

Methodological Analysis Of *Tafsîr Fî Zhilâl Al-Qur'ân*: Between Reflective Approach And Epistemological Criticism

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Abstract

Fî Zhilâl Al-Qur'ân by Sayyid Qutb is one of the most influential works in the field of contemporary Qur'an interpretation, offering a unique and reflective approach to understanding the Qur'ân. Instead of focusing on technical linguistic analysis or classical historical narratives, this work emphasizes the internalization of the spirit and message of the Qur'an. Qutb's reflective method highlights resistance to tyranny and promotes the establishment of divine values in socio-political life. However, this work is not immune to epistemological criticism, especially regarding the lack of scientific references, ideological subjectivity, and oversimplification of complex meanings. This paper aims to analyze the interpretive methodology used in *Fî Zhilâl al-Qur'an*, identify its strengths and weaknesses, and place it in a broader landscape of modern Qur'anic interpretation. Using a qualitative approach and content analysis, the study found that although this work lacks academic rigor in some respects, it significantly contributes to resurrecting the Qur'an's role as a dynamic and revolutionary guide to life.

Fî Zhilâl Al-Qur'ân yang ditulis oleh Sayyid Qutb adalah salah satu karya paling berpengaruh di bidang penafsiran al-Qur'an kontemporer, menawarkan pendekatan yang unik dan reflektif untuk memahami al-Qur'an. Alih-alih berfokus pada analisis linguistik teknis atau narasi sejarah klasik, karya ini menekankan internalisasi semangat dan pesan al-Qur'an. Metode reflektif Qutb menyoroti perlawanan terhadap tirani dan mempromosikan penetapan nilai-nilai ilahi dalam kehidupan sosial-politik. Namun, karya ini tidak kebal terhadap kritik epistemologis, terutama mengenai kurangnya referensi ilmiah, subjektivitas ideologis, dan penyederhanaan makna yang kompleks secara berlebihan. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis metodologi interpretatif yang digunakan dalam Fî Zhilâl al-Qur'ân, mengidentifikasi kekuatan dan kelemahannya, dan menempatkannya dalam lanskap yang lebih luas dari interpretasi al-Qur'an modern. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan analisis konten, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa meskipun karya ini tidak memiliki ketelitian akademis dalam beberapa hal, penelitian ini secara signifikan berkontribusi untuk membangkitkan kembali peran al-Qur'an sebagai panduan hidup yang dinamis dan revolusioner.

A. INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is a unity, there is no ikhtilaf or internal or external contradictions. This is the basic assumption and becomes the "theological lens" of the interpreters of the Qur'an (Huriadi et al., 2024). Although it is undeniable that the Qur'an has been revealed since centuries ago at the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW which describes the events of that time and before as contained in the Qashash al-Qur'an (Hidayat et al., 2025). The teachings contained in the Qur'an are relevant teachings that can be applied in all places and times (Rahma et al., 2025).

Efforts to understand the teachings contained in the Qur'an continue to develop from time to time, along with the dynamics of the times and human needs (Haq, 2025). As stated by Munirul Ikhwan, the distance between the text of revelation that was revealed in the 7th century AD in the Arabian Peninsula and the social reality of the modern century raises an urgent need for a new interpretation mechanism. This effort does not only focus on the linguistic interpretation of verses, but also on approaches that are able to bridge the historical context of revelation with contemporary Muslim problems (Ikhwan, 2016).

The teachings contained in the Qur'an must always be developed through a contextual approach and relevant to the dynamics of the times, because although the Qur'an is absolute and not contradictory, the ever-changing social challenges demand a new method of interpretation that is able to connect the historical context of revelation with the needs of Muslims today. Departing from that, Sayyid Quthb tried to make the latest breakthrough in interpreting the Qur'an which departed from the reality of society and then straightened out what was considered incorrect that occurred in that reality (Nor & Dahliana, 2025).

So far, studies that analyze the methodology of Sayyid Qutb's tafsir *Fî Zhilâl al-Qur'an*, both from a reflective perspective and epistemological criticism are in the following three trends:

First, studies that see that the tafsir methodology used by Sayyid Qutb, including tafsir bi al-Ma'tsur with the tahlili method, also review how this tafsir brings the message of the Qur'an alive and contextual, as well as the style of the people's liberation movement, using linguistic and social approaches (Firdaus & Zulaiha, 2022; Lestari & Vera, 2021; Nor & Dahliana, 2025).

Second, the study of Sayyid Quthub's Tafsir thought in *Fî Zhilâl al-Qur'an* which explores criticism of Sayyid Qutb's methodology, including the use of weak hadith,

literary language style, and how Sayyid Quthb combines interrelated verses and emphasizes the reflective aspect of human behavior (Huda & Pajriah, 2022; Supriadi, 2015).

Third, *the* critical analysis of Sayyid Quthb's interpretation epistemology in *Fî Zhilâl al-Qur'an* (Nasprianto, 2022; Lukman Harun, 2021).

This paper aims to complete the lack of literature that has been shown above. Namely, to analyze Sayyid Quthb's tafsir approach to what extent it is reflective, and how the underlying epistemology is. At least, there are two questions that can be asked: First, how does the reflective approach appear in the method of tafsir *Fî Zhilâl al-Qur'an*? Second, how can the epistemological review assess the validity and structure of knowledge? These two questions will be an important point of departure in all discussions in this article.

This paper is based on the argument that, on the one hand, Sayyid Quthb applies a reflective approach in his tafsir by making his life experience, socio-political crisis, and idealism as a lens in understanding the messages of the Qur'an. This approach makes his tafsir not only explain the literal meaning, but also reflects existential anxiety and moral commitment to social justice and tawhid as the principle of societal change. Epistemologically, tafsir *Fî Zhilâl* is built on the synthesis between the text of revelation and ideological interpretation. However, the dominance of ideological elements in the construction of its meaning raises issues of validity and objectivity because it often ignores linguistic aspects, history, and classical interpretation rules. This interpretation is more normative- transformational than descriptive-analytical.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a library research design, which focuses on analyzing the text of Sayyid Quthb's *Fî Zhilâl al-Qur'an* tafseer. The approach used in this study is reflective and epistemological. The reflective approach is chosen to explore the subjective and ideological dimensions in Quthb's interpretation, especially how his life experiences and socio-political views influence the reading of the Qur'anic verses. Meanwhile, the epistemological approach is used to critically examine how the structure of knowledge is formed in the tafsir, including the source of its authority, the validity of its arguments, and the epistemic tendencies that underlie the construction of its meaning.

The method used is content analysis, namely by reading and identifying patterns of interpretation on certain relevant verses, such as verses on social justice, tawhid, jihad, or the morality of the people. The main instrument in this research is the researcher himself as a qualitative instrument, assisted by an analysis tool in the form of an interpretation study form that contains columns of verse context, interpretation methods, ideological reflections, and accompanying epistemological aspects. The data in this study were collected from primary sources in the form of tafsir *Fî Zhilâl al-Qur'an* (both in Arabic and translation), and secondary sources in the form of books and scientific articles that discuss tafsir methodology, reflective interpretation, and epistemological studies of tafseer.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study found that Sayyid Qutb's tafsir *Fî Zhilâl Al-Qur'ân* has a distinctive methodological character, namely a reflective-thematic approach that is strongly influenced by the socio-political conditions of the author (Putra & Saputra, 2020). Sayyid Qutb interpreted the verses of the Qur'an by prioritizing ideological and spiritual values, especially in the context of the struggle against tyranny, upholding monotheism, and social transformation.

The interpretation in this work is not oriented towards linguistic descriptions, differences in *qirā'āt*, or systematic history-based interpretations. Instead, he organizes the meaning of the verses in the form of long narratives that focus on the moral and political messages of the Qur'ân. In suras such as al- Baqarah, *al-Anfâl*, and *al-Mā'idah*, we find the consistency of Qutb's approach in connecting the Qur'ânic text with the phenomenon of Muslim oppression and the need for revival through the application of divine values.

In terms of interpretive structure, Sayyid Qutb does not technically separate the verse-by-verse interpretation from the exploration of major themes (Lestari & Vera, 2021). His style of interpretation is more like a narrative essay with an emphasis on the relevance of the Qur'an to the reality of human life. This marks a shift from a traditional approach to a reflective-existential approach in the world of contemporary interpretation.

The findings also show that *Fî Zhilâl Al-Qur'ân* is close to thematic tafsir (*maudhū'î*), although its organization does not follow the scientific systematics of

modern academic tafsir. Compared to other contemporary commentaries such as Rashid Ridha's *Tafsir al-Manar*, Qutb's work is more prominent in raising the confrontational and revolutionary side.

Discussion

This paper aims to analyze Sayyid Quthb's tafsir methodology in *Fî Zhilâl al-Qur'ân*, by highlighting the reflective approach and the epistemological criticism that accompanies it. Therefore, the discussion is organized systematically so that the analysis is comprehensive and in accordance with the research objectives.

1. Intellectual History and Social Context of Sayyid Quthb

Sayyid Quthb was formed by a family environment that is both religious and nationalist. Since childhood, he has been familiar with the reading of the Qur'an and the world of politics. This shaped the character of Quthb's ideological and revolutionary thinking (Khalidi, 2001). After joining the Muslim Brotherhood, his political and prison experiences influenced the contextual style of his tafsir, which is full of the spirit of struggle (Abdul Aziz, 2014).

2. Reflective Approach in *Tafsîr Fî Zhilâl al-Qur'ân*

a. Definition of Reflective Approach

The reflective approach emphasizes spiritual experience and appreciation of Qur'anic values. Sayyid Quthb does not focus on the technical linguistic approach, but on the moral and socio-political essence of the Qur'anic verses (al-Farmawi, 1979).

b. Application of Reflective Approach in *Tafsîr Fî Zhilâl Al-Qur'ân*

Tafsîr Fî Zhilâl Al-Qur'ân describes Quthb's existential interaction with the Qur'ân. In the interpretation of QS. at-Tawbah:122, he rejects the views of classical mufasssirs and argues that only those who engage in direct jihad truly understand religion (Khalidi, 2001).

3. Style and Methodology of Interpretation

a. *Manhaj Haraki*

This interpretation uses the *manhaj haraki* approach, which is a movement-based interpretation and *da'wah*. Quthb invites readers to make the Qur'an a guide to social transformation (Khalidi, 1995).

b. Literature and Ideology Linkage

Quthb's literary background contributed to his expressive and ideological style of interpretation. He avoids technical explanations such as *qira'at* and *asbâb al-nuzûl*, and emphasizes personal reflections on verses (Al-Dzahabi, 1995).

4. Strengths and weaknesses of Tafsir Fî Zhilâl al-Qur'ân

a. Strengths

- Thematic and narrative presentation.
- Avoiding israiliyyat.
- Use of sahih hadith.
- Communicative and poetic language.
- Original thinking.

b. Weaknesses of

- Lack of scholarly references and sanad.
- Lack of exploration of traditional exegetical methodology.
- Subjective ideological content.

5. An Epistemological Critique of Sayyid Quthb's Tafsir

a. Introduction to Tafsir Epistemology

In general, the epistemology of tafsir refers to the theory of knowledge about how the interpretation of the Qur'an is built and validated. According to al-Dzahabi (1995), a scientifically sound interpretation is one that is based on a strong methodology, such as the use of sanad, *istidlâl*, *munâsabah*, and cross-referencing to *mu'tabar* interpretations. Contemporary thinkers such as Mohammed Arkoun even propose the need for epistemological criticism of any tafsir project to uncover hidden ideological biases and subjectivity.

b. Criticism from Salafi and Traditionalist Scholars

Shaykh Ibn Bâz and al-Albânî criticized Quthb's interpretation of the concepts of *istiwâ'* and *ulûhiyyah* which are considered to deviate from the beliefs of *ahlus sunnah* (Al-Albani, 2001).

c. Academic and Scientific Criticism

From a scientific perspective, the main weakness of this interpretation lies in the non-use of the principle of tool science as a whole and the lack of intertextuality with classical interpretations (Al-Zarkasyi, 1967; Al-Qatthan, 2000). This interpretation also does not apply the *tafsîr dirâyah* method systematically, which

according to some academics such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, can create a gap between personal experience and scientific validity.

6. Politicization of Tafsir and Accusations of Radicalism

a. Tafsir as a Means of Resistance

This interpretation becomes a mouthpiece for social criticism of the contemporary jahiliah system, carrying the idea of jihad as liberation from structural oppression (A'la, 2014).

b. Accusations of Radicalism

Quthb is criticized for the use of extreme diction such as jahiliah and jihad, which are considered the foundation of radical ideology (Chirzin, 1999).

7. Relevance of *Tafsîr Fî Zhilâl al-Qur'ân* in Contemporary Interpretation Discourse

This interpretation opens a new space in modern tafsir discourse: spiritual, sociological, and transformative. Although it does not fulfill all academic rules, this interpretation contributes greatly to raising ideological awareness and the social role of the Qur'an. Therefore, the position of this tafsir is more appropriately categorized as an inspirational reflective- moralist tafsir, not a scientific-methodological tafsir in the strict academic sense.

D. CONCLUSION

This research shows that Sayyid Qutb's *Fî Zhilâl Al-Qur'ân* is a reflective interpretation that emphasizes spiritual and moral appreciation of the Qur'ân in a modern socio-political context. This reflective approach offers a narrative, thematic, and ideological style of interpretation, making the Qur'ân a source of inspiration for resistance to oppression and as a guide to social transformation. Sayyid Qutb succeeded in bringing the Qur'ân into the realm of the praxis of people's lives, especially in the spirit of resistance to structural injustice. However, the methodology used still faces epistemological criticism due to the lack of scientific references, the lack of use of tool sciences ('ulûm al-Qur'ân), and a strong tendency of ideological subjectivity. Therefore, *Fî Zhilâl Al-Qur'ân* occupies an important position in the map of contemporary interpretation as a moralist-reflective interpretation, but has not fully met the academic rules of methodological interpretation.

Based on the results of this study, it is suggested that the study of *Fî Zhiâl Al-Qur'ân* be continued with a comparative approach to other contemporary interpretations in order to find a meeting point between reflective approaches and academic methodologies. Future researchers can also trace the influence of this tafsir in Islamic social movements in various parts of the world, as well as develop a tafsir framework that is able to integrate ideological enthusiasm with scientific validity in a balanced manner. In addition, further studies are needed to assess the extent to which reflective tafsir can be used as a valid alternative method in contemporary tafsir studies.

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