A CRITICAL APPROACH TO PROPHETIC TRADITIONS:
Contextual Criticism in Understanding Hadith

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Abstract

Hadith scholars have developed a rigorous discipline for studying and examining the validity of writings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. Significant research has been published on hadith with respect to its narration (sanad) and text or content (matn). What remains underdeveloped is the role of substantive criticism of the validity of hadith. This article examines the discourse of hadith criticism and provide analytical description and a critical approach for how the validity of a hadith can be determined. It argues that substantive criticism is necessary for proper and acceptable understanding of hadith and in turn for determining the validity of hadith. In addition to a methodology for hadith criticism, the article examines how the meaning of hadith is important in the hadith studies. The article's main argument concerns the significance of contextual understanding of hadith in any critical study of hadith.

[Sarjana hadis telah mengembangkan disiplin yang ketat untuk mempelajari dan memeriksa keabsahan tulisan-tulisan yang dikaitkan dengan Nabi Muhammad. Banyak tulisan yang membahas narasi (sanad) dan teks serta konten (matn) telah dupublikasi. Dari banyaknya karya tersebut pembahasan yang lebih lanjut untuk dituliskan adalah peran kritik substantif terhadap validitas hadits. Artikel ini mengkaji wacana kritik hadis dan memberikan gambaran analitis dan pendekatan kritis tentang keabsahan sebuah hadis. Paper ini berpendapat tentang kritik substantif diperlukan untuk pemahaman hadits yang tepat dan dapat diterima untuk menentukan validitas hadits. Selain metodologi kritik hadis, artikel ini mengkaji makna

hadis dalam kajian hadis. Argumen artikel ini menyangkut pemahaman kontekstual hadits dalam setiap studi kritis pada hadits]

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

A. Introduction

Among the valuable legacy from the earlier generations in an effort to preserve the authenticity of hadith are the methods of research on chains of narrators and the text of hadith. What came to be known as 'hadith criticism' has been reflected in several traditional subjects.[1] The research effort (or criticism) of hadith is important considering that not all hadiths were written during the time of the Prophet,[2] and not everything that was said to be narrated by the companions was actually heard from the Prophet himself, or that everything that came from the Prophet was recorded by them. Apart from that, some of information allegedly narrated from the Prophet have been found to be forged narrations.[3]

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1 These subjects include *'ilm rijāl al-ḥadīth* covering *ṭabaqah* and *tārīkh al-ruwāt*, *'ilm al-Jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl*, *'ilm gharīb al-ḥadīth*, *'ilm asbāb wurūd al-ḥadīth*, *tārīkh al-mutūn*, *'ilm al-naskh wa al-mansūkh*, *'ilm 'ilal al-ḥadīth*, *'ilm al-mubhamāt*, and *'ilm al-taṣḥīf wa al-taḥrīf*. All these subjects are auxiliary efforts to study hadith. It is also possible to study be study hadith by employing other non-traditional disciplines (interdisciplinary), such as Archeology, History, Geography and others.

2 Although the official writing of hadith was only undertaken during the caliphate of 'Umar bin Abd al-'Azīz, that does not mean that the writing did not exist at the time of the Prophet. There was indeed a prophetic prohibition on writing hadith, but it was valid as long as there were concerns about the mixing of hadith with the Qur'an and as long as a hadith could be memorized well by the Companions. However, for the Companions who were able to distinguish between hadith and the Quranic texts and had difficulty memorizing certain traditions or are worried about being forgotten, then writing was allowed. In addition, the prohibition on writing was intended for the Companions who were unable to write, while for the Companions who were able to write the prohibition did not apply, such as in the case of Abdullah Ibn Umar. See Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyuṭī Suyuti, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī fī Syarḥ Taqrīb al-Nawāwīy*, vol. I, 2nd edition (Riyad: Maktabah al-Kauśar, 1415), p. 94; Muhammad 'Ajjāj al-Khāṭib, *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth 'Ulūmuhu wa Muṣṭalaḥhu* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1989), p. 152.

3 During the time of the Prophet, although it was rarely alleged that there had been falsification of hadith, this could be understood from the cause of the emergence of the hadith that threatened those who deliberately fabricated the hadith to get a seat in the hell fire; where a man came to propose to a woman from Bani Laith, but the woman refused, then the man stated that he was commissioned and ordered by the Messenger of Allah to set the law on property and blood for the area of Bani Laith. Hearing this,

The essence of hadith criticism (*naqd al-ḥadīth*) is to examine the *sanad* and *matn* of hadiths so that their originality can be ascertained.[4] Although this effort has existed since the time of the Prophet, the term *naqd* (criticism) emerged in the second century of Hijra.[5] Al-Qur'an itself does not use the term *naqd* to denote the meaning of criticism, but rather *yamīz*, as seen in the Qur'an Ali 'Imrān (3): 179.

The term *tamyīz* is also used by a hadith scholar of the third century of Hijra. Imam Muslim in his book entitled "al-Tamyīz" contains the methodology of hadith criticism.[6] Another hadith scholar, Ibn Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327 H), in his book on hadith criticism is entitled "al-Jarḥ wa al-Taʼdīl".mentions the term al-naqd wa al-nuqqād. Meanwhile, Ibn Hibbān al-Busṭī (d. 354 H) wrote a book on narrator criticism with the title "Kitab al-Majrūḥīn". Likewise, Imām al-Bukhārī wrote a book on narrator criticism with the title "al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr". Thus, it can be seen that the concept of criticism of 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 has been limited to interrogating the validity of the chain of narrations (*sanad*) of hadith and the voracity of its text (*matn*), with the emphasis on the former.[7] Today's scholarship of hadith criticism, however, has developed significantly. In

a messenger from Bani Laith came to the Messenger of Allah and said this. Then the Messenger of Allah said the enemy of Allah had lied, so he sent a companion to find the man and ordered killed; if he was found alive and burn his body if he was found dead. The Companion found the man had died from being bitten by a snake, then he burned it and conveyed it to the Messenger of Allah. Then he read the hadith above. But, a massive forgery only occurred when there was a slander against the Caliph Usman which then continued when a conflict arose between Ali and Mu'awiyah, and became more widespread when the Muslims were divided into different sects, the Khawarij, Shia and Sunni. Muhammad Abū Zahw, *al-Ḥadīth wa al-Muḥaddithūn* (n.p: al-Maktabah al-Taufiqiyah, n.d), p. 31.

4   The original understanding here is that there is no longer any doubt about the level of truth and validity of the hadith because the sanad and matan are valid. Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn bin Aḥmad al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn ʻInda ʻUlamāʼ al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī* (Beirut: Dār al-Falāq al-Jadīdah, 1983), p. 31.

5   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, accessed 4 Jan 2023.

6   Muhammad Mustafa Azami, *Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature*, p. 48.

7   ʻUthmān ibn ʻAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī, *ʻUlūm al-Ḥadīth Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ*, ed. by Nūr al-Dīn. ʻItr (Beirūt: Dār al-Fikr al-Muʻāṣir, n.d); Suyuti, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī fī Syarḥ Taqrīb al-Nawāwīy*; Muhammad ʻAjjāj al-Khāṭib, *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth*.

addition to the well-established genre of hadith criticism following the traditional approach, the modern scholarship of hadith is characterized by growing interests in developing novel approaches to hadith criticism.[8] In spite of the differences in methodology, contemporary scholarship of hadith criticism seems to agree on the importance of correct understanding in accepting the validity of hadith.

Two approaches are obvious among Muslim scholars with regard to the understanding or interpretation of Islamic sources, one which prefers the textual interpretation and the other which supports the contextual interpretation. These distinct approaches in the understanding of hadith It can also be observed.[9] The question of which approach is more reliable and justified in understanding hadith can only be answered by examining the nature of interpretation of texts. Theoretically, the process of understanding and interpreting a text, including a hadith text, assumes that there are three subjects involved, namely 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 can be described, namely 1) a sign or message or text, 2) an intermediary or an interpreter, and 3) an audience. This triadic structure implicitly contains problems in evaluating a hadith, namely 1) the nature of the text, 2) the methods used to understand the text and, 3) how the understanding and interpretation are determined by the presuppositions and horizons of the audience that is the target of the text.[10] The distinction of time, place, and cultural

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

9 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); Others argue that this discipline emerged in the third century of Hijra. See Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009).

10 "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).

atmosphere between the audience and the text and its creator certainly creates alienation and gaps on the one hand and even a deviation of meaning on the other. The issue of alienation is the main concern of an interpretation theory, so that understanding the text requires a distinction between the meaning of the text and the significance of the context. This, in turn, requires examination of the context behind any text in order for a text to be well understood.

On the basis of the above considerations, this article contributes to the discourse of hadith criticism by proposing a contextual approach as a significant, necessary approach in understanding and interpretation of hadith. The article examines how the validity of a hadith can be determined. It argues that substantive criticism is necessary for proper and acceptable understanding of hadith and in turn for determining the validity of a hadith. The article first discusses hadith criticism and its methods, both with respect to historical validity and content. Then, the article examines how the meaning of hadith is important for hadith studies. The final section is devoted to the significance of contextual understanding of hadith in any critical study of hadith.

B. Hadith Criticism: Historical and Eidetic Criticism

The term hadith criticism (*naqd al-ḥadīth*) etymologically consists of *naqd* and *ḥadīth*. Naqd means sorting, researching, and criticizing, as in the expression *naqada al-darāhima wa ghairahā,* meaning *mayyazahā wa nazarahā li yaʻrifa jayyidahā min radīʼihā*, sorting and criticizing it so that it is known which hadith is correct (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and vice versa. In the usage of hadith scholars, as Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Jawābī notes, *naqd al-ḥadīth* means:

> Determining the quality of a *rāwī* by assessing deficiency or righteousness, through the use of certain terms and by using the reasons that have been determined by hadith scholars, and by examining the text (*matn*) of hadiths whose *sanads* are sound in order to determine the soundness or weakness of the text, and to eliminate ambiguity in the sound hadiths whose meaning seems problematic and to eliminate contradictions in their content by applying profound, accurate standards.[11]

This definition shows that there are two objects of hadith criticism: first, sanad criticism, better known as *al-naqd al-khārijī* or external

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11   Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Jawābī, *Juhūd al-Muḥaddithīn fī Naqd Matn al-Ḥadīth an-Nabawī al-Sharīf*, vols. 4–5 (Tunisia: Muʼassasāt ʻA. Ibn ʻAbd Allāh, 1991), p. 94.

criticism, namely criticism of a series of hadith narrators with certain criteria so that the source of the narration of a hadith is known. This criticism is to investigate the level of validity of *sanad*; and second, *al-naqd al-dākhilī* or internal criticism, namely criticism of the text (*matn*) or the content of a hadith, that is to determine the validity of the text.[12]

In short, criticism of hadith is an attempt to examine the level of validity and originality of *sanad* and *matn*, so that it can be determined which hadith in fact comes from the Prophet and become a reliable source of the Prophet's sunnah, and which is not. Thus, we can conclude that hadith criticism is something important, because by such criticism it can be determined the quality of narrators (*sanad*) and a text, which in the end will determine the quality of a hadith.

From the definition of hadith criticism described above, it can be understood that in order to know the authenticity and validity of a hadith, the chain of narration and the text of the hadith must be examined. According to Hassan Hanafi, the criticism of *sanad* is "historical criticism," while the criticism of *matn* especially those related to the meaning of hadith, is called "eidetic criticism." Apart from these two criticisms, Hanafi proposes another final stage of criticism, namely "practical criticism" or application of the meaning obtained from eidetic criticism into the present context.[13]

Sanad criticism or historical criticism assumes that it is impossible to have a valid understanding if there is no certainty about what is being understood is historically accurate. This plunges people into making mistakes, even if their understanding is correct.[14] The authenticity of religious texts must be tested on the basis of historical criticism, not on belief, nor on theological, philosophical, mystical or spiritual criticism.[15]

Historical studies of hadith show that a 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-shafahī*) and the tradition of practical transmission (*al-naql al-'amalī*) before it entered the stage of textual transmission (*al-naql*

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12 Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn bin Aḥmad al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn 'Inda 'Ulamā' al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī*, p. 31.

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

14 Hasan Hanafi, *Dialog Agama & Revolusi*, p. 1.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

al-kitābī). This is different from the Qur'an because the transmission of the Qur'an is a textual transmission. It is a verbatim revelation, which is ostensibly exactly the same as the first spoken words because it was written immediately after the revelation was under the supervision and correction of the Prophet himself.[16] Thus, the transmission of the Qur'an demands high validation to guarantee the authenticity of the text compared to the transmission of hadith. This means that the authenticity of the Qur'an has been tested historically, while the hadith at this historical level of criticism faces problems regarding its historical authenticity.

The crucial problem that arises in this discourse is why criticism of *sanad* is considered important and hadith scholars seem to treat *sanad* in a special way compared to *matn* of hadith. This attitude held by hadith scholars' is reasonable since criticism of *matn* has meaning and can be carried out after *sanad* criticism was completed. This is because a *matn* of a hadith will never be stated as originating from the Prophet if it is not accompanied by *sanad*. Therefore, in the writer's opinion, it is logical if hadith critics take criticism of *sanad* first and then follow it with the criticism of *matn*.

If *sanad* criticism is commonly known as external criticism (*al-naqd al-khārijī*), *matn* criticism concerns the internal aspects of hadith (*al-naqd al-dākhilī*). 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 which was transmitted to subsequent generations until on the hands of *mukharrij* of hadith, both verbally and substantively.

It can be emphasized that *sanad* criticism finds out whether a narrator is trustworthy, devout, and has a strong memory, and whether or not the *sanad* is continued. Meanwhile, internal criticism determines whether the hadith contains a form of *shāż* or *'illah* which makes the hadith unacceptable (*mardūd*) as a hadith from the Prophet.

Broadly speaking, hadith scholars have developed a methodology of *matn* criticism which consists 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 by the hadith narrators in the form of conceptual expression of the *matn* (*naqd ma'nā al-ḥādīth*).[17] If

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16 Hassan Hanafī, *Dirāsāt Islāmiyyah*, p. 37.

17 For discssuion ofthe distinction between naqd mabnā al-matn and naqd ma'nā al-ḥadīth above, see Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Jawābī, *Juhūd al-Muḥaddithīn fī Naqd Matn al-Ḥadīth an-Nabawī al-Sharīf*.

we compare the concept of *matn* criticism as elaborated by the hadith scholar with Hassan Hanafi's hermeneutical proposal, what Hanafi terms "eidetic criticism" is comparable to the criticism of the meaning of hadith. According to Hanafi, eidetic criticism is intended as a step toward understand religious texts, including hadith, which is carried out through grammatical rules and examination of historical situations.[18]

The term *matn* criticism is understood as an examination of the validity of the *matn* of a hadith which is carried out to separate valid from invalid hadiths. Thus, the *matn* criticism is not intended to deconstruct or destabilize the basis of Islamic teachings by looking for the weaknesses in the Prophet's words, but rather is directed at editorial analysis and meaning in order to establish the validity of a hadith. Because of this, criticism of the *matn* is a positive effort in order to maintain the integrity of the hadith, as well as to have a more accurate understanding of the hadith of the Prophet.

C. Criticism of the Meaning of Hadith

Critical studies of the hadith's *matn*, as mentioned earlier, include both examinaiton of the wording or structure of the text and critical analysis of its meaning. These two components of *matn* criticism have implications for the acceptance or rejection of a *matn*. Criticism of the structure of *matn*, as discussed in the previous section, aims to obtain the authentic composition of the *matn* sentence and the degree of hadith authenticity. The validity of a text and the authenticity of *matn* is a guarantee for the authoritativeness of hadith as well as the groundwork for *istinbāṭ* (deductive inference). Any expression of *matn* is open to a very varied textual understanding (*dalālah*). The dominant textual implications are: *'ibārah al-naṣṣ, 'isyārah al-naṣṣ, dalālah al-naṣṣ, iqtiḍā' al-naṣṣ,* and *mafhūm mukhālafah*.[19] 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 hadith relates to the substance or the concept of the teachings brought by *matn*. Whether a hadith is accepted or rejected will very much depend on how it is understood. A

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18 Hasan Hanafi, *Dialog Agama & Revolusi*, p. 16.

19 'Abd al-Wahhāb Khallāf, *`Ilm Uṣūl al-Fiqh 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.

correct understanding of *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 meaning of hadith is an examination of the substance that a person may understand from the text of a hadith by enabling his or her intellectual potential. Understanding the meaning of hadith has long been part of the discipline of hadith. Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī in *Kitāb Maʾrifah ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth* includes the topic "Maʾrifah fiqh al-ḥadīth" as the twentieth branch of the science of hadith.[20] This topic is considered the ultimate goal or fruit of hadith science. Although it has become the intellectual field of fiqh scholars, according to al-Ḥākim, the scholars of hadith also had the same concern.

The formulation of the meaning of hadith is prominent among hadith scholars and their documentary data are scattered in the books of hadith commentaries. The tendency of commentaries is influenced by cultural background, scientific specialization, school, orientation of the review methodology and others. Hadith commentaries describe a series of activities explaining vocabulary, reviewing the pronunciation of *gharīb*, explaining the significance of sentence structures, estimating the depth of meaning and drawing conclusions about the essence of its teachings.[21]

Efforts to formulate a complete concept of an Islamic doctrinal themes cannot be separated from the perspective of hadith as sources of teachings in Islam. To be accepted as part of these teachings, the substance contained in the hadith must first pass a series of reliability tests. From the perspective of hadith understanding, a hadith cannot be acknowledged and accepted if its substance contradicts other stronger arguments which are recognized by Sharia.

Importantly, the substance of the hadith have been observed to be inconsistent with other arguments. This has long been recognized and studied by scholars. They, especially scholars of legal theories (*uṣūliyyūn*) call this kind of situation in terms of contradicting arguments, *taʿāruḍ* or *taʿādul*.

According to the Islamic legal theorists, *taʿāruḍ* is the existence of two propositions which require the realization of something and at the same time demand the correlary's elimination, on condition that both

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20 Al-Ḥākim an-Naisabūrī, *Kitab Maʾrifah ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth wa Kamiyyah Ajnāsih*, ed. by Aḥmad bin Fāris al-Salūm (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2003), p. 246.

21 Al-Mubarakfūrī, *Tuḥfah al-Aḥwaẕī*, vol. 1 (Kairo: Dār al-Fikr, 1979), pp. 29–30.

have the same level of authority. Meanwhile *ta'ādul* has a more specific meaning than *ta'āruḍ*, because *ta'ādul* used to demand the mutual negation of both arguments.[22]

This contradiction between the arguments of Sharia is considered to occur if the two opposing arguments have the same level of strength. On this basis, it is not considered *ta'āruḍ* if the conflict occurs between strong and weak propositions. The legal contents shown by the two arguments must also be contradictory, for example one justifies while the other forbids. Apart from that, the object and the time when the two arguments were born must also be the same and one.

According to some legal theorists, the existence of these arguments is not a true contradiction. This is because it is impossible for religion to deliberately emphasize two or more contradictory propositions. This contradiction is purely outwardly facing due to the limited ability of the mujtahid to understand the meaning. Other scholars deny the contradiction of the *qaṭ'ī* arguments but not the arguments that are *ẓannī*.[23]

Scholars differ in their handling of the contradiction of this argument.[24] For the Shafi'iyyah scholars, the first step is to reconcile the arguments that are contrary to these (*jam'*). If it is not possible to make a compromise, then look at the history or time of *wurūd* and *ṡubūt*. If this can be known, the texts that came later are said to be abrogated (*mansūkh*) by the texts that came later (*nāsikh*). If the history of the text cannot be ascertained, then another argument is sought that can support one of the two. If it is impossible to practice both at the same time, then an attempt is made to do *tarjīḥ*. However, if it is possible to practice the two arguments that are contradictory even though only from one side, then instead of doing *tarjīḥ*, the two arguments must be equally practiced, because the principle that practicing the argument is more important than ignoring it (*i'māl al-kalām awlā min ihmālihi*). If the latter is also not possible, then it must be chosen (*takhyīr*) from between the two propositions.

As for the Hanafiyah ulama, the first step is to solve conflicting arguments is to do *naskh*, if the history is known. If not, then strive for *tarjīḥ*, so that what is practiced is the argument which is *rājiḥ*. If this step cannot be completed, a compromise should be made (*al-jam'*) wherever possible. If this cannot be accomplished, then both arguments must

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22   Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Jawābī, *Juhūd al-Muḥaddithīn fī Naqd Matn al-Ḥadīth an-Nabawī al-Sharīf*, 4–5: 362–3.

23   *Ibid.*, 4–5: 363–6.

24   *Ibid.*, 4–5: 372–3.

be ignored (al-*tasāqut*)). This method is the opposite of the Shafi'iyyah way which takes the path of *takhyīr*. For Hanafiyyah, takhyīr is not logical to do because it means strengthening a proposition without any supporting arguments (*tarjīḥ bilā murajjiḥ*). When he came to a dead end, the Hanafiyyah ulama suggested resorting to to other arguments of a lower status. For example, when two verses of the Qur'an contradict, one must turn to the guidance of the Sunnah. If no other argument can be found with a lower status, then it must be returned to the more general norm which underlies the two contradictory arguments.

In *Nuzhah al-Naẓar*, Ibn Hajar proposed a method similar to that offered by the Shafi'iyyah ulama. The difference is in the fact that Ibn Hajar chose to take the *tawaqquf* position. This means stopping the analysis and not putting forth either of the two propositions. *Tawaqquf* differs from the Hanafiyyah version of the term *tasāqut*, because the underlying assumption of *tawaqquf* is that it is difficult to perform *tarjīḥ* due to the current interpreter's inability to solve it. Other interpreters may someday reveal its meaning.[25]

Hadith in some cases may not go hand in hand with the evidence of other stronger arguments, either the *naqlī* arguments or the rational arguments. If it is found that there is *ta'āruḍ* between the hadiths and these arguments, the methods and steps that have been formulated by the scholars above can be used as a guide for a more precise understanding of the hadiths. As a guideline, a hadith observance can be accepted and recognized for its authenticity if it corresponds with the Qur'an, other stronger traditions, *sīrah nabawiyyah*, scientific and religious experiences of the generation of Companions, religious behavior of the people of Medina (*'amal ahl al- Madīnah*) - for the Maliki community, and other *shar'i* arguments.

Awareness of the existence of traditions that contradict other arguments and efforts to resolve them have been the concern of scholars for a long time and are even assumed to have existed since the time of the Prophet. 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 these traditions. According to Azami, the companions and scholars of hadith afterward have used two approaches, namely *mu'āraḍah* or *muqāranah* and rational

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25   *Ibid.*, 4–5: 373–4.

criticism (*al-naqd al-'aqlì*).[26] *Mu'āraḍah* is undertaken by cross-reference and comparison with other narrations, such as comparing with the al-Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Meanwhile, with rational criticism, in addition to emphasizing the *sanad* aspects of hadith, scholars also use a basis of reason in seeing their eyes. Consideration of reason used by the *muḥaddith* on several occasions, among others: when hearing the narrative, when delivering the hadith (*taḥdīth*), when evaluating the narrators, and when evaluating the hadith itself.[27]

Many hadith scholars have offered methodological criteria for testing the accuracy of hadith observations and at the same time resolving the contradictions that may arise from hadith. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, for example, in *Kitāb al-Kifāyah fī 'Ilm al-Riwāyah* states that the solitary hadith cannot be accepted if it contradicts reason, the certain instructions of the Quran (*muḥkam*), the sunnah of the Prophet, the practice which is in line with the sunnah, as well as other conclusive arguments.[28]

Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyyah also provided guidelines for the validity of a hadith observation. In *al-Mannār al-Munīf*, he outlined several criteria for the weaknesses of certain hadiths, namely, among others: containing excessive replies and threats that the Messenger of Allah could not say, containing things that are contrary to the senses or too loose and sedated. Also some were considered contrary to the sunnah, showing that the Prophet did something clear in front of all the companions and all agreed to hide them and not narrate them or do not show anything like the words of the Prophet. Additionally the editorial is not similar to the words of the Prophets, contrary to historical reality, more similar to the testimony of a doctor, nullified by strong evidence, contradicting the clear verses of the Quran, or there are a number of indications that indicate its nullification.[29]

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

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26 Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A'ẓamī, *Manhaj al-Naqd 'ind al-Muḥaddithīn: Nash'atuhu wa Tārīkhuhu*, 3rd edition (Riyad: Maktabah al-Kauśar, 1990), p. 50,59,67,81-82; Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Jawābī, *Juhūd al-Muḥaddithīn fī Naqd Matn al-Ḥadīth an-Nabawī al-Sharīf*, 4–5: 489.

27 Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A'ẓamī, *Manhaj al-Naqd 'ind al-Muḥaddithīn: Nash'atuhu wa Tārīkhuhu*, p. 83.

28 Al-Khaṭīb al-Bagdādī, *Kitāb al-Kifāyah fī 'Ilm al-Riwāyah* (Kairo: Maṭba'ah al-Sa'ādah, 1972), p. 432.

29 Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyyah. and 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Guddah, *al-Manār al-Munīf fī al-Ṣaḥīḥ wa al-Ḍa'īf* (Halb: Maktab al-Maṭbū'āt al-Islāmiyyah, 1970).

are basically the result of a reformulation of the existing criteria which many previous scholars stated. Among these are: (1) not violating the explicit instructions of the Qur'an; (2) not violating a hadith that has been recognized for its existence and not violating the sīrah nabawiyyah facts; (3) not violating common sense views, empirical data, and historical facts; and (4) eligible as an expression of the authority of prophecy.[30]

D. The Significance of Understanding Hadith

Judging the validity of the text of hadith, whether it is accepted or not, requires a certain understanding of the text itself. An understanding may have implications for rejection of the text. However, when it is interpreted differently it may make it acceptable.

In Arabic, the word understanding (to understand correctly) is represented by the word *fiqh*. Linguistically, *fiqh* means apprehending something and understanding it.[31] In the hadith scholarship, there are several terms that are usually used in the sense of understanding and coupled with hadith, namely *fiqh, ma'ānī,* and *syarḥ*. Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, for example, uses the term "fiqh al-ḥadīth".[32] M. Syuhudi Ismail wrote a book on the understanding of hadith with the title "Ma'āni al-Ḥadīth."[33] Meanwhile, the term *syarḥ* has long been used by scholars to mean comments and descriptions that explain the contents of the hadith text in a hadith book.

In general, there are two approaches to understanding hadith, textual and contextual approaches. The textual approach rests on the outward meaning of the hadith text, while the contextual approach focuses more on revealing the context surrounding the genesis of a

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30 Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn bin Aḥmad al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn 'Inda 'Ulamā' al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī*, 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 Ḍawābiṭ* (USA: al-Ma'had al-Alamī li al-Fikr al-Islāmī, 1990), pp. 111–50; Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Jawābī, *Juhūd al-Muḥaddithīn fī Naqd Matn al-Ḥadīth an-Nabawī al-Sharīf*, 4–5: 456–94.

31 Louis Ma'lūf, *al-Munjid fī al-Lugah wa al-A'lām* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1986), p. 591.

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

33 M. Syuhudi Ismail, *Hadis Nabi Yang Tekstual Dan Kontekstual*, p. 6,89.

hadith. As seen below, both of these approaches have been found in early Islamic history.

The textual approach in interpreting the hadith requires adherence to the text in a rigid manner and relying on the outward-*ḥarfiyyah* linguistic aspects of a text. Understanding the hadith text from these aspects is basically the first step in the understanding process. However, in the textual approach the understanding of the language is also the end of the process. For textualists, the meaning of hadith is standardized, and its application is universal. More than that, as emphasized by the text itself, the teachings of Islam have been perfect, so that all the problems of the life of the people have been regulated in it. Therefore, there is no need for elaboration, clarification or justification that is just based on reason.[34]

Textualists adhere to the referential theory of meaning, meaning that the meaning of a word is in the object 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, the text of the hadith uses Arabic, so if someone can find out the use of the language used by the hadith by referring to linguistic evidence then he may be able to ascertain its meaning. Second, objectivity can be achieved if one refers to historical history such as the views of Companions or Followers.[35] Because of this belief in the objectivity of meaning, textualists tend to be rigid in understanding. These scholars attempt to limit the meaning of the text to one meaning and deny the possibility of other meanings from the text.

The textual approach is guided by the principle that a text can be interpreted from the general form of the pronunciation and not from the specific context that caused its birth (*al-ʿibrah bi-ʾumūm al-lafẓ lā bi-khuṣūṣ al-sabab*).[36] Therefore, text understanding is uprooted from its socio-historical context.

An understanding that rests on the linguistic aspects of this text has appeared even since the time of the Prophet. In a hadith narrated by al-Bukhārī and quite popular among scholars of Islamic law, the Holy

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34 The explanation of the views of the textualists regarding hadith refers to the similar explanation of the textualists' views in Qurʾanic interpretation. See Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qurʾan*, p. 3,55-56.

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 103–4.

36 Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī Shaukānī, *Irshād al-Fuḥūl ilā Taḥqīq al-Ḥaqq min ʿIlm al-Uṣūl* (Beirūt: Dār al-Fikr, n.d), pp. 133–5.

Prophet forbade his companions to pray *'Aṣr* except in the settlements of Banī Quraiẓah. By relying on the sounds of the hadith text, not a few companions did the Aṣr prayer after arriving at Banī Quraiẓah even though the Aṣr prayer time had passed.[37]

Among jurists, the *Ẓāhiriyyah* school, followers of Dāwud al-Ẓāhirī, is known as a school of legal thought that limits itself to textual interpretation. The meaning of the text (hadith) can only be captured from its outward meaning. One of the main followers of this school, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456 H) made the sound of the text (*naṣṣ*) from both the Qur'an and hadith as a source of Islamic teachings. He even rejected attempts to rationalize the text based on the qiyas method, as is generally accepted among Sunni scholars.[38]

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

For supporters of contextual understanding, contextual understanding of the Prophet's hadith is considered important because in understanding a hadith in general, scholars tend to focus on *riwāyah* data, emphasizing grammatical commentary with reference to the previous people's mindset. This condition is admittedly problematic if the thoughts put forward by previous scholars are understood as something final and dogmatic. It must be understood that their thoughts emerge within a certain time and space framework, and with the changing context of space and time, it is naive to impose this as a timeless essential truth.[39]

In contrast to the textual understanding model, contextualists view that in the understanding of hadith there are inherent subjective and dynamic elements that underlie every effort to understand. Therefore, it becomes difficult to accept if the meaning of the text is then considered by an interpreter to be established and objective. In the contextualist view, an interpreter cannot approach the text without bringing with him his

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37 Muḥammad Abū al-Fatḥ al-Bayānūnī, *Dirāsāt fī al-Ikhtilāfāt al-Fiqhiyyah* (Riyad: Dār al-Salām, 1983), pp. 46–7.

38 Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *Ibn Ḥazm: Ḥayātuhu wa 'Aṣruhu – Arā'uhu wa Fiqhuhu* (Kairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1978), p. 255.

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

experiences, values, beliefs and prejudices. He is like a historian, because a hadith is a historical document that demands knowledge of a certain period. In giving meaning to the historical record, he departs from his unique experience and world view which is then seen from the results of his understanding. With this in mind, contextualists make it impossible for a truly objective understanding.[40]

Contextualists believe that an understanding that only relies on the external aspects of the text will only dwarf the text itself. Hadith texts were not born in a vacuum; it appears in a certain time and situation. Therefore, a complete understanding of the text requires knowledge of the entire context in which it appeared. Contextualists emphasize the sociohistorical context of the hadith observations. They argue that the understanding of hadith must be in the light of its political, social, historical, cultural and economic context, in which the contents of the hadith are uttered, interpreted and applied.

The sociohistorical context provides an understanding of the relationship between the teachings contained in the observations of the hadith and the reasons for the introduction of these teachings in the Hijaz in the 7th century AD. 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 that existed in the Hijaz at that time.

In the scientific tradition, a contextual approach is evident in the theory of *asbāb al-wurūd*. In the theory of *asbāb wurūd al-ḥadīth*, there are always various backgrounds and causes of events, situations and individual or social psychological conditions that led to the birth of a hadith. This is because, as with the Qur'an, the Prophet's hadith arose through his words and deeds to answer questions and resolve problems that occurred and were faced by the Arab community, especially as the first object of the Prophet's message. Based on this theory, the principle of contextual understanding focuses more on the specific context that gave rise to the text, and not on the external form and generality of the text (*al-'ibrah bi- khuṣūṣ al-sabab lā bi'umūm al-lafẓ*).[41] Through this method, a person who studies hadith finds the meaning of the hadith and its significance for the historical needs of the interpreter so that he can find

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40 Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, pp. 103–4.

41 Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī Shaukānī, *Irshād al-Fuḥūl ilā Taḥqīq al-Ḥaqq min ʿIlm al-Uṣūl*, pp. 133–5.

solutions to the problems faced and is able to reflect the benefits which are the main objectives of the Sharia.[42]

However, the concept of *asbāb al-wurūd* has striking limitations. In addition to its many conflicting origins, its historical accuracy is also questionable. Therefore, in addition to this concept, adequate anthropological knowledge is needed so that our knowledge of the sociohistorical context at that time will be clearer.

The roots of the contextual approach to hadith can be found from the first century of Hijra. The criticism of the hadith history that is often done by 'Aisha, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, is an attempt to interpret the hadith history critically and contextually. As when responding to the hadith conveyed by Abū Hurairah that "actually the corpse will be tortured because of the crying of his family," 'Aisha, based on the reason for the hadith, said that Abū Hurairah had misunderstood the Prophet's words.[43]

E. Contextual Understanding

Contextual understanding as expressed in the previous paragraph rests on the idea that the correct understanding of a hadith becomes essential in order to have hadith relevant so that it has become a living discourse and able to dialogue with the changing situation of the times. Hadith texts that were born centuries ago were brought back in a completely different situation and context from the time when the hadith appeared. This is where the hadith intersects with contextualization efforts. Because, as the second source after the Qur'an which contains flexibility and dynamic elasticity, hadith must always be integrated with the dynamics of human life throughout the ages.

The essence of the hadith text is that it is the result of the narrators' record and understanding of what was said, done, and w the behavior of the Prophet. The Prophet is believed to be the creator or author. For the majority of Muslims what originates from the Prophet in essence comes from God and is revelation. The methods used to understand the hadith will depend on the results of a study of the three components of hadith, namely: a study of authenticity based on the continuity of sanad (*ittiṣāl*

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42 Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kaifa Nata'āmal ma'a al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyah, Ma'ālim wa Ḍawābiṭ*, p. 125.

43 On 'Aisha's criticism, see Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn bin Aḥmad al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn 'Inda 'Ulamā' al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī*, pp. 85–103.

al-sanad), a study of the validity of the text based on the observational criticism of various aspects, including the aspect of asbāb wurūd al-ḥadīth, tawārīkh al-mutūn and various historical events, both directly and indirectly, are related to the emergence of a hadith observation.

In interpreting hadith, as argued earlier, the meaning of the text and the significance of the context should be distinguished. This can be made by employing a critical historical-contextual analogy between the Arab world during the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslim ummah living in completely different times and regions. This requires examination of historical and cultural verification of every hadith text.

Contextual understanding has attracted the theoretical attention of scholars. Many scholars have long seen the significance of referring to the socio-historical context of a hadith. The concept of asbāb wurūd in hadith study as mentioned earlier shows this tendency. More than that, the scholars have offered a theoretical framework for how a contextual understanding of hadith can be accounted for.

The fundamental criteria for responsible contextual understanding work, of course, relates to the subject who carries out the understanding. Muslim legal theorists have long discussed and debated the criteria the subject should have when discussing the terms of a mujtahid. Al-Shāṭibī, for example, outlines two main criteria for an interpreter (mujtahid), perfect knowledge of the objectives of shari'ah (maqāṣid al-sharī'ah) and 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, know Islamic legal theory, hadiths on legal issues, and so on.[44] A person who cannot fulfill the requirements referred to, then he is not authorized or has no authority in performing ijtihad.

In Khaled Abou El Fadl's view, for an Islamic scholar to be accepted authoritatively, they must meet five criteria of authority, including honesty, sincerity, comprehensiveness, rationality, and self-control.[45] The fulfillment of these five criteria will determine whether one's understanding of the hadith, for example, can be considered authoritative or not. If all five are fulfilled, then the effort to understand them will be trusted and considered authorized. However, if he expects

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44   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 az-Zuḥailī, Uṣūl al-Fiqh al-Islāmiī, vol. 2 (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1986), pp. 1043–51.

45   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.

others to follow his understanding and one of these criteria is not met, then he has acted arbitrarily (authoritarian).

With regard to the understanding of the hadith, many Muslim scholars have offered methods and ways of understanding a hadith through a contextual approach appropriately and responsibly. Below are some suggestions offered by Muslim scholars regarding this matter.

One scholar who pioneered this effort was Imam al-Qarāfī, a jurist from the Maliki school of thought. He distinguised the roles and functions of the Prophet, whether as the great imam, a judge or mufti.[46] On that basis, when the Prophet said or did something, it was necessary to carry out some analysis. Among other things, to whom was the utterance addressed, under what circumstances did the Prophet pronounce it, and in what capacity did the Prophet speak it, whether as a person of the Prophet, or as a community leader.

Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dahlāwī in *al-Ḥujjah al-Bālighah* classified the traditions of the Prophet. According to him, hadiths can be divided into traditions relating to the delivery of treatises and traditions that are not related to treatises.[47] The hadiths that are meant for *tablīgh al-risālah* include knowledge of the afterlife, the supernatural, the provisions of the Sharia, issues of worship, universal wisdom, and benefits, as well as the virtues of charity. The hadiths that are not included in the framework of the *risālah* include the Prophet's actions outside of worship on the basis of adjustments to custom, the Prophet's actions which were adjusted to the particular benefit at that time and did not bind the people as a whole, as well as his decisions in his capacity as a judge. Al-Qāsimī in *Qawā'id al-Taḥdīth* honestly following al-Dahlāwī's classification.[48]

Maḥmūd Shaltūt in his description of the hadith in *al-Islām 'Aqīdah wa Sharī'ah* refers to the division of the Prophet's functions as proposed by al-Qarāfī above. He then drew a distinction between the traditions of the Prophet which have the value of sharia (*sunnah tasyrī'iyyah*) and those that have no legal implications (*sunnah ghair tasyrī'iyyah*).[49]

In the 1990s, Muḥammad al-Gazālī was considered to have made a big breakthrough in the study of traditional hadith, because of his radical

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

47 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.

48 Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Qawā'id al-Taḥdīth min Funūn Muṣṭalaḥ al- al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 269–70.

49 Maḥmūd Shaltūt, *al-Islām 'Aqīdah wa Shrī'ah* (Kuwait: Dār al-Qalam, 1990).

efforts in criticizing hadith observations and at the same time providing a new understanding of it. There were many valid hadiths that he rejected because according to him their texts were contrary to the demands of the Quran, the sunnah which was more authentic and more valid, historical evidence or scientific knowledge. In his criticism, al-Gazālī smoothly explores the historical context of a hadith. For example, when criticizing a hadith about the failure that will befall a society led by a woman, he requires that the understanding of the hadith be returned to its context (sabab al-wurūd). On such basis, in al-Gazālī's understanding, the hadith was specifically intended to respond to the political conditions in Persia at that time and could not be generalized.[50]

Apart from emphasizing the historical context of the genesis of hadith, al-Gazālī also shows the importance of differentiating the context and conditions of the Prophet's time and the present. The understanding of the Quran and also the hadiths cannot avoid contextualization; the context and current benefits must be considered in reinterpreting the religious texts. In this context also, al-Gazālī differentiates between religious teachings which are only a means and those that become goals, or between those that change and are permanent.[51]

In his efforts to interpret the hadith contextually, Yūsuf al-Qarāḍāwī stated that in order to interpret the hadith correctly, any understanding must be taken in the light of the context that surrounds the emergence of a hadith and its purpose (maqāṣid). The purpose or reason ('illah) for the issuance of the hadith can be known either through the text itself, or inferential, or through the event in which it was born. With an analysis like this it is very possible that the researcher will find hadiths which are casuistic solutions and are based on considerations of benefit which are limited by the time and place at that time. In fact, according to al-Qarāḍāwī, unlike the Qur'an, there were quite a few hadiths which were basically solutions to specific problems at that time.[52]

For al-Qarāḍāwī, an interpreter of hadiths must use a historical study of the true meaning of hadith recitations at the time the hadith

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50   Syaikh Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Studi Kritis atas Hadis Nabi saw: Antra Pemahaman Tekstual dan Kontekstual*, pp. 64–7; Suryadi, *Metode Kontemporer Memahami Hadis Nabi*.

51   Syaikh Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Studi Kritis atas Hadis Nabi saw: Antra Pemahaman Tekstual dan Kontekstual*, pp. 163–70.

52   Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kaifa Nata'āmal ma'a al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyah, Ma'ālim wa Ḍawābiṭṭ*, pp. 145–6.

in question appeared and the shifts in meaning that occurred following it. This is important because it shows that the meaning of the hadith pronunciation is very possible to change from one period to another from one cultural environment to another.[53]

Like Muḥammad al-Gazālī, Yūsuf al-Qarāḍāwī also states that a hadith contains two dimensions, an instrumental (*wasīlah*) and an essential dimension (*ghāyah*). The first one is clearly very vulnerable to the attraction of changing space and time so that it is ephmeral, while the second is permanent. When an interpreter is unable to distinguish between these two dimensions, then he will be trapped by this conundrum.[54]

A (neo-)modernist Muslim intellectual, Fazlur Rahman, in his study, offered radical conclusions regarding the essence of hadith and sunnah and their understanding. According to him, in broad terms the Prophet's sunnah is more appropriate if it is seen as a general umbrella concept than that it has a special content which is absolutely specific. The reason is that theoretically it can be concluded directly from the fact that sunnah is a behavioral term. Therefore, in practice, there are no two cases that have completely the same situational background morally, psychologically, and materially, so the sunnah must be able to be interpreted and adapted. The Sunnah of the Holy Prophet, said Rahman, is more of a pointer in a direction than a series of rules that have been determined with certainty.[55] This is in accordance with the character of Islam as a religion that prioritizes ethics and morals that are more dynamic and elastic.

Based on these assumptions, Fazlur Rahman propounded his theory of the situational interpretation of hadith. He emphasized that the need of Muslims today is to re-evaluate the various elements in the hadith and their perfect reinterpretation in accordance with the social-moral conditions that have changed in the present. This can only be done through a historical study of the hadith by reducing it to a living sunnah and by clearly distinguishing the real values it contains from its situational background. The traditions, including in this case the legal traditions, must be interpreted according to their proper historical perspective and according to their proper function in their clear historical context. The legal traditions, continued Rahman, must be viewed as a problem that must be reviewed and not seen as a ready-made law that can be directly

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53 *Ibid.*, p. 179.
54 *Ibid.*, p. 139.
55 Fazlur Rahman, *Islam Methodology in History* (Karachi: Central Institute of Islamic Research, 1965), p. 12.

used.[56]

The situational interpretation through historical study in order to evolve the hadiths into this "living sunnah" will enable us to deduce the norms from it for ourselves through an adequate ethical theory and then the re-establishment of new laws from the theory. This historical study, according to Rahman, is very important, because only by understanding the background which consists of things that are certain to be known about the Prophet and early Muslims (besides the al-Qur'an), we can interpret the hadith.[57] With principles like these, Rahman rejected Ibn Taimiyah's textual "return to the Qur'an and Sunnah" invitation which became a central issue for many reform movements. Rahman rejects the understanding of hadith only by using the historical perspective. According to him, the hadiths as a legacy of the past must be understood using a present perspective. In this connection Rahman firmly states:

> But this means not just a simple "return" to the Qur'an and the sunnah as they were acted in the past but a true understanding of them that would give us guidance today. A simple return to the past is, off course a return to the graves.[58]

These descriptions indicate that the situational interpretation is strategic. That is to understand the hadith Prophet's text and then understand its situational background, which concerns the situation of the Prophet and society during the Prophet's period in general, including in this case asbāb al-wurūd. This must also address the relevant Qur'anic instructions. From this one can understand and distinguish the real values or legal objectives (ratio-legis) from the legal specifications, and thus the ideal moral principles of the hadith can be formulated.

Hassan Hanafi, when explaining the stage of eidetic criticism in his hermeneutics, said that understanding the text, including hadith, must be performed in the original language. This analysis is carried out according to grammatical rules and historical situations. According to him, it is impossible to imagine any understanding that predates the rules of grammar. On this basis, Hanafi requires starting a process of understanding texts through linguistic studies. This study, for example, concerns the form of words and the meaning of words; whether he uses a verb, a noun, the form amr or nahy, or distinguishes it from the true meaning and metaphorical meaning, the meaning of 'ām or

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56 *Ibid.*, pp. 77–8.
57 *Ibid.*, pp. 80–1.
58 *Ibid.*, p. 143.

khāṣṣ and so on; also, a study of language style. These various Hanafi linguistic recitation methods clearly refer to various *al-qawā'id al-uṣūliyyah al-lughawiyyah* which are extensively reviewed and discussed by scholars in the *uṣūl al-fiqh* literature.[59] In addition, efforts to understand this must also consider other hadith texts that have a theme that is relevant to the hadith theme in question in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding. In addition, confirmation of the meaning is also acquired through the instructions of the Qur'an.

In an effort to understand the text of the hadith, Hanafi emphasizes the significance of, in addition to the linguistic aspects, historical situations, both the situation in the presence of the text or the historical situation that gave birth to the text. In this stage, the meaning or meaning of a statement is understood by studying the reality, situation or historical problem in which the statement of a hadith appears. In other words, understanding the hadith is a response to the general situation of the people of the Prophet's period as well as to specific situations.

As in Fazlur Rahman's dualist movement, Hanafi also demands that the understanding of the text in accordance with its socio-historical context be forwarded to the generalization stage. The meanings obtained based on linguistic analysis and historical situations are generalized by transforming the universal meaning included in the hadith, or - borrowing the meaning of Fazlur Rahman - we find the "moral ideal" that a hadith text manifests. This is because every statement of the Prophet must be assumed, has a moral-social purpose that is universal. Thus, at this stage of generalization, an interpreter must be able to find universal rational constructs as the essence and essence of the meaning of a hadith text.[60]

In his book, Textual and Contextual Hadiths of the Prophet, M. Syuhudi Ismail, in addition to emphasizing the significance of contextual understanding, offers criteria so that this contextual understanding can be applied appropriately. According to him, in interpreting the hadith it is important to consider aspects that are closely related to the Prophet and the context behind or that causes the birth of the hadith. For him, the contextual understanding of hadith is taken if there is a strong indication behind the text of the hadith not to apply textual understanding. With this assumption, in M. Syuhudi Ismail's view, not all hadiths must be interpreted contextually. There are hadith observations that are quite

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59   Hasan Hanafi, *Dialog Agama & Revolusi*, pp. 16–20.

60   *Ibid.*, pp. 21–2; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 6–7.

interpreted textually and do not require contextual understanding, in addition there are hadith observations that require both textual and contextual approaches.[61] Even though in the end what is used is a textual understanding, this can only be taken after considering all the contexts surrounding a hadith that will be interpreted. All these understandings, both textual and contextual, are intended to reveal the character of Islamic teachings, both universal, temporal and local.[62]

From the above paragraphs it can be seen how Muslim scholars and require the Prophet's hadith, although not entirely, to be understood contextually. In addition, it is also seen how they provide methods and guidelines for contextual understanding that are more accountable so that they do not slip into excessive ideology and subjectivism.

F.   From Hadith Understanding to Practical Criticism

After efforts to understand the hadith text from the linguistic angle, its socio-historical context and universal moral meaning, the next step in understanding hadith relates to how the results of this understanding are embodied in the present context. In the Hassan Hanafi nomenclature, this step is called practical criticism. It is an effort to introduce the meaning of religious texts into human life today.[63]

In Islamic legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), the effort to embed the meaning of the text into the present situation and context is called ijtihad in applying law in certain cases (*taṭbīq or taḥqīq*).[64] Intellectual work in this area 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 understanding into concrete events. This stage is included as an activity of ijtihad, because in this application process where one must do everything in his or her power to find the relevance of the meaning obtained through *istinbāṭ* in certain events, whether this incident is included in it or not, whether the legal provisions as a result of understanding the text can be applied to the case or not. For this reason, at this stage, a person is required to really understand the content of the text and also know the details of the events and the

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61   M. Syuhudi Ismail, *Hadis Nabi Yang Tekstual Dan Kontekstual*, p. 6,89.

62   *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

63   Hasan Hanafi, *Dialog Agama & Revolusi*, pp. 22–5.

64   Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī'ah*, 4: 235–7; Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, p. 379.

social context that surrounds them.[65]

At the stage of practical criticism of the understanding of hadith, universal rational constructs or universal moral-social objectives obtained from the generalization process at the previous stage (eidetic criticism) are projected onto the reality of contemporary life so that they have practical meaning for solving contemporary social problems. He must be embodied into a concrete socio-historical context in the present. In the construct of his theory of double movements, practical criticism can be matched with Rahman's second movement. In this second movement, the results of understanding the text in the first movement are faced with today's realities.

In this regard, one must conduct a careful study of the current situation and analysis of the various realities, so that we can assess the current situation and change its conditions as needed and determine new priorities to be able to implement new hadith values as well. In the present and historical reality analysis stage, it is clear that interdisciplinary involvement is needed. This means that at that point the presence or at least confirmation of social, political, economic, and other experts is very important.

If 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 generalization - hence, this process is inductive in nature - then practical criticism moves from the past to the present historical reality by trying to projecting and growing back universal rational constructs or universal moral-social values to the present socio-historical realities, so that this process has a deductive character. The interpretation and understanding of hadith with an approach like this will clearly give birth to a new, dynamic and creative discourse of hadith, so that the norms and ideals of the Prophet's sunnah can be realized progressively in a variety of phenomena and social environments, therefore he can always seek new and fresh forms for his self-realization. Thus, the hadith can no longer be a static discourse but a living sunnah.

G. Concluding Remarks

In the previous discussion, the article demonstrates the significance of understanding in hadith criticism and how it is necessary in determining the validity of hadith. This is an additional method to the well-established

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65   Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 7.

methodology of hadith criticism. Traditionally, hadith criticism consists of *sanad* criticism or external, historical criticism, that is criticism to investigate the level of validity of chains of narrators, and *matn* criticism or internal, eidetic criticism, that is criticism of the text or the content of a hadith. This latter criticism includes both criticism 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*.

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

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