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A CRITICAL APPROACH TO PROPHETIC TRADITIONS
Contextual Criticism in Understanding Hadith

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Abstract

Many scholars have developed rigorous disciplines for studying and examining the validity of the hadith attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. There is much research in this field, especially that concerns its narration (sanad) and text (matn). What remains underdeveloped is the substantive criticism for seeking the hadith validity. This article examines the discourse of hadith criticism and provides an analytical description of how to determine the hadith's validity. It argues that substantive criticism is necessary for a proper and acceptable understanding of the hadith and, in turn, for determining its validity. In addition, the article examines how the meaning of the hadith is vital in hadith studies. The article's main argument concerns the significance of contextual understanding of hadith in any critical study.

[Para ulama telah mengembangkan disiplin ilmu yang ketat untuk mempelajari dan memeriksa validitas hadis. Sudah banyak penelitian di bidang ini, baik tentang sanad maupun matn. Penelitian yang belum banyak disentuh adalah kritik substantif terkait validitas hadis. Artikel ini mengkaji wacana kritik hadis dan memberikan gambaran analitis bagaimana menentukan kevalidan sebuah hadis. Argumen dari artikel ini adalah bahwa kritik substantif diperlukan untuk pemahaman hadis yang tepat dan dapat diterima dan, pada gilirannya, untuk menentukan kesahihan hadis. Selain itu, artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana makna hadis menempati posisi sangat vital dalam kajian hadis. Argumen utama artikel ini menyangkut pentingnya pemahaman kontekstual hadis dalam studi kritis apa pun.]

Keywords: hadith criticism, *sanad*, *matn*, contextual understanding.

A. Introduction

Among the valuable legacy from the earlier Muslim generations to preserve the authenticity of the hadith are the research methods on chains of the hadith narrators (*sanad*) and its *matn*. What came to be known as hadith criticism has emerged in several traditional subjects in the field. The research effort and criticism of the hadith are crucial since not all hadiths were written during the time of the Prophet, and not everything that was said to be narrated by the companions was heard from the Prophet himself, or everything they recorded came truly from the Prophet. Apart from that, some information allegedly narrated from the Prophet are forgeries.[1]

The essence of hadith criticism (*naqd al-ḥadīth*) is to examine the *sanad* and *matn* of the hadith to ascertain its originality.[2] Although this effort has existed since the time of the Prophet, the term *naqd* (criticism) emerged in the second century of Hijra.[3] Al-Quran does not use the term *naqd* to denote the meaning of criticism, but rather *yamīz*, as seen in the Quran Ali 'Imrān (3): 179. Imam Muslim, a hadith scholar of the third century of Hijra, also used the same term in his book, *al-Tamyīz*, to describe the methodology of hadith criticism.[4] Another hadith scholar, al-Rāzī (d. 327 H) mentioned the term *al-naqd wa'l-nuqqād* in his work, *al- Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl*. Meanwhile, Ibn Hibbān (d. 354 H) wrote a book on narrator criticism entitled *Kitāb al-Majrūḥīn*, and al-Bukhārī wrote *al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr*. Thus, it can be seen that the concept of criticism of the hadith has been known since the beginning of Islam, but the use of the term *naqd* only appeared later.

The traditional approach to hadith criticism limited its concern to the validity of the chain of narrators (*sanad*) of the hadith and the voracity

[1] Muhammad Abū Zahw, *al-Ḥadīth wa'l-Muḥaddithūn* (al-Maktabah al-Taufiqiyah, n.d), p. 31.

[2] Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn ibn Aḥmad al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn 'inda 'Ulamā' al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī* (Beirut: Dār al-Falāq al-Jadīdah, 1983), p. 31.

[3] Muhammad Mustafa Azami, *Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature* (Oak Brook: American Trust Publications, 2012), p. 47; others argue that this discipline emerged in the third century of Hijra. See Umi Sumbulah, *Kritik Hadis: Pendekatan Historis Metodologis* (Yogyakarta: Sukses Offset, 2008), p. 32.

[4] Azami, *Studies in Hadith Methodology*, p. 48.

of its text (*matn*), emphasising the former.[5] Today's scholarship of hadith criticism, however, has developed significantly. In addition to the well-established genre of hadith criticism following the traditional approach, the modern scholarship of the hadith is characterised by growing interest in developing novel approaches to hadith criticism.[6] Despite the methodological differences, contemporary scholarship of hadith criticism seems to agree on the importance of correct understanding in accepting the validity of the hadith.

Two approaches are prominent among Muslim scholars concerning the understanding or interpreting of Islamic sources: textual and contextual. These distinct approaches to the understanding of the hadith can also be observed.[7] The question of which approach is more reliable and justified in understanding the hadith can only be answered by examining the nature of the interpretation of texts. Theoretically, the process of understanding and interpreting a text, including the hadith, assumes that three subjects are involved: the context of the author, the context of the text, and the context of the reader. Therefore, inherently a triadic structure of the art of interpretation consists of (1) a sign or a text, (2) an intermediary or an interpreter, and (3) an audience. This triadic structure implicitly contains issues in evaluating the hadith, namely 1) the nature of the text, 2) the methods used to understand the text, and 3) the understanding determined by the presuppositions and horizons of the audience that is the target of the text.[8] The distinction

[5] 'Uthmān ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī, *'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth Ibn al-Ṣalāh*, ed. by Nūr al-Dīn. 'Itr (Beirūt: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu'āṣir, n.d); Al-Suyuti, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī*; Al-Khāṭib, *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth*.

[6] Jonathan Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 2nd edition (London: Oneworld Academic, 2018); Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *A Textbook of Hadith Studies: Authenticity, Compilation, Classification and Criticism of Hadith* (Leicestershire: The Islamic Foundation, 2005); Sumbulah, *Kritik Hadis*; Wasman Wasman, "Hermeneutika Hadis Hukum", *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2014), pp. 151-66.

[7] Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006); M. Syuhudi Ismail, *Hadis Nabi yang Tekstual dan Kontekstual: Telaah Ma'ani al-Hadits tentang Ajaran Islam yang Universal, Temporal dan Lokal* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1994); Adis Duderija, "Pre-Modern and Critical Progressive Methodologies of Interpretation of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah", *Journal of Qur'ān and Ḥadīth Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2012); Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009).

[8] "Hermeneutics", *Encyclopedia of Religions*, vol. 6 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987); Richard E. Palmer, "Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory", in *Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

of times, places, and cultural atmospheres between the audience and the text and its creator creates alienation, gaps, and even a deviation of meaning. The alienation issue is the primary concern in interpretation, so understanding the text requires a distinction between the text's meaning and the context's significance.

This way of interpretation, in turn, requires examination of the context behind any text in order for a text to be well understood. This article contributes to the discourse of hadith criticism by proposing a contextual approach to understanding and interpreting the hadith. It argues that substantive criticism is necessary for a proper, acceptable understanding of the hadith and, in turn, for determining its validity.

B. Hadith Criticism: Historical and Eidetic Criticism

There are two objects of hadith criticism. The first is *sanad* criticism, better known as *al-naqd al-khārijī* or external criticism, namely criticism of a series of the hadith narrators with specific criteria to investigate the validity of the *sanad*. The second is *al- naqd al-dākhilī* or internal criticism, namely criticism of the text (*matn*) or the content of the hadith.[9] In short, criticism of the hadith is an attempt to examine the validity and originality of its *sanad* and *matn*, so that it can be determined which hadith comes from the Prophet and become a reliable source of the Prophet's deed and which is not. Thus, we can conclude that hadith criticism is important because such criticism can determine the quality of the hadith narrators (*sanad*) and text (*matn*), ultimately determining the quality of the hadith.

The above description concludes that the authenticity and validity of the hadith rely on a must-do examination of both the chain of narrators and the text. According to Hanafi, the criticism of *sanad* is historical, while the criticism of *matn,* especially those related to the meaning of the hadith, is called eidetic criticism. Besides these two criticisms, Hanafi proposes practical criticism as the final stage of criticism for applying the meaning obtained from eidetic criticism into the present context.[10]

Historical criticism assumes that it is impossible to have an accurate understanding if there is no certainty that what is being understood is historically accurate. This inaccuracy plunges people into making

[9] Al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd*, p. 31.

[10] Hassan Hanafī, *Dirāsāt Islāmiyyah* (Kairo: Maktabat al-Anjila al-Miṣriyyah, 1987), p. 69; Hassan Hanafi, *Dialog Agama & Revolusi* (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 1994), pp. 1-2.

mistakes, even if their understanding is correct.[11] The authenticity of religious texts must be tested based on historical criticism, not on belief, theological, philosophical, mystical or spiritual criticism.[12]

Historical studies show that the hadith has experienced a long historical vetting process before it becomes a textual discourse as contained in the hadith books. It experienced the tradition of verbal transmission (*al-naql al-shafahi*) and the tradition of practical transmission (*al-naql al-'amali*) before it entered the stage of textual transmission (*al-naql al-kitābi*).[13] Unlike the Quran, whose transmission is textual and demands high validation, the hadith at this historical level of criticism faces problems regarding its authenticity.

If the *sanad* criticism is commonly known as external criticism (*al-naqd al-khāriji*), the *matn* criticism concerns the internal aspects of the hadith (*al-naqd al-dākhili*). This term is associated with the critical orientation of the *matn* itself, focusing on the hadith text, which is the essence of what the Prophet had said, transmitted to subsequent generations until on the hands of *mukharrij* of hadith, both verbally and substantively. The *sanad* criticism finds out whether a narrator is trustworthy, devout, and has a strong memory and whether or not its chain of transmission is connected. Meanwhile, internal criticism determines whether the hadith contains a form of *shāẕ* or 'illah which makes the hadith unacceptable (*mardūd*).

Hadith scholars have developed a methodology for the *matn* criticism consisting of two basic frameworks of activities: first, examining the validity and integrity of the text of *matn* (also known as *naqd mabnā al-matn*); secondly, examining the validity of the content of Islamic teaching presented verbally in the form of conceptual expression of the *matn* (*naqd ma'nā al-ḥādīth*).[14] This concept of the *matn* criticism is comparable with Hanafi's hermeneutical eidetic criticism in interpreting religious texts. According to Hanafi, eidetic criticism is a step toward understanding religious texts, including the hadith, carried out through grammatical rules and examining historical situations.[15]

The *matn* criticism examines the validity of the *matn* of the hadith to separate valid from invalid hadiths. Thus, the *matn* criticism is not

[11] Hanafi, *Dialog Agama*, p. 1.
[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.
[13] Hanafī, *Dirāsāt Islāmiyyah*, p. 37.
[14] Al-Jawābī, *Juhūd al-Muḥaddithīn*.
[15] Hanafi, *Dialog Agama*, p.16.

intended to deconstruct the basis of Islamic teachings by looking for the weaknesses in the Prophet's words but rather is directed at editorial analysis and meaning to establish the validity of the hadith. The *matn* criticism is a positive effort to maintain the integrity of the hadith and have a more accurate understanding.

C. Criticising the Meaning of the Hadith

Critical studies of the *matn* include examinations of the text's wording or structure and critical analysis of its meaning. These two components of the *matn* criticism have implications for accepting or rejecting the *matn*. Criticism of the structure of *matn* aims to obtain the authentic composition of the *matn* sentence and the degree of the hadith authenticity. The validity and the authenticity of *matn* guarantee the authoritativeness of the hadith. Any expression of *matn* is open to a very varied textual understanding. The dominant textual implications are: *'ibārah al-naṣṣ, 'isyārah al-naṣṣ, dalālah al-naṣṣ, iqtiḍā' al-naṣṣ,* and *mafhūm mukhālafah*.[16] A standard edition of the hadith text is very significant for understanding textual (lexical), structural, semantic and contextual understanding. From this understanding, a normative concept of Islamic teachings according to the hadith would be produced.

The criticism of the meaning of the hadith relates to the substance or the concept of the teachings in the *matn*. Whether the hadith is accepted or rejected very much depends on its content. A correct understanding of the *matn* based on a reliable method will reveal the identity of the *matn* and, in turn, will lead to whether it is accepted or rejected.

The criticism of the meaning is an examination of the substance that a person may understand from the text by enabling his or her intellectual potential. How to understand the meaning of the hadith has long been part of the discipline of the hadith. Al-Naysābūrī, in his *Kitāb Ma'rifah 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth,* included the topic *ma'rifah fiqh al-ḥadīth* as the twentieth branch of the science of the hadith.[17] This topic is considered the ultimate goal or the fruit of the hadith sciences. Although it has become the concern of fiqh scholars, according to al-Ḥākim, hadith scholars also had the same attention.

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[16] 'Abd al-Wahhāb Khallāf, *'Ilm Uṣūl al-Fīqh wa-Khulāṣat Tārīkh al-Tashrī' al-Islāmī* (Kuwait: Dār al-Qalam, 1978), pp. 143-60; Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* (Kairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1958), pp. 139-56.

[17] Al-Ḥākim al-Naisabūrī, *Kitāb Ma'rifah 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth wa-Kamiyyah Ajnāsih*, ed. by Aḥmad bin Fāris al-Salūm (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2003), p. 246.

The formulation of the hadith interpretation is prominent among hadith scholars, and their documentary data are scattered in the books of the hadith commentaries. The tendency of commentaries is influenced by cultural background, scientific specialisation, school, the orientation of the review methodology and others. The hadith commentaries commonly include descriptions explaining vocabularies, the pronunciation of *gharīb* words, and the significance of sentence structures, estimating the depth of meaning, and drawing conclusions about the essence of the teachings.[18]

Importantly, scholars have long recognised and studied that the substance of the hadith is sometimes inconsistent with other sources. They, especially scholars of legal theories (*uṣūliyyūn*), call this kind of situation in terms of *ta'āruḍ* or *ta'ādul*, contradicting arguments.[19] However, this contradiction is not an actual contradiction because it is impossible to emphasise two or more contradictory propositions deliberately. This contradiction is purely outwardly facing due to the limited ability of a *mujtahid* to understand the very meaning. Other scholars deny the contradiction of the *qaṭ'ī* arguments but not the arguments that are *ẓannī*.[20] In some other cases, the hadith may not go hand in hand with the evidence of other more qualified arguments, either the *naqlī* or the rational arguments. As a guideline, the hadith can be accepted and recognised for its authenticity if it corresponds with the Quran, the more qualified traditions, scientific and religious experiences of the Companions, et cetera.

Based on available narrations, some of the senior companions, such as 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb and Aishah, have established, albeit casually, some of the rules used in dealing with such contradictions. According to Azami, the companions and the hadith scholars afterwards used two approaches: *mu'āraḍah* or *muqāranah* and *al-naqd al-'aqlī*.[21] *Mu'āraḍah* is undertaken by cross-references and comparison with other narrations. Meanwhile, *al-naqd al-'aqlī* sees rational aspects of the hadith transmission, the hearing, the delivering, the narrators, and the hadith content.[22]

In general, contemporary hadith scholars agree on several benchmarks or criteria for criticism of the hadith. These benchmarks

[18] Al-Mubarakfūrī, *Tuḥfah al-Aḥwadhī*, vol. 1 (Kairo: Dār al-Fikr, 1979), pp. 29-30.

[19] Al-Jawābī, *Juhūd al-Muḥaddithīn*, 4-5: 362-3.

[20] *Ibid.*, 4-5: 363-6.

[21] Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Aẓamī, *Manhaj al-Naqd 'ind al-Muḥaddithīn: Nash'atuh wa Tārīkhuh*, 3rd edition (Riyad: Maktabah al-Kauṡar, 1990), p. 50,59,67,81-82; al-Jawābī, *Juhūd al-Muḥaddithīn*, 4-5: 489.

[22] Aẓami, *Manhaj al-Naqd*, p. 83.

result from a reformulation of the existing criteria that many classical scholars have proposed. Among these are: (1) not violating the explicit instructions of the Quran; (2) not violating the hadith that has been recognised for its existence and not violating the *sīrah nabawiyyah*; (3) not violating common sense views, empirical data, and historical facts; and (4) eligible as an expression of the authority of prophecy.[23]

D. The Significance of the Hadith Understanding

In the hadith scholarship, several terms are usually used in the sense of understanding and coupled with hadith, namely *fiqh, ma'ānī,* and *syarḥ*. Al- Naysābūrī and al-Qāsimī, for example, use the term *fiqh al-ḥadīth*.[24] Ismail wrote a book on the understanding of the hadith titled *Ma'āni al-Ḥadīth*.[25] Meanwhile, scholars have long used the term *syarḥ* to mean comments and descriptions that explain the contents of the hadith.

In general, there are two approaches to understanding hadith, textual and contextual approaches. The textual approach rests on the outward meaning of the hadith, while the contextual approach focuses more on revealing the context surrounding the genesis of the hadith. Both approaches have been found in early Islamic history.

The textual approach in interpreting the hadith requires adherence to the text strictly and relying on the outward-*ḥarfiyyah* linguistic aspects. Understanding the hadith from these aspects is basically the first step. However, in the textual approach, the understanding of the text is the end of the process. For textualists, the meaning of hadith is standardised, and its application is universal. More than that, the teachings of Islam have been so perfect that all the problems of the life of the people have been regulated. Therefore, there is no need for elaboration, clarification or justification that is just based on reason.[26] Textualists adhere to the referential theory of meaning that the meaning of a word is in the object

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[23] Al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd*, p. 238; Syaikh Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Studi Kritis atas Hadis Nabi saw: Antra Pemahaman Tekstual dan Kontekstual*, 6th edition, trans. by Muhmmad al-Baqir (Bandung: Mizan, 1998); Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kaifa Nata'āmal ma'a al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyah, Ma'ālim wa-Ḍawābit* (USA: al-Ma'had al-Alamī li al-Fikr al-Islāmī, 1990), pp. 111-50; al-Jawābī, *Juhūd al-Muḥaddithīn*, 4-5: 456-94.

[24] Al-Naisabūrī, *Kitāb Ma'rifah*, p. 246; Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Qawā'id al-Taḥdīth min Funūn Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth*, 2nd edition, ed. by Muḥammad Bahjah al-Bayṭār (Kairo: Dār al-Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1961), p. 269.

[25] Ismail, *Hadis Nabi*, p. 6,89.

[26] The explanation of the views of the textualists regarding hadith refers to their views in Quranic interpretation. See Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Quran*, p. 3, 55-56.

to which the word refers. This theory places language and meaning in a completely real extralinguistic world. The single objective meaning of language has become their ideal target—this belief in the objectivity of meaning is based on two assumptions. First, referring to linguistic evidence can ascertain the meaning of the hadith. Second, objectivity refers to recorded history, such as the Companions' views.[27] Thereby, textualists tend to be rigid in understanding. Such scholars attempt to limit the meaning of the text to one meaning and deny the possibility of other meanings. The textual approach assumes that a text can be interpreted from the general form of its pronunciation, not from its specific context.[28] Therefore, textual understanding is uprooted from its socio-historical context.

Another approach is the contextual approach. The underlying assumption of this approach is that as a text, the hadith faces the same problems as other texts, namely that it cannot present a whole idea and the situational setting surrounding it. When anything related to the Prophet is written in the formulation of the hadith, narrowing and drying of meanings and nuances are inevitable.

For supporters of contextual understanding, contextual understanding of the hadith is vital. When scholars tend to focus on the *riwāyah* data, emphasising grammatical commentary referring to the previous people's mindset, this condition is admittedly problematic as the thoughts put forward by previous scholars are understood as something final and dogmatic. In contrast, it must be understood that their thoughts emerge within a particular time and space, so it is naive to impose this as a timeless essential truth.[29]

Unlike the textual model, contextualists view that there are inherently subjective and dynamic elements in understanding the hadith, which underlies every effort. Therefore, it is not easy to consider any meaning of the text as established and objective. In the contextualist view, an interpreter cannot approach the text without bringing with him his experiences, values, beliefs and prejudices. He is like a historian because the hadith is a historical document that demands knowledge of a specific period. In giving meaning to the historical record, he departs

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[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 103-4.

[28] Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Shaukānī, *Irshād al-Fuḥūl ilā Taḥqīq al-Ḥaq min 'Ilm al-Uṣūl* (Beirūt: Dār al-Fikr, n.d), pp. 133-5.

[29] Suryadi, *Metode Kontemporer Memahami Hadis Nabi: Perspektif Muhammad al-Ghazali dan Yusuf al-Qaradhawi* (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2008), p. 7.

from the unique experience and worldview, forming his understanding. With this in mind, contextualists make it impossible for a truly objective understanding.[30]

Contextualists believe that an understanding that only relies on the internal aspects of the text will only dwarf the text itself. A complete understanding of the text requires knowledge of the entire context in which it appeared. Contextualists emphasise the socio-historical context of the hadith observations. They argue that the understanding of the hadith must be in the light of its political, social, historical, cultural and economic contexts, in which the contents of the hadith are uttered, interpreted, and applied.

The socio-historical context provides an understanding of the relationship between the teachings contained in the hadith and the reasons for introducing these teachings in the 7th-century Hijaz. Understanding this context requires adequate knowledge of the Prophet's life in Mecca and Medina, the spiritual atmosphere, political, economic, social, and legal environment, as well as various teaching systems and norms, institutions, and cultures in Hijaz at that time.

Such a contextual approach has roots in the theory of *asbāb al-wurūd*. There were always various backgrounds of events and individual or social psychological conditions which led to the rise of the hadith. Like the Quran, the hadith arose through the Prophet's words and deeds to answer questions and resolve problems that occurred and were faced by the Muslim community. Based on this theory, the principle of contextual understanding focuses more on the limited context that gave rise to the text and not on the external form and generality.[31] Through this method, a person who studies hadith finds the meaning of the hadith and its significance in solving the problems faced and reflecting the sharia's main objectives.[32] However, the concept of *asbāb al-wurūd* has striking limitations. In addition to its many conflicting origins, its historical accuracy is questionable. Therefore, adequate anthropological knowledge is needed.

1. Contextual Understanding

Contextual understanding has attracted the attention of scholars, who have long seen the significance of referring to the socio-historical

[30] Saeed, *Interpreting the Quran*, pp. 103-4.

[31] Al-Shaukānī, *Irshād al-Fuḥūl*, pp. 133-5.

[32] Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kaifa Nata'āmal*, p. 125.

context of the hadith. The concept of *asbāb wurūd* in the hadith study shows this tendency. More than that, the scholars have offered a theoretical framework to make a contextual understanding of the hadith accountable.

Muslim legal theorists have discussed the criteria of a *mujtahid* as the hadith interpreter. Al-Shāṭibī, for example, outlines two main criteria for a *mujtahid*: perfect knowledge of the shari'ah objectives and the ability to perform *istinbāṭ*. Regarding the discovery of legal norms, the scholars put forward more specific and detailed conditions, such as that the person must master Arabic, understand Islamic legal theory, and know the hadith on legal issues.[33] A person who cannot fulfil the requirements is not authorised or has no authority in performing ijtihad. Meanwhile, Abou El Fadl requires an Islamic scholar to be accepted authoritatively with five criteria of authority: honesty, sincerity, comprehensiveness, rationality, and self-control.[34]

Many Muslim scholars have offered methods and ways of understanding the hadith through a contextual approach. One scholar who pioneered this effort was al-Qarāfī, a jurist from the Maliki school. He distinguished the roles and functions of the Prophet, whether as the great imam, the judge or the mufti.[35] When the Prophet said or did something, it was necessary to analyse the utterance addressed, the circumstances in which the Prophet has said or done it, and in what capacity the Prophet has spoken.

In line with al-Qarāfī's, al-Dahlāwī classified the traditions into that relating and that are not related to the delivery of treatises. The first category demands Muslims to follow, which includes knowledge of the afterlife, the supernatural, the provisions of the sharia, issues of worship, universal wisdom, benefits, and the virtues of charity. While the Prophet's deeds outside of worship based on custom and particular benefit do not bind the people.[36] Shaltūt refers to the division of the Prophet's functions as proposed by al-Qarāfī above. He then distinguished the traditions of the Prophet, which have the value of sharia and those

[33] Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī'ah*, vol. 4 (Kairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, n.d), pp. 105-7; Wahbah al-Zuḥailī, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh al-Islāmiī*, vol. 2 (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1986), pp. 1043-51.

[34] Khaled M. Abou El Fadl, *Atas Nama Tuhan: Dari Fikih Otoriter ke Fikih Otoritatif,* trans. by R.Cecep Lukman Yasin (Jakarta: Serambi, 2004), pp. 99-104.

[35] Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī, *al-Furūq* (Kairo: Dār Ihya' al-Kutub, 1344), p. 206.

[36] Shāh Walī Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Raḥīm ad-Dahlāwī, *Ḥujjah Allāh al-Bāligah*, ed. by al-Sayyid Sābiq (Beirūt: Dār al-Jail, 2005), pp. 223-4.

with no legal implications.[37]

In the 1990s, Muḥammad al-Gazālī was considered to have made a significant breakthrough in the study of traditional hadith because of his radical efforts in criticising hadith observations while providing a new understanding. In his criticism, al-Gazālī smoothly explores the historical context of a hadith.[38] Apart from emphasising the historical context of the hadith, al-Gazālī also shows the importance of differentiating the context and conditions of the Prophet's time and the present. Understanding the hadith cannot avoid contextualisation; the context and current benefits must be considered in reinterpreting religious texts. In addition, al-Gazālī differentiates between religious teachings that are only a means and those that become goals or between those that change and are permanent.[39]

Many other scholars have proposed similar methods for understanding the hadith. Yūsuf al-Qarāḍāwī, Fazlur Rahman, Hassan Hanafi, and M. Syuhudi Ismail are among them, to mention some examples. They have all highlighted the importance of this contextual reading of religious texts with some nuances different to each other.[40] In addition, they have provided methods and guidelines for contextual understanding that are more accountable so that they do not slip into extreme ideology and subjectivism.

2. *From the Hadith Understanding to Practical Criticism*

After understanding the hadith from its linguistic angle, socio-historical context, and universal moral meaning, the next step relates to embodying the result in the present context. In Hanafi's nomenclature, this step is called practical criticism. It is an effort to introduce the meaning of religious texts into human life today.[41] In Islamic legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), the effort is *taṭbīq* or *taḥqīq*,[42] which is generally carried out by muftis and judges. With the ability to formulate Islamic laws (*istinbāṭ*) from religious texts, such as hadith, they then apply the results of this

[37] Maḥmūd Shaltūt, *al-Islām 'Aqiīdah wa Shrī'ah* (Kuwait: Dār al-Qalam, 1990).

[38] Al-Ghazali, *Studi Kritis atas Hadis*, pp. 64-7; Suryadi, *Metode Kontemporer*.

[39] Al-Ghazali, *Studi Kritis atas Hadis*, pp. 163-70.

[40] Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History* (Karachi: Central Institute of Islamic Research, 1965), p. 12; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 6-7; Hanafi, *Dialog Agama*, pp. 16-20; Ismail, *Hadis Nabi*, p. 6, 89.

[41] Hanafi, *Dialog Agama*, pp. 22-5.

[42] Al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt*, 4: 235-7; Zahrah, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, p. 379.

understanding to concrete events. It requires them to really understand the text's content, the events' details, and the social context.[43]

At the stage of practical criticism of understanding the hadith, universal rational constructs or universal moral-social objectives obtained from the generalisation process at eidetic criticism are projected onto the reality of contemporary life to have practical meaning for solving contemporary social problems. It must suit the present socio-historical context. This practical criticism stage matched Rahman's second movement in his double movements theory. In this regard, one must carefully study the current situation and analyse the various realities to assess it, change its conditions as needed, and determine new priorities to implement the new hadith values. This stage needs to involve interdisciplinary approaches, meaning that the confirmation of social, political, economic, and other experts is significant.

Eidetic criticism moves from a specific situation now to the past to obtain universal rational constructs or universal moral-social values through a process of generalisation. Hence, this process is inductive. Meanwhile, practical criticism moves from the past to the present historical reality by projecting and growing back universal rational constructs or moral-social values to the present socio-historical realities, so this process has a deductive character. The interpretation and understanding of the hadith with such an approach will clearly give a new, dynamic, creative discourse of the hadith so that the norms and ideals of the Prophet's sunnah can be realised progressively in various phenomena and social environments. Thus, the hadith is no longer a static discourse but a living sunnah.

E. Concluding Remarks

The article demonstrates the significance of hadith criticism and how it is necessary to determine its validity as an additional method to the well-established methodology of hadith criticism. Traditionally, hadith criticism consists of *sanad* or external, historical criticism that investigates the level of validity of chains of narrators, and *matn* or internal, eidetic criticism, that criticises the text or the content of the hadith. This latter criticism includes both criticisms of the wording or structure of the text and criticism of its meaning, all of which have implications for the acceptance or rejection of a *matn*.

[43] Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 7.

This article has argued that the acceptance and validity of hadith are highly determined by how the hadith is understood and interpreted. Understanding the hadith is, accordingly, a necessary component of hadith criticism. The article has also suggested that contextual understanding is the most reliable approach to understanding the hadith.

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