generation of knowledge.

The Bayani system presupposes that all requisite information for humanity resides within authoritative texts, and scholars are tasked with extracting (*istinbath*) and elucidating that knowledge by linguistic analysis and logical reasoning grounded in textual premises.

Shihab's interpretation of *kufr* distinctly reveals Bayani elements in multiple facets. Initially, Shihab consistently commences interpretation with a linguistic and etymological investigation of pivotal terms in the passages being interpreted. Shihab elucidates the term *kafara* by examining its diverse connotations in Arabic, analyzing its use in different Quranic settings, and identifying semantic patterns that enhance comprehension of the notion. This linguistic methodology is characteristic of Bayani epistemology, which perceives language as essential for deciphering textual meaning. Secondly, Shihab extensively cites the views of ancient scholars and prior tafsir traditions as authoritative sources. In nearly every interpretation, Shihab references perspectives from al-Tabari, al-Qurthubi, al-Razi, Ibn Kathir, and other prominent exegetes, illustrating acknowledgment of scholarly authority (*sulthah*) as a source of epistemic validity. This aligns with the Bayani idea that knowledge is authenticated via transmission chains and citations of acknowledged authoritative individuals. Third, Shihab employs Prophetic hadiths as elucidatory instruments (*bayan*) for Quranic passages, illustrating the Bayani perspective that the Sunnah serves to clarify and elaborate on general or unclear Quranic texts.

Nonetheless, despite these pronounced Bayani traits, Shihab's interpretation also reveals substantial Burhani components that signify epistemological receptivity. Burhani epistemology, within Al-Jabiri's framework, constitutes an epistemological system rooted in Aristotelian logic and Greek philosophy, which permeated Islamic civilization via translation movements and was further advanced by Muslim philosophers including al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and notably Ibn Rushd (Averroes). The primary feature of Burhani epistemology is that knowledge is generated through demonstration (*burhan*), which entails logical argument founded on rational premises that are self-evident or empirically verifiable. In the Burhani system, reason (*'aql*) possesses autonomy in discerning truth, necessitating that texts be read rationally rather than literally when literal interpretations conflict with logical conclusions. Burhani epistemology underscores causality, natural laws, and the differentiation between necessary truths (which are immutable) and contingent truths (which are mutable). This epistemology is more receptive to change, innovation, and critique as it does not confer absolute authority to tradition, but rather to reasonable demonstration. Shihab's understanding of *kufr* reveals Burhani aspects through his rational and ethical contextualization of the notion.

Initially, Shihab utilizes causal reasoning (*ta'lil*) to comprehend divine commands and prohibitions, not simply accepting them as capricious divine will, but rather exploring the rationale (*hikmah*) underlying them. For example, while analyzing verses about retribution for nonbelievers, Shihab does not depict them as capricious divine edicts but elucidates them within the context of divine justice, where punishment corresponds to the deliberate repudiation of truth. This causal methodology is emblematic of Burhani thought, which endeavors to provide rational elucidations for phenomena. Secondly, Shihab differentiates between universal principles and specific applications, illustrating the Burhani capacity to derive general principles from particular instances.

The transition from closed Bayani to open Burhani in Shihab's understanding can be perceived as a dialectical process wherein Bayani premises – specifically the belief in the idea of *kufr* as delineated in Quranic and Hadith texts – produce Burhani outcomes through rational and ethical reasoning. This dialectic arises as Shihab not only affirms the existence and theological significance of the concept of *kufr* but also probes its implications for Muslim existence in a pluralistic society. What is the appropriate treatment of non-Muslims by Muslims in light of this theological classification? Is it permissible to discriminate, antagonize, or perpetrate violence against anyone designated as *kafir*? These inquiries necessitate reasoning that surpasses simple textual reference and requires rational-ethical considerations inherent to Burhani epistemology. In addressing these inquiries, Shihab concludes that while theologically upholding the distinction between *mu'min* and *kafir*, Muslims are practically obligated to treat all individuals with fairness, respect, and humanity, irrespective of their religious affiliations. This conclusion is Burhani in nature as it is derived from ethical reasoning and the contemplation of universal ideals, rather than solely from literary references.

This phenomena substantiates Al-Jabiri's claim that Bayani epistemology is not inherently closed and static but can evolve into Burhani when textual principles are interpreted through critical and contextual reasoning. In Shihab's case, adherence to textual authority (Bayani) does not impede but rather fosters the cultivation of open-mindedness (Burhani), as Shihab recognizes that genuine fidelity to texts entails not mere literal replication but the comprehension and application of the textual essence in pertinent ways to evolving contexts.

#### **Consequences for Modern Islamic**

The epistemological examination of the idea of *kufr* in Tafsir Al-Misbah possesses substantial and multifaceted consequences for the evolution of modern Islamic. Islamic , encompassing both formal and informal modalities, is crucial in influencing Muslims' comprehension of their faith and their perspectives on religious diversity. The instruction of the idea of *kufr* at Islamic al institutions will directly shape students' views on non-Muslims, tolerance, pluralism, and interfaith relations. Should the notion of *kufr* be imparted in a restrictive, literalist, and exclusivist fashion – typical of inflexible Bayani epistemology – Islamic will yield graduates with a binary mindset, categorizing the world into "us" (Muslims) and "them" (*kafir*), which may incite intolerance, discrimination, and potentially religious violence.

If the concept of *kufr* is conveyed through an open, critical, and contextual epistemological framework, as illustrated in Shihab's interpretation in Tafsir Al-Misbah, Islamic can cultivate graduates with robust religious commitment, inclusive attitudes towards diversity, dialogical skills with other traditions, and the ability to contribute to the establishment of peaceful and equitable pluralistic societies. A primary result is the necessity for epistemological reform in the design of Islamic curricula, especially with the instruction of delicate theological concepts like as *kufr*. Presently, numerous Islamic curricula in madrasahs, pesantrens, and public school religious continue to employ a doctrinal-apologetic approach that prioritizes rote memorization of definitions, verses, and hadiths concerning *kufr*, lacking sufficient critical comprehension of historical contexts, hermeneutical processes, and the ethical-social ramifications of the concept.

This task is challenging as it necessitates reconciling potentially conflicting elements: specificity and generality, identity and receptiveness, conviction and tolerance. The epistemological examination of Tafsir Al-Misbah reveals that such equilibrium is achievable through epistemological methodologies that are both Bayani

and Burhani—upholding textual authority while allowing for rational and ethical deliberation. Character formation in al practice can be achieved through diverse strategies: presenting concrete examples of the Prophet Muhammad and his virtuous companions treating non-Muslims with justice and compassion despite theological disparities; examining Islamic history that illustrates Muslim coexistence with other religious communities; facilitating interfaith dialogue that allows students to engage directly with individuals of different faiths; and creating service-learning projects that promote collaboration among students from various religious backgrounds in tackling shared social issues. Experiential approaches enable students to comprehend cognitively that Islam advocates tolerance, while also fostering emotional resonance and the practical application of tolerant behaviors in everyday life.

The fifth implication is to the incorporation of epistemological viewpoints into the assessment and evaluation processes within Islamic. Contemporary assessment frameworks in Islamic predominantly emphasize objective examinations that gauge rote memory of religious knowledge, failing to sufficiently evaluate students' critical thinking, ethical reasoning, or inclusive perspectives. To move Islamic towards a more open and critical Burhani epistemology, evaluation mechanisms must also be modified to assess higher-order competencies. For example, rather than simply requesting students to define kufr or cite verses pertaining to it, assessments should measure students' competencies to: analyze diverse interpretations of the concept of kufr and their ramifications; assess arguments for and against exclusive versus inclusive interpretations; formulate their own interpretations with sufficient rationale; ethically apply the concept of kufr in hypothetical or real-life scenarios involving interreligious relations; and contemplate how their comprehension of kufr shapes their attitudes toward individuals of different faiths. Such evaluations necessitate more sophisticated assessment methods, such as essays, projects, portfolios, or performance assessments, rather than solely relying on multiple-choice examinations. Despite requiring greater time and resources, such exams yield more precise insights into students' epistemic and ethical development, along with significant input for enhancing learning.

## Discussion

The Dialectical Transition from Bayani to Burhani: Theoretical and Practical Implications The dialectical transition from the closed Bayani epistemology (Madanat, 2023), to the open Burhani epistemology in Shihab's interpretation of kufr in Tafsir Al-Misbah offers substantial theoretical and practical implications for comprehending the dynamics of contemporary Islamic thought and its applications in Islamic . This dialectical dynamic corresponds with Al-Jabiri's principal argument in his critique of Arab reason, asserting that an epistemological shift within the Islamic intellectual heritage is both feasible and essential for current renewal (Ahmad & Islam, 2024) (Wahyuningsih, 2025). Al-Jabiri delineates three principal epistemological frameworks that have influenced Arab-Islamic thought: Bayani (demonstrative-linguistic), 'Irfani (gnostic-mystical), and Burhani (rational-philosophical), with Bayani prevailing in traditional Islamic sciences, including tafsir (Akbar, 2021). Al-Jabiri asserts that the preeminence of Bayani epistemology has led to "epistemological closure," marked by an overdependence on textual authority, linguistic analysis, and traditional precedent, undermining rational critique and contextual adaptation (Kermani, 2004).

The case of Tafsir Al-Misbah illustrates that this closure is not definitive and that the Bayani methodology, when applied reflexively and critically, can facilitate avenues toward Burhani rationality. This dialectical perspective aligns with the endeavors of

other contemporary Islamic scholars who have examined the interplay between tradition and reason in Islamic hermeneutics. In his pivotal work on the concept of text within Islamic thought, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd contends that the Quran must be comprehended through its historical and linguistic contexts, asserting that interpretation is invariably influenced by the interpreter's framework of understanding, encompassing their epistemological presuppositions and socio-historical positioning (Abdul-Jabbar, 2025). Abu Zayd's interpretative methodology, shaped by Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, underscores the dialogic essence of interpretation, wherein the text and the interpreter interact to generate meaning that is neither wholly dictated by the text nor entirely subjective to the interpreter (Belhachmi, 2008) (Zohdi, 2017b).

The dialectical shift from Bayani to Burhani is further theoretically supported by Khaled Abou El Fadl's work on interpretive communities and authority in Islamic law. Abou El Fadl contends that the Islamic legal and theological tradition has consistently exhibited a tension between authoritarianism – characterized by centralized authority in texts or institutions that require uncritical compliance – and authoritativeness – where authority is derived from compelling reasoning, ethical integrity, and attentiveness to the community's well-being (Pratama et al., 2025). He asserts that genuine Islamic tradition is defined not by strict adherence but by "conscientious pause," a reflective process wherein interpreters meticulously evaluate diverse perspectives, recognize ambiguities, and assume moral accountability for their interpretations (Ramadhan, 2025). The notion of conscientious pause is apparent in Shihab's interpretation of *kufr*: instead of rigidly adhering to exclusivist interpretations from certain classical sources, Shihab reflects on the ethical ramifications, historical contexts, and modern realities, ultimately achieving interpretations that reconcile theological distinctiveness with ethical inclusivity. This interpretive methodology embodies what Abou El Fadl designates as "moderate" Islam – not in the context of diminishing religious convictions, but rather in the sense of a balanced, measured, and ethically responsible interpretation that eschews the extremes of rigid literalism and unrestrained relativism (Tabur, 2023). Moreover, the dialectical transition from Bayani to Burhani in the interpretation of *kufr* carries substantial implications for theories of Islamic reform and modernization (Muawwanah, 2024c). Classical modernization theory, when applied to Islamic contexts, frequently posited that modernization necessitated the complete embrace of Western logic and secularization, suggesting a fundamental contradiction between Islamic tradition and contemporary ideals (Khoa et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, more sophisticated conceptions of "multiple modernities" acknowledge that distinct civilizations may forge their own trajectories toward modernity that remain aligned with their traditions rather than diverging from them (Waldman, 1968). The *Tafsir Al-Misbah* exemplifies the multiple modernities perspective: Shihab attains interpretive results consistent with contemporary ethical principles of tolerance, pluralism, and human rights not by forsaking Islamic tradition, but by engaging with and utilizing its inherent methodological resources. This exemplifies what Armando Salvatore terms "reflexive tradition," wherein tradition is not merely inherited but actively reinterpreted through critical interaction with both ancient texts and modern challenges (Khoa et al., 2023). This reflexive tradition facilitates what Talal Asad refers to as the establishment of a "discursive tradition" in Islam, wherein the tradition is perpetually replicated and altered through constant dialogues among Muslims regarding the practice of their faith in evolving contexts (Paul, 2018).

The dialectical transition from Bayani to Burhani exemplifies this discursive tradition: classical Bayani methodologies are not dismissed but recontextualized and transformed through Burhani critical reflection, yielding interpretations that are both traditional and contemporary, particular and universal, committed and open (M. H. Syafii, Purnomo, et al., 2025; Suryo & Syafi'i, 2024). The practical implications of this dialectical transition for Islamic are significant and complex. al theorists have long acknowledged that learning encompasses not only the transfer of information but also the modification of thinking, a concept termed "transformative learning" by Jack Mezirow (Mustaqim, 2017).

Furthermore, the dialectical approach to epistemology influences the cultivation of what William Perry refers to as "intellectual and ethical development" in students (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Perry's framework delineates the evolution of students' cognitive development from dualistic thinking, characterized by the perception of knowledge as absolute and authorities as infallible, through multiplicity, where various perspectives are acknowledged as equally valid, to relativism, which posits that all knowledge is context-dependent, culminating in commitment within relativism, where students make informed commitments while acknowledging contextuality and uncertainty. The dialectical transition from Bayani to Burhani can enhance this developmental trajectory: Bayani methodology initially grounds students in authoritative texts and traditions (satisfying dualistic needs for certainty), while Burhani critical engagement exposes them to interpretive diversity and contextual nuances (advancing toward multiplicity and relativism).

Ultimately, the synthesis of Bayani commitment with Burhani openness exemplifies how to establish informed and responsible interpretive commitments amidst complexity and uncertainty (realizing commitment within relativism). Research on religious underscores the efficacy of developmental methodologies: studies indicate that students instructed to critically analyze religious concepts while respectfully engaging with tradition cultivate more mature faith commitments and enhanced tolerance for religious diversity, in contrast to those subjected solely to dogmatic instruction (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). The dialectical epistemological approach further informs strategies for combating religious radicalization and extremism through (M. H. Syafii, Azhari, et al., 2025).

Diane Moore's pedagogy of "religious literacy" prioritizes instruction about religion that is "representational rather than devotional," facilitating students' comprehension of religions as "internally diverse, evolving, culturally embedded, and influential in shaping individuals and societies" (Mohamed & Hao, 2025). Utilizing this framework to educate about kufr entails assisting students in comprehending that the concept has been variably interpreted throughout Islamic history, with interpretations shaped by historical and cultural contexts, and that these differing interpretations yield distinct social and ethical ramifications – an understanding cultivated by the dialectical transition from closed Bayani to open Burhani (Yani et al., 2025; Qosim & Amin, 2025).

Epistemological Pluralism and al Innovation in Islamic Contexts The second principal theme arising from the analysis of kufr interpretation in Tafsir Al-Misbah is the potential and imperative for epistemological pluralism in modern Islamic. Epistemological pluralism denotes the acknowledgment and development of various legitimate methods of understanding and interpreting reality, in contrast to epistemological monism, which favors a singular technique as the exclusive valid route to knowledge (Mahmudulhassan et al., 2024). In Islamic al contexts, epistemological pluralism entails recognizing that the Bayani, 'Irfani, and Burhani methodologies each provide valuable yet incomplete

perspectives on religious truth, necessitating the integration of insights from all three epistemologies instead of favoring one over the others (Garavito, 2024). Al-Jabiri, while critiquing the dominance of Bayani and advocating for the revival of Burhani, does not advocate for the total rejection of Bayani or 'Irfani methodologies; instead, he calls for the establishment of a balanced epistemological ecosystem in which all three can coexist and engage productively (Yani et al., 2025). The Tafsir Al-Misbah case exemplifies a balanced methodology: Shihab employs Bayani linguistic analysis, sporadic 'Irfani spiritual insights, and Burhani rational-ethical reasoning, amalgamating them into interpretations that are textually anchored, spiritually significant, and rationally justifiable. This epistemological pluralism corresponds with modern theories that highlight multiple intelligences and varied learning modalities. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences asserts that human cognitive ability consists of various modalities—linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic—and that effective education should accommodate this diversity instead of favoring solely linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences, as is common in conventional education (Asyibli et al., 2025; Suri, 2013).

Effective Islamic education necessitates pedagogical awareness to identify the specific epistemological support required by each student at various stages of their educational journey (Reid, 2021; Moore, 2012). The application of epistemological pluralism in Islamic education is also linked to theories of culturally responsive pedagogy and the decolonization of education. Gloria Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant pedagogy asserts that effective instruction should leverage students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference to enhance the relevance and efficacy of learning (Arkoun, 2003). In various Islamic educational settings, students originate from varying cultural, linguistic, and intellectual backgrounds, which may incline them towards distinct epistemological perspectives. Students from Sufi-influenced communities may choose 'Irfani approaches, while those from reformist backgrounds may favor Burhani rationalism, and individuals from traditional pesantren surroundings may be more acquainted with Bayani textualism (Syafii, 2024; Syafii et al., 2025).

The practical application of epistemological pluralism in the instruction of *kufr* would necessitate various pedagogical strategies rooted in research-based best practices. Initially, elucidating epistemological assumptions: educators ought to illuminate the various epistemological frameworks that influence differing interpretations of *kufr*, aiding students in comprehending not only the conclusions of various scholars but also the methodologies employed to reach those conclusions (Cranton & Taylor, 2011). This meta-cognitive awareness—reflecting on one's own thought processes—is essential for cultivating pupils' intellectual complexity and interpretive independence (Salvatore, 2007). Secondly, offering diverse representations: ideas such as *kufr* should be conveyed through various epistemological frameworks—linguistic-textual (Bayani), spiritual-experiential ('Irfani), and philosophical-ethical (Burhani)—enabling students to develop comprehensive understandings (Paul, 2018). This reflective practice cultivates what Marcia Baxter Magolda refers to as "self-authorship"—the ability to formulate one's own opinions and values via critical thought instead of passively accepting the views of others (Munandar & Amin, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

The main findings of this study demonstrate that M. Quraish Shihab, in his Tafsir Al-Misbah, successfully presents a unique epistemological construction of the concept of kufr. The research reveals that although Shihab's initial framework was based on Bayani epistemology, which focuses on the authority of texts and traditions, his hermeneutical process actually produced Burhani reasoning that is open, rational, and ethical. This dialectical shift is the result of critical reflection on contemporary realities that demand a more contextual interpretation of the Quran, thus producing an understanding of kufr that is not exclusive but promotes justice and respect for the diversity of faiths.

The scholarly contribution of this research lies in the integration of Al-Jabiri's epistemological critique with modern Indonesian exegetical practices. This study confirms that Islamic epistemology is dynamic and can transform toward a more rational pattern of reasoning without abandoning its commitment to the revealed text. Thus, this research broadens the horizon of Qur'anic hermeneutics in Indonesia and offers a new perspective for Islamic reform based on epistemological pluralism—namely, a synthesis of Bayani, 'Irfani, and Burhani—that enables students to understand the reality of diversity reflectively and critically.

The limitations of this research lie in its focus on a single work of interpretation, the Tafsir Al-Misbah, and its lack of comparison with other contemporary commentaries in the Islamic world. Further research is recommended, incorporating various modern exegetical works, different social contexts, and empirical approaches to the implementation of these epistemological values in Islamic curricula in both formal and non-formal institutions. With a broader scope, it is hoped that a more comprehensive model of Islamic can be formulated, adaptive to plurality, and that it will contribute significantly to strengthening religious moderation in the global era.

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