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A Multi-Tiered Matn Criticism Model on Gender-Related Hadiths: Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī and Rashīd Riḍā in Comparison

Sebuah Model Kritik Matan Multi-Tiered pada Hadis-Hadis Relasi – Gender: Studi Komparatif Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī dan Rashīd Riḍā

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Abstract

Amid growing debates on gender equality in Muslim societies, hadiths concerning women's leadership and social relations remain contested sources of religious authority. This study aims to comparatively examine how traditionalist and reformist scholars apply *naqd al-matn* (textual criticism) to gender-related hadiths. Using a qualitative library research design and comparative content analysis, the study analyzes the approaches of Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī and Rashīd Riḍā toward several frequently debated hadiths on women's leadership, *nāqisāt 'aql wa dīn*, and marital relations. The findings reveal that the primary difference between both approaches does not lie in the acceptance of hadith authenticity, but in their underlying epistemological assumptions. Ibn Hajar employs textual harmonization to preserve the coherence of the hadith tradition, whereas Riḍā uses contextual and Qur'anic ethical considerations to reconstruct normative meanings. This study highlights the epistemological tensions shaping contemporary hadith interpretation and gender discourse.

Keywords: Matn Criticism; Gender; Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī; Rashīd Riḍā; Social Relations

Abstrak

Di tengah perdebatan yang semakin memanas mengenai kesetaraan gender dalam masyarakat Muslim, hadis-hadis yang berkaitan dengan kepemimpinan perempuan dan hubungan sosial tetap menjadi sumber otoritas keagamaan yang kontroversial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji secara komparatif bagaimana para ulama tradisional dan reformis menerapkan *naqd al-matn* (kritik teks) terhadap hadis-hadis yang berkaitan dengan gender. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian perpustakaan kualitatif dan analisis isi komparatif, penelitian ini menganalisis pendekatan Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī dan Rashīd Riḍā terhadap beberapa hadis yang sering diperdebatkan mengenai kepemimpinan perempuan, *nāqisāt 'aql wa dīn*, dan hubungan perkawinan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perbedaan utama antara kedua pendekatan tersebut tidak terletak pada penerimaan keaslian hadis, melainkan pada asumsi epistemologis yang mendasarinya. Ibn Hajar menggunakan harmonisasi teks untuk menjaga koherensi tradisi hadis, sedangkan Riḍā menggunakan pertimbangan kontekstual dan etika Al-Qur'an untuk merekonstruksi makna normatif. Penelitian ini menyoroti ketegangan epistemologis yang membentuk penafsiran hadis kontemporer dan wacana gender.

Kata Kunci: Kritik Matan; Gender; Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī; Rashīd Riḍā; Hubungan Sosial



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INTRODUCTION

The debate surrounding *ḥadīths* related to gender and social relations has become one of the most dynamic issues in contemporary Islamic discourse. Across various Muslim-majority countries, *ḥadīths* concerning women's leadership, marital relations, *qiwāmah*, and *ḥadīths* on *nāqisāt 'aql wa dīn* continue to serve as references in shaping social norms as well as public policies concerning women.¹ The UN Women report indicates that disparities in women's political participation persist in many Muslim-majority countries, while numerous studies affirm that religious legitimacy is frequently invoked to preserve hierarchical gender relations.² At the same time, the expansion of digital media has broadened the space for debate regarding the validity and relevance of these *ḥadīths*, resulting in conflicting interpretations between traditionalist and reformist groups. In Indonesia, this phenomenon is reflected in the growing discourse on gender equality promoted by the *Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia* (KUPI), alongside critical responses from conservative scholars who continue to uphold classical understandings of gender-related *ḥadīths*. This situation demonstrates that the issue of gender-related *ḥadīths* is no longer confined to academic circles but has become a social issue influencing the construction of social relations, education, family law, and public policy across contemporary Muslim societies.³

Studies on gender-related *ḥadīths* have developed through various approaches, producing diverse conclusions. Reformist scholars such as Fatima Mernissi, Amina Wadud, and Asma Barlas have sought to reassess *ḥadīths* considered to support the subordination of women through historical, hermeneutical, and contextual approaches.⁴ In contrast, traditionalist scholars continue to uphold the validity of these *ḥadīths* by referring to the classical methodology of *ḥadīths* criticism as elaborated in the works of Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, and al-Adlabī.⁵ Nevertheless, most previous studies have focused primarily on gender interpretation or the intellectual thought of particular scholars rather than on a systematic comparison of how each group applies the principles of *naqd al-matn* to the same *ḥadīths*. Jonathan A. C. Brown explains that *matn* criticism has in fact been an integral component of the *ḥadīths* scholarly tradition; however, its application to modern gender studies has rarely been examined through a comparative framework.⁶ Consequently, there remains a research gap in the absence of a systematic comparative study employing identical standards of *matn* criticism to assess the differences between traditionalist and reformist approaches toward gender-related *ḥadīths* and social relations.

Based on this social reality and the existing gap in the literature, this study aims to comparatively analyze the application of *matn* criticism (*naqd al-matn*) by two major tendencies in contemporary *ḥadīths* studies—namely the traditionalist and reformist approaches—to *ḥadīths*

1 Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Islam and Gender Justice, in *The New Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, ed. Miranda Fricker et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 312–326.

2 UN Women, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2024*, (New York: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2024), 18–24, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications>.

3 Margot Badran, *Gender and Islam in Global Context*, (London: Routledge, 2019), 35–41.

4 Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1991), 49–69.

5 Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Aḥmad al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn 'inda 'Ulama' al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1983), 238–260.

6 Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, (London: Oneworld Publications, 2017), 211–235.

related to gender and social relations. Specifically, this research seeks to identify how both approaches employ the criteria of *matn* criticism in evaluating *ḥadīths* concerning women's leadership, marital relations, *qiwāmah*, and other *ḥadīths* that frequently become subjects of debate. Furthermore, this study aims to determine whether the differences in conclusions reached by these two groups stem from methodological differences in applying the same evaluative criteria or rather from more fundamental epistemological assumptions. By employing the framework of *matn* criticism formulated by al-Adlabī and further developed within contemporary *ḥadīths* studies, this research is expected to demonstrate the relationship between classical *ḥadīths* methodology and the intellectual demands of modernity. The findings are expected not only to contribute to the advancement of contemporary *ḥadīths* studies but also to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics underlying the production of religious authority in the continually contested issues of gender within modern Muslim societies.

This study is built upon the assumption that the differences between traditionalist and reformist perspectives on gender-related *ḥadīths* are not merely the result of divergent interpretations of *ḥadīth* texts but are closely associated with the epistemological constructions underlying the process of *matn* criticism itself. *Matn* criticism never takes place within a completely neutral space because judgments concerning rationality, historical context, the universal values of the Qur'an, and social realities are always shaped by the interpreter's intellectual horizon. Therefore, although both groups claim to employ valid principles of *ḥadīth* criticism, divergent conclusions may arise due to differences in determining the authority of reason, the position of historical context, and the relationship between *ḥadīth* texts and the normative values of Islam. This study further assumes that modernity has introduced new challenges to the methodology of classical *ḥadīth* criticism, particularly when *ḥadīths* intersect with issues of women's rights, social equality, and gender justice. Within this context, the reformist and traditionalist approaches are viewed not as two entirely opposing poles but rather as two distinct epistemological responses to the same issue. Based on these assumptions, this research seeks to investigate the methodological roots of their differences more objectively and systematically.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design using a library research approach with a comparative study design. The qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on understanding, interpreting, and analyzing the methodological construction of *naqd al-matn* developed by the two major tendencies in contemporary *ḥadīth* studies, namely the traditionalist and reformist schools. Meanwhile, the comparative design is employed to identify the similarities, differences, and epistemological implications arising from the application of *matn* criticism to *ḥadīths* concerning gender and social relations. This study does not seek to measure phenomena statistically; rather, it explores the arguments, methodological principles, and interpretive frameworks employed by each group in assessing the validity and relevance of *ḥadīths*.

The research data consist of both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include classical and contemporary works that directly discuss *ḥadīth matn* criticism, such as *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn 'inda 'Ulamā' al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī* by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Adlabī, *al-Kifāyah fī 'Ilm al-Riwāyah* by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Fath al-Bārī* by Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, as well as the principal *ḥadīth* collections, including *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. In addition, this study utilizes the works of reformist scholars who have extensively examined gender-related *ḥadīths*, including Fatima Mernissi, Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā. Secondary data were obtained from reputable journal articles, academic books, dissertations, and previous studies addressing *ḥadīth* criticism, Islamic hermeneutics, gender studies, and

contemporary methodologies for understanding *ḥadīths*. The combined use of primary and secondary sources is intended to provide a comprehensive understanding of the development of *matn* criticism from the classical to the modern period.

Data were collected through documentation techniques by tracing, identifying, and cataloguing literature relevant to the research topic. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis combined with a comparative analysis approach. In the initial stage, data reduction was performed by selecting materials directly related to the principles of *matn* criticism and gender issues. Subsequently, the data were categorized according to the indicators of *matn* criticism formulated by *ḥadīth* scholars, including the conformity of *ḥadīths* with the Qur'an, their consistency with historical facts, their compatibility with reason, and their coherence with the general principles of the *sharī'ah*. A comparative analysis was then undertaken to examine how the traditionalist and reformist groups applied these indicators to the same *ḥadīths*. The findings of the comparison were subsequently interpreted through the epistemological framework of *ḥadīth* studies to explain the factors underlying the differences in their conclusions. This analytical procedure enables the researcher to identify whether such differences originate from the methodology of *matn* criticism itself or from the underlying epistemological assumptions.

To ensure the validity of the study, source triangulation was employed by comparing information derived from classical *ḥadīth* collections, the works of *ḥadīth* scholars, and contemporary academic studies. In addition, cross-checking was conducted on various interpretations found within both the traditionalist and reformist literature to minimize representational bias. The reliability of the analysis was further strengthened through the consistent application of a theoretical framework and by evaluating arguments according to the standards of *ḥadīth* criticism accepted within the Islamic scholarly tradition. Consequently, the interpretations produced are not merely descriptive but are also supported by a sound methodological foundation that is academically accountable.

This study is limited to the analysis of *matn* criticism concerning *ḥadīths* related to gender and social relations that frequently become subjects of debate in contemporary Islamic studies. The scope of the research does not encompass all aspects of *isnād* criticism or every *ḥadīth* concerning women; rather, it focuses exclusively on *ḥadīths* directly relevant to issues of women's leadership, family relations, social authority, and gender construction. Furthermore, the study places greater emphasis on methodological analysis than on legal derivation (*istinbāt al-aḥkām*). The selection of the five *ḥadīths* examined in this study—namely the *ḥadīth* on women's leadership (*lan yufliḥa qawmun wallaw amrahum imra'ah*), the *ḥadīth* of *nāqīṣāt 'aql wa dīn*, the *ḥadīth* of *lawlā Hawwā'*, the *ḥadīth al-mar'ah 'awrah*, and the *ḥadīth* concerning marital relations—was based on three criteria of representativeness. First, these five *ḥadīths* are the ones most frequently cited in contemporary debates on gender among both academics and Muslim communities. Second, each *ḥadīth* represents a distinct dimension of gender relations in Islam: public leadership, intellectual and religious capacity, the narrative origin of women, women's social mobility, and domestic relations. Third, both Ibn Ḥajar in *Fath al-Bārī* and Riḍā in *Majallat al-Manār* (*Tafsīr al-Manār*) explicitly discuss these five *ḥadīths*, thereby enabling a direct comparison based on primary sources. Furthermore, it should be transparently acknowledged that the analysis of these five *ḥadīths* presented in Table 1 is based on a direct reading of *Fath al-Bārī* (Dār al-Ma'rifah edition, 2001), *Majallat al-Manār* (Vol. 8, 1905), and *Tafsīr al-Manār* (al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah edition, 1990), as cited in the accompanying footnotes. Accordingly, the findings of this study are not intended to determine the normative correctness of either approach but rather to explain the characteristics, strengths, and limitations of each approach in responding to the challenges of modernity. These limitations are necessary to ensure that the study remains focused, in-depth, and aligned with its stated research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Epistemological Mapping of Naqd al-Matn: Between Muḥaddithūn, Uṣūliyyūn, and Muslim Feminists

The debate surrounding *naqd al-matn* fundamentally concerns not only the techniques of *ḥadīth* verification but also the epistemological question of who possesses the authority to assess the validity of a transmitted report and according to what standards such an assessment should be conducted.⁷ In the classical literature, *ḥadīth* scholars developed a set of criteria for evaluating the *matn*, ranging from its conformity with the Qur'an, stronger *ḥadīths*, historical facts, and rational considerations to its consistency with the characteristics of Prophetic language.⁸ Al-Adlabī demonstrates that *matn* criticism was not a secondary activity undertaken only after *isnād* criticism had been completed; rather, it constituted an integral component of the *ḥadīth* verification process that had been practiced since the earliest generations of *muḥaddithūn*.⁹ Similar findings are presented by al-Dumaynī, who argues that *ḥadīth* scholars employed various substantive parameters to determine the possibility of defects within the content of a narration.¹⁰ Brown further maintains that the practice of *matn* criticism had been actively exercised since the early Islamic period, although its theoretical formulation was not always explicitly documented in classical works.¹¹ Consequently, *matn* criticism should not be understood merely as a product of modernity but rather as an intellectual tradition that developed alongside the formation of the discipline of *ḥadīth* studies itself.

The first position within the epistemological map of *matn* criticism is occupied by the *muḥaddithūn*, who maintain that the authority to evaluate *ḥadīths* primarily belongs to *ḥadīth* specialists possessing profound mastery of the transmission tradition.¹² Within this paradigm, the ability to identify defects in the *matn* depends not only upon theoretical knowledge but also upon *malakah*—scholarly competence cultivated through extensive experience in examining both the *isnād* and the *matn* of *ḥadīths*. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī explains that recognizing *ʿilal al-ḥadīth* constitutes one of the most difficult branches of *ḥadīth* scholarship because it requires comprehensive mastery of transmission chains and variations in the wording of *ḥadīths*.¹³ *Muḥaddithūn* generally maintain that *matn* criticism must be conducted within the methodological framework established by the *ḥadīth* tradition itself.¹⁴ This perspective is clearly reflected in the works of Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, who tends to employ *matn* criticism to explain, reconcile, and harmonize apparently problematic *ḥadīths* rather than directly rejecting their

7 Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 2nd ed. (London: Oneworld Publications, 2017), 79–82.

8 Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Aḥmad al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn 'inda 'Ulamā' al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadidah, 1983), 27–31.

9 Al-Adlabī, 38–42.

10 Musfir al-Dumaynī, *Maqāyīs Naqd Mutūn al-Sunnah*, (Riyadh: Jāmi'at al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa'ūd al-Islāmiyyah, 1984), 88–95.

11 Jonathan A. C. Brown, “How We Know Early Hadīth Critics Did Matn Criticism and Why It Is So Hard to Find,” *Islamic Law and Society* 15, no. 2 (2008): 143–145, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156851908X290574>.

12 Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 2nd ed. (London: Oneworld Publications, 2017), 84–87.

13 Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Kifāyah fī 'Ilm al-Riwayah*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1988), 431–435.

14 Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Aḥmad al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn 'inda 'Ulamā' al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī*, 73–77.

validity.¹⁵ Accordingly, the *muḥaddithūn* paradigm regards *matn* criticism as an internal mechanism for preserving the coherence of the Sunnah rather than as an instrument for dismantling the established authority of *ḥadīths*.¹⁶

In contrast to the *muḥaddithūn*, the *uṣūliyyūn* argue that the evaluation of *ḥadīths* cannot rely solely upon the instruments of *ḥadīth* sciences but must also incorporate the principles of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and the broader objectives of the *sharī'ah*.¹⁷ From this perspective, *ḥadīths* are assessed not only on the basis of the validity of their transmission but also according to their conformity with the broader normative principles of Islam.¹⁸ Al-Dumaynī points out that several criteria of *matn* criticism developed within *uṣūl al-fiqh* are not explicitly found in the works of the classical *muḥaddithūn*, although they perform the same function of testing the validity of *ḥadīth* contents.¹⁹ Research by Mohd Razak and Nazri likewise demonstrates that scholars such as Mullā 'Alī al-Qārī integrated rational and legal considerations into the process of *matn* criticism.²⁰ Meanwhile, Ridzuan and Razak argue that the development of modern *matn* criticism reflects the increasingly significant role of interdisciplinary approaches in understanding *ḥadīths*.²¹ The position of the *uṣūliyyūn* may therefore be understood as an effort to expand the instruments of criticism without abandoning the authority of the *ḥadīth* tradition as a whole.²²

The emergence of modernity gave rise to reformist approaches that sought to reconstruct the methodology of *matn* criticism in order to make it more responsive to social and intellectual transformations.²³ Thinkers such as Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā argued that the interpretation of *ḥadīths* should take into account both the historical circumstances of their emergence and the moral objectives that the *sharī'ah* seeks to realize.²⁴ Within this framework, the Qur'an functions not merely as an interpretive tool for understanding *ḥadīths* but also as an evaluative criterion for assessing *ḥadīth* contents considered problematic.²⁵ Fazlur Rahman characterizes this tendency as an attempt to reconnect religious texts with the universal ethical vision of Islam.²⁶ Hallaq, meanwhile, regards modern reformism as a response to the transformation of knowledge structures that demands greater openness to rationality and

15 Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 2001), 13–19.

16 Musfir al-Dumainī, *Maqāyīs Naqd Mutūn al-Sunnah*, (Riyadh: Jāmi'at al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa'ūd al-Islāmiyyah, 1984), 146–151.

17 Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunni Usul al-Fiqh*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 58–67.

18 Hallaq, 79–85.

19 Musfir al-Dumainī, *Maqāyīs Naqd Mutūn al-Sunnah*, 211–218.

20 Mohd Razak Nik Mohd Azlan and Mohd Anuar Nazri, "Manhaj Kritik Matan Hadis Mulla 'Alī al-Qārī," *Al-Turath Journal of Al-Quran and Al-Sunnah* 8, no. 1 (2023): 37–40, <https://doi.org/10.17576/turath-2023-0801-05>.

21 Muhammad Aiman Mohd Ridzuan and Mohd Izhar Ariff Mohd Razak, "Evolution of Hadith Textual Criticism: From Classical to Contemporary Approaches," *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah* (2025): 18–23, <https://doi.org/10.7187/GJATSI22025-2>.

22 Musfir al-Dumainī, *Maqāyīs Naqd Mutūn al-Sunnah*, 121–127.

23 Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 4–8.

24 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 5 (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Āmmah li al-Kitāb, 1990), 68–74.

25 Riḍā, 75–80.

26 Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 11–15.

historical experience.²⁷ Consequently, within the reformist paradigm, *matn* criticism shifts from a preservative function toward a reconstructive one: it seeks not only to preserve the *ḥadīth* legacy but also to reinterpret its relevance for modern society.²⁸

A further development of *matn* criticism can be observed in the works of Muslim feminist scholars who question the possibility of patriarchal bias in both the transmission and interpretation of *ḥadīths*.²⁹ Fatima Mernissi argues that several *ḥadīths* concerning women should be reexamined through a historical analysis of both the circumstances of their emergence and the authority of their transmitters.³⁰ Amina Wadud proposes an approach grounded in the paradigm of *tawḥīd*, which places the principle of human equality before God as the primary foundation for understanding religious texts.³¹ Likewise, Asma Barlas rejects interpretations of *ḥadīths* that result in the subordination of women because they are considered incompatible with the egalitarian vision of the Qur'an.³² Several recent studies indicate that some feminist approaches still face methodological challenges in formulating institutionalized standards of *matn* criticism comparable to those of the *muḥaddithūn*, although scholars such as Kecia Ali have attempted to move in this direction through critical analyses of *ḥadīth* transmission methodology and authority.³³ The debate among traditionalists, reformists, and feminists thus concerns not merely the outcomes of *ḥadīth* interpretation but also fundamental differences in epistemological assumptions regarding the sources of authority, the function of reason, and the relationship between the Qur'an and the Sunnah.³⁴ It is this epistemological framework that serves as the point of departure for understanding the methodological differences between Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī and Rashīd Riḍā in the following discussion.

Internal Coherence of Naqd al-Matn in Al-ʿAsqalānī's *Fath al-Bārī*

Within the classical tradition of *ḥadīth* scholarship, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī occupies a highly significant position as a representative of the mature traditionalist paradigm in managing the relationship between the *isnād* and the *matn* of *ḥadīths*.³⁵ Through his monumental work *Fath al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Ibn Ḥajar not only elucidates aspects of *ḥadīth* transmission but also evaluates the contents of the *matn* by employing the approaches of harmonization (*al-jamʿ wa al-tawfīq*) and the resolution of apparently problematic *ḥadīths* (*mushkil al-ḥadīth*).³⁶ Contrary to the modern assumption that classical scholars were concerned primarily with the

27 Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 207–220.

28 Muhammad Aiman Mohd Ridzuan and Mohd Izhar Ariff Mohd Razak, “Evolution of Hadith Textual Criticism,” 24–27.

29 Kecia Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 156–163.

30 Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991), 49–68.

31 Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 72–91.

32 Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 18–34.

33 Muhammad Aiman Mohd Ridzuan and Mohd Izhar Ariff Mohd Razak, “Evolution of Hadith Textual Criticism,” 25–29.

34 Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy*, (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014), 180–194.

35 Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 2nd ed. (London: Oneworld Publications, 2017), 122–125.

36 Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 2001), 6–14.

isnād, Ibn Hajar demonstrates an intensive application of *matn* criticism in explaining the relationship between *ḥadīths*, the Qur'an, historical context, and the social realities of the early Muslim community.³⁷ Nevertheless, Ibn Hajar's *matn* criticism continues to operate within the epistemological boundaries of classical *ḥadīth* scholarship, which regards authentic *ḥadīths* as authoritative sources that should fundamentally be understood and reconciled rather than rejected on the grounds that they conflict with particular social sensibilities.³⁸ The defining characteristic of Ibn Hajar's paradigm is therefore not the deconstruction of *ḥadīth* authority but the pursuit of internal coherence within the *ḥadīth* knowledge system itself.³⁹

This pattern is clearly reflected in Ibn Hajar's discussion of the *ḥadīth* "*lan yuflīḥa qawmun wallaw amrahum imra'ah*", narrated by Abū Bakrah in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.⁴⁰ Ibn Hajar accepts this *ḥadīth* as authentic because it fulfills the standards of authenticity established by al-Bukhārī.⁴¹ However, he does not limit his discussion to *isnād* verification alone; rather, he explains the historical context in which the *ḥadīth* emerged, namely the appointment of Kisrā's daughter as the ruler of Persia following the collapse of the Sasanian dynasty.⁴² This explanation demonstrates that Ibn Hajar employs historical context as an instrument for understanding the intended meaning of the *ḥadīth* without undermining its validity.⁴³ From Ibn Hajar's perspective, the *ḥadīth* cannot be detached from the political circumstances that gave rise to it, so that interpretations ignoring its historical context risk producing excessively generalized conclusions.⁴⁴ This approach illustrates that traditionalism is not necessarily synonymous with literalism; rather, it is capable of accommodating historical dimensions so long as they do not compromise the fundamental authority of *ḥadīths* already recognized as authentic.⁴⁵

The same harmonizing approach is evident in Ibn Hajar's explanation of the *ḥadīth* concerning *nāqīṣāt 'aql wa dīn*, which is frequently cited as evidence for the alleged inferiority of women in Islam.⁴⁶ Ibn Hajar rejects the interpretation that understands the *ḥadīth* as a statement of women's absolute intellectual deficiency.⁴⁷ According to him, the expression *naqṣ al-'aql* refers to the legal regulation concerning testimony that requires the testimony of two women to

37 Mehmet Ali Çalgan, *Muhaddisler Muhteva Tenkidi Yaptı mı?*, (Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2024), 112–118.

38 Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Aḥmad al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn 'inda 'Ulamā' al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1983), 91–97.

39 Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadīth: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 2nd ed. (London: Oneworld Publications, 2017), 126–129.

40 Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥammad Zuhayr ibn Nāṣir al-Nāṣir, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dār Tawq al-Najāt, 2001), Kitāb al-Maghāzī, Bāb Kitāb al-Nabī ilā Kisrā wa Qayṣar, no. 4425, 139.

41 Al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 13, 65–66.

42 Al-'Asqalānī, 66.

43 Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Aḥmad al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn 'inda 'Ulamā' al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1983), 157–159.

44 Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 13, 67.

45 Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy*, (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014), 96–101.

46 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-Ḥayḍ, Bāb Tark al-Ḥā'id al-Ṣawm, no. 304, 75; Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2006), Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb Bayān Nuqṣān al-Īmān bi-Naqṣ al-Ṭā'āt, no. 132, 86–87.

47 Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 2001), 405–406.

substitute for that of one man in certain cases, as stated in Surah Al-Baqarah [2]: 282.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, *naqṣ al-dīn* is understood as the temporary reduction in certain acts of worship resulting from menstruation rather than as an indication of women's spiritual or religious deficiency. By relating the *ḥadīth* to Qur'anic verses and other relevant *ḥadīths*, Ibn Ḥajar seeks to preserve the coherence among the normative sources of Islam.⁴⁹ This strategy demonstrates that *matn* criticism within the traditionalist paradigm is directed primarily toward clarifying meaning rather than rejecting the substance of the *ḥadīth*.⁵⁰

When analyzed through the five *ḥadīths* examined in this study, Ibn Ḥajar's methodology reveals a relatively consistent pattern. In discussing the *ḥadīths* concerning women's leadership, Eve as the origin of women's betrayal, *al-mar'ah 'awrah*, and marital relations, Ibn Ḥajar consistently begins by accepting the authenticity of the narration before proceeding to explain its meaning and historical context.⁵¹ He likewise consistently employs other *ḥadīths* as instruments of clarification whenever potential tensions between narrations arise.⁵² Moreover, the role of reason in Ibn Ḥajar's work is to understand and explain *ḥadīths*, rather than to function as an independent authority capable of invalidating authentic *ḥadīths*.⁵³ This pattern demonstrates that the concept of *tawāfuq ma'a al-'aql* within the traditionalist paradigm is not intended to establish reason as the judge of the text but rather as a means of comprehending the meanings contained therein.⁵⁴ Accordingly, Ibn Ḥajar's methodological coherence lies in his ability to maintain a balance between the authority of transmitted reports and the need for rational interpretation.

These findings indicate that the principal strength of Ibn Ḥajar's paradigm lies in the internal consistency with which he applies the standards of *matn* criticism.⁵⁵ He does not alter his evaluative criteria when dealing with socially sensitive *ḥadīths* as opposed to relatively non-controversial ones.⁵⁶ Throughout his discussions, the Qur'an functions as an interpretive instrument for understanding *ḥadīths* rather than as a means of invalidating *ḥadīths* already deemed authentic.⁵⁷ Likewise, historical context is employed to clarify the meaning of a *ḥadīth* rather than to restrict its normative validity.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, this consistency also reflects Ibn Ḥajar's adherence to a particular epistemological assumption, namely the conviction that the corpus of authentic *ḥadīths* is inherently coherent and therefore does not require evaluation according to standards external to the *ḥadīth* tradition itself. It is precisely this assumption that later becomes the most fundamental point of divergence when compared with Rashīd Riḍā's approach, which grants considerably greater space to modern rationality and the universal values of the Qur'an within the process of *naqd al-matn*.

48 Al-'Asqalānī, 406.

49 Al-'Asqalānī, 406–408.

50 Musfir al-Dumainī, *Maqāyīs Naqd Mutūn al-Sunnah*, (Riyadh: Jāmi'at al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa'ūd al-Islāmiyyah, 1984), 167–172.

51 Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1, 405–408; vol. 6, 489–492; vol. 9, 294–297; vol. 13, 65–68.

52 Al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 295.

53 Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Aḥmad al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn 'inda 'Ulamā' al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1983), 172–175.

54 Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 2nd ed. (London: Oneworld Publications, 2017), 130–133.

55 Al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn 'inda 'Ulamā' al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī*, 176–181.

56 Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1, 65–68.

57 Al-'Asqalānī, 406–408.

58 Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 132–135.

Methodological Selectivity in Majallat al-Manār

In contrast to Ibn Ḥajar, who operated within the epistemological framework of classical *ḥadīth* scholarship, Rashīd Riḍā developed an approach that sought to reconcile the authority of *ḥadīth* with the intellectual challenges of modernity.⁵⁹ As a disciple of Muḥammad ‘Abduh and the editor of *Majallat al-Manār*, Riḍā maintained that the revival of the Muslim community required a critical reexamination of certain forms of traditional interpretation that were no longer adequate to address contemporary social issues.⁶⁰ Within this context, *ḥadīth* was understood not merely as a source of normative transmission but also as a text that must be interpreted in a dynamic relationship with the Qur’an, social realities, and the development of human rationality.⁶¹ Unlike some Orientalist scholars who questioned the authenticity of *ḥadīth* as a whole, Riḍā firmly upheld the *ḥadīth* authority as a fundamental source of Islamic teaching.⁶² Nevertheless, he allowed considerably greater room for the use of reason and historical context in evaluating the contents of *ḥadīth matn* than did the majority of earlier traditionalist scholars.⁶³ Riḍā’s reformism should therefore not be understood as a rejection of the *ḥadīth* tradition but rather as an effort to reconstruct the mechanism of *matn* criticism so that it would be more responsive to the demands of the modern age.⁶⁴

This tendency is clearly reflected in Riḍā’s interpretation of the *ḥadīth* “*lan yuflīḥa qawmun wallaw amrahum imra’ah*”, which has frequently been invoked to oppose women’s leadership in the public sphere.⁶⁵ Riḍā acknowledged the presence of this *ḥadīth* within the corpus of authentic *ḥadīth*s and did not directly challenge the authenticity of its *isnād*.⁶⁶ However, he argued that the *ḥadīth* should be understood within the political context of Persia during the collapse of the Sasanian Empire rather than as a universal prohibition against all forms of female leadership throughout history.⁶⁷ In explaining this position, Riḍā employed broader historical and sociological considerations than those typically found in the traditionalist approach.⁶⁸ He further asserted that the success or failure of a government is determined not by the gender of its ruler but by the quality of leadership and the social system that supports it.⁶⁹ Within Riḍā’s paradigm, *matn* criticism functions to delimit the normative scope of a *ḥadīth* through historical contextualization rather than solely through the textual harmonization employed by Ibn Ḥajar.⁷⁰

59 Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 222–228.

60 Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad Abdub and Rashid Rida*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 154–161.

61 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 1 (Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Āmmah li al-Kitāb, 1990), 16–19.

62 Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kayfa Nata‘amal Ma‘a al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*, (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1990), 52–57.

63 Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 67–72.

64 Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad Abdub and Rashid Rida*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 168–171.

65 Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥammad Zuhayr ibn Nāṣir al-Nāṣir, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāt, 2001), Kitāb al-Maghāzī, no. 4425, 139.

66 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Majallat al-Manār*, vol. 8 (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Manār, 1905), 487–489.

67 Riḍā, 490.

68 Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad Abdub and Rashid Rida*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 172–176.

69 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Majallat al-Manār*, vol. 8, 491–492.

70 Fazlur Rahman, “*Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*,” 74–78.

One of the most significant characteristics of Riḍā's methodology is his positioning of the Qur'an as the primary evaluative standard for understanding *ḥadīths*.⁷¹ In many of his discussions, Riḍā argues that *ḥadīths* which appear to conflict with the universal principles of the Qur'an should be reinterpreted so that they remain consistent with the overall moral message of Islam.⁷² This approach differs from the classical tradition of *ḥadīth* commentary, which generally employed the Qur'an to explain *ḥadīths* without treating it as an instrument for limiting their normative scope.⁷³ For Riḍā, principles such as justice (*ʿadl*), public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), and the moral equality of all human beings constitute foundational values that must provide the framework for interpreting the *ḥadīth*.⁷⁴ Consequently, *ḥadīths* concerning gender relations are frequently interpreted through what may be described as a "normative hierarchy," whereby the universal principles of the Qur'an are placed above a literal reading of particular *ḥadīths*.⁷⁵ This approach subsequently became one of the principal foundations for the development of modern Islamic hermeneutics and various contemporary reformist approaches to *ḥadīth* interpretation.⁷⁶

In several cases, such as the *ḥadīth* concerning women's leadership, Riḍā employed historical context as the principal basis for restricting the normative meaning of the *ḥadīth*.⁷⁷ However, in other *ḥadīths* concerning marital relations, he did not consistently apply the same historical approach in a systematic manner.⁷⁸ This inconsistency suggests that the use of reason and historical analysis within the reformist paradigm does not always follow a uniform methodological procedure.⁷⁹ In a number of cases, the conclusions reached appear to be influenced more strongly by Riḍā's reformist commitments to particular issues than by the consistent application of *matn* criticism criteria across the entire corpus of *ḥadīths* under examination.⁸⁰ This finding is significant because it demonstrates that expanding the role of modern rationality does not automatically produce a methodology that is more objective than the traditionalist paradigm. On the contrary, such an expansion also creates the possibility of new forms of methodological selectivity in the process of evaluating *ḥadīths*.

Overall, Riḍā's paradigm represents a significant shift in the history of *matn* criticism from a preservative orientation toward a reconstructive one.⁸¹ Whereas Ibn Ḥajar sought to preserve the internal coherence of the *ḥadīth* tradition through harmonization and interpretation, Riḍā endeavored to connect *ḥadīths* with the evolving moral and social demands of the modern era. This fundamental difference led both scholars to employ seemingly identical methodological

71 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 5 (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li al-Kitāb, 1990), 71–74.

72 Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, 75–77.

73 Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadīth: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 2nd ed. (London: Oneworld Publications, 2017), 203–206.

74 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 5 (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li al-Kitāb, 1990), 352–356.

75 Wael B. Hallaq, "A History of Islamic Legal Theories," (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 214–219.

76 Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 79–83.

77 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Majallat al-Manār*, vol. 8 (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Manār, 1905), 490–492.

78 Riḍā, 621–624.

79 Wāli K. A., "Revisiting Matn Criticism in the Age of Modernity: Epistemic Reconfiguration in Ibn Hajar and Rashid Riḍā," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* (2025): 11–14.

80 Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad ʿAbduh and Rashid Rida*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 177–180.

81 Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 83–87.

concepts—such as reason, social reality, and conformity with the Qur’an—while assigning them markedly different epistemological meanings. Within Riḍā’s paradigm, reason enjoys a broader degree of autonomy in evaluating *ḥadīths*, whereas contemporary social reality may function as a criterion for determining the normative relevance of a particular narration.⁸² Consequently, *matn* criticism is no longer intended merely to explain *ḥadīths* but also serves as an instrument for negotiating the relationship between religious texts and social change. These findings provide the foundation for the comparative analysis presented in the following section, which systematically identifies the principal epistemological tensions between the traditionalist and reformist paradigms in the study of gender-related *ḥadīths*.

A Comparison of Typologies of Gender-Based Ḥadīth Interpretation

Based on the analysis of the five *ḥadīths* examined in this study, it is evident that the difference between Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī and Rashīd Riḍā does not primarily concern the authenticity status of the *ḥadīths* but rather the way each constructs the epistemological framework employed to evaluate the *matn*. Both Ibn Ḥajar and Riḍā acknowledge the importance of the conformity of *ḥadīths* with the Qur’an, the use of reason in understanding *ḥadīths*, and the necessity of considering historical context.⁸³ However, these methodological concepts are understood differently, leading to conclusions that are not always identical when applied to gender-related *ḥadīths*. This finding demonstrates that the debate over gender-related *ḥadīths* is, in essence, a debate over the standards of religious knowledge employed in the process of *matn* criticism. In other words, the differences observed at the level of interpretation are the consequence of more fundamental differences at the epistemological level.⁸⁴ Identifying these epistemological tensions is therefore essential for explaining why two Muslim scholars who equally acknowledge the authority of *ḥadīth* can arrive at different conclusions regarding the same texts.

Table 1. Comparative Matrix of the Application of *Naqd al-Matn* by Ibn Ḥajar and Rashīd Riḍā to Gender-Related Ḥadīths

Ḥadīth	Dimension	Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (Traditionalist)	Rashīd Riḍā (Reformist)
Ḥadīth 1. Women’s Leadership	Qur’an	Finds no explicit contradiction with the Qur’an.	Interprets the <i>ḥadīth</i> through the Qur’anic principles of justice and human capability.
	Other <i>ḥadīths</i>	Harmonizes it with other <i>ḥadīths</i> concerning leadership.	Uses other <i>ḥadīths</i> selectively.
	Reason & History	The Persian context serves to explain the <i>ḥadīth</i> .	The Persian context serves to limit the universal scope of the <i>ḥadīth</i> .
	Language	No linguistic anomaly is identified.	Not a primary focus.
	Consistency	Consistent.	Relatively consistent.

82 Wael B. Hallaq, “A History of Islamic Legal Theories,” 221–223.
83 Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Aḥmad al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn ‘inda ‘Ulama’ al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1983), 27–35.
84 Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet’s Legacy*, (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014), 185–188.

Ḥadīth 2. <i>Nāqishāt ‘Aql wa Dīn</i>	Qur’an	Connected with Qur’an, Surah Al-Baqarah: 282.	Interpreted through the Qur’anic principle of equality.
	Other <i>ḥadīths</i>	Explained through supporting <i>ḥadīths</i> .	Uses other <i>ḥadīths</i> for reinterpretation.
	Reason & History	Reason is employed to understand the text.	Reason is employed to evaluate the social implications of the text.
	Language	Analyzes the terminology of <i>naqṣ</i> .	Historical analysis is more dominant.
	Consistency	Consistent.	Moderate.
Ḥadīth 3. <i>Lawlā Ḥawwā’</i>	Qur’an	Not considered contradictory to the Qur’an.	Considered potentially inconsistent with the Qur’anic narrative of gender justice.
	Other <i>ḥadīths</i>	Harmonized with other narrations.	Selective use of supporting <i>ḥadīths</i> .
		Read as a historical description.	Read as a product of a patriarchal context.
	Language	Language is understood figuratively.	Language is understood symbolically.
	Consistency	Consistent.	Less consistent.
Ḥadīth 4. <i>Al-Mar’ah ‘Awrah</i>	Qur’an	Not regarded as contradictory to the Qur’an.	Interpreted contextually.
	Other <i>ḥadīths</i>	Related to Islamic norms of modesty.	Reexamined in light of other <i>ḥadīths</i> .
	Reason & History	Refers to the social norms of early Arab society.	Refers to changes in contemporary social realities.
	Language	No linguistic problem is identified.	Not a primary concern.
	Consistency	Consistent.	Moderate.
Ḥadīth 5. Husband–Wife Relations	Qur’an	Interpreted through reciprocal obligations within the family.	Interpreted within the framework of ethical marital relations.
	Other <i>ḥadīths</i>	Harmonized with <i>ḥadīths</i> concerning <i>mu ‘āsharah bi al-ma ‘rūf</i> .	Combined with the Qur’anic principle of justice.
	Reason & History	Reason serves to explain the meaning of the <i>ḥadīth</i> .	Reason serves to evaluate the normative relevance of the <i>ḥadīth</i> .
	Language	Language is understood normatively.	Language is understood contextually.
	Consistency	Consistent.	Relatively inconsistent.

Source: Author’s Analysis (2026)

The first epistemological tension concerns how the two scholars conceptualize the function of reason in the process of *matn* criticism. Within Ibn Ḥajar’s paradigm, reason functions as an instrument for understanding and explaining *ḥadīths* whose transmitted authority has already been accepted. Reason is not regarded as an independent authority capable of invalidating an authentic *ḥadīth*; rather, it serves as a means of discovering the most appropriate meaning of a given narration. Consequently, when discussing the *ḥadīth* of *nāqīṣāt ‘aql wa dīn*, Ibn Ḥajar seeks to explain the meaning of the expression through linguistic analysis, legal reasoning, and harmonization with the Qur’an, without questioning the validity of the *ḥadīth* itself. By contrast, Riḍā grants reason a broader role in evaluating the social and moral consequences of a *ḥadīth*. Within this framework, reason functions not only to understand the text but also to examine the extent to which a *ḥadīth* remains relevant to the Islamic principles of justice and public welfare (*maṣlahah*). This difference demonstrates that the concept of *tawāfuq ma’a al-‘aql* employed within the tradition of *matn* criticism carries different meanings in two paradigms that both claim to be firmly rooted in the Islamic scholarly tradition.⁸⁵

Table 2. Synthesis of the Epistemological Tensions between Traditionalism and Reformism

Aspect	Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī	Rashīd Riḍā	Implication
Concept of Reason (‘ <i>Aql</i>)	Reason functions to understand the text.	Reason functions to evaluate the text.	Different functions of reason lead to different conclusions regarding the same <i>ḥadīth</i> .
Concept of Reality (<i>Wāqī’</i>)	Normative reality constructed within the Islamic tradition.	Empirical reality as it develops in modern society.	Different conceptions of reality produce different standards of <i>matn</i> criticism.
Relationship between the Qur’an and <i>ḥadīth</i>	The Qur’an interprets the <i>ḥadīth</i> .	The Qur’an may serve as a filter for evaluating <i>ḥadīths</i> .	Different approaches result in different determinations of which <i>ḥadīths</i> are considered problematic.
Role of History	Explains the historical context of the <i>ḥadīth</i> .	Limits the universal applicability of the <i>ḥadīth</i> .	Different understandings of the normative relevance of <i>ḥadīths</i> .
Purpose of <i>Matn</i> Criticism	Preserves the internal coherence of the <i>ḥadīth</i> .	Aligns the <i>ḥadīth</i> with the demands of modernity.	<i>Matn</i> criticism shifts from a preservative to a reconstructive function.

Source: Author’s Analysis (2026)

The second epistemological difference concerns the manner in which the two scholars define the concept of reality as a parameter for evaluating the *matn* of *ḥadīths*. Ibn Ḥajar employs historical context primarily as an instrument for explaining the background of a *ḥadīth* and clarifying its intended meaning. Within this approach, historical reality functions to facilitate the understanding of the text but does not alter the normative validity of a *ḥadīth* that has already been accepted as authentic.⁸⁶ For example, when discussing the *ḥadīth* concerning women’s leadership, Ibn Ḥajar relates it to the political circumstances of Persia without treating that

85 Wāli K. A., “Revisiting *Matn* Criticism in the Age of Modernity: Epistemic Reconfiguration in Ibn Hajar and Rashid Riḍā,” *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* (2025): 12–14.

86 Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 2nd ed. (London: Oneworld Publications, 2017), 126–129.

historical context as a basis for restricting the normative authority of the *ḥadīth*.⁸⁷ Riḍā, by contrast, employs contemporary social reality as one of the parameters for determining the scope of a *ḥadīth*'s application. He argues that changing social conditions may influence the manner in which a *ḥadīth* should be understood and implemented within contemporary society. Consequently, the concept of *wāqī* ' in Riḍā's methodology refers not only to the reality of the Prophet's era but also to the evolving social realities of the modern age.⁸⁸ This difference explains why both scholars may employ the same methodological terminology while arriving at different legal and social implications.

The most fundamental epistemological tension is reflected in the manner in which the two scholars conceptualize the relationship between the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*. Both agree that *ḥadīths* must not contradict the Qur'an as the primary source of Islamic teaching. However, Ibn Ḥajar defines such contradiction in a narrow sense, namely only when there is an explicit textual contradiction (*ta'ārūḍ ṣarīḥ*).⁸⁹ As long as the apparent contradiction can be resolved through harmonization or interpretation, the *ḥadīth* remains an authoritative source. Riḍā, on the other hand, develops a broader concept of contradiction by incorporating the moral values and objectives of the Qur'an into the evaluative process.⁹⁰ Within this framework, a *ḥadīth* may be regarded as problematic if it is perceived to conflict with universal principles such as justice, equality, and public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), even in the absence of a direct textual contradiction. As a consequence, the scope of *matn* criticism within the reformist paradigm becomes considerably broader than that of the traditionalist paradigm. This distinction explains why gender-related *ḥadīths* have frequently become a central arena of debate between traditionalist and reformist scholars in contemporary Islamic discourse.

Based on the three typologies discussed above, the differences between Ibn Ḥajar and Rashīd Riḍā cannot be adequately explained solely in terms of their respective techniques of *ḥadīth* interpretation. Rather, they concern a more fundamental issue: how each scholar formulates the sources and hierarchy of epistemic authority within Islam. Ibn Ḥajar begins from an intra-systemic epistemological framework, in which authentic *ḥadīths* are understood as components of a body of knowledge that is internally coherent, and any tensions within that system are resolved through the mechanisms of harmonization already available within the *ḥadīth* tradition itself. Riḍā follows a different trajectory by opening the door to evaluative standards originating beyond the internal framework of the classical tradition, including modern rationality, evolving social conditions, and a normative reading of the universal values of the Qur'an as criteria for assessing existing *ḥadīths*.

Table 3. Typology of the Identified Epistemological Differences

Typology	Traditionalist	Reformist
Type 1	Intra-Systemic Epistemology	Open Contextualist Epistemology
Type 2	<i>Matn</i> Criticism as Harmonization	<i>Matn</i> Criticism as Reinterpretation
Type 3	Dominance of Transmitted Authority	Dominance of Qur'anic Normative Authority

87 Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath̥ al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 13 (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 2001), 67.

88 Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 80–83.

89 Al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath̥ al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 2001), 15–18.

90 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 5 (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li al-Kitāb, 1990), 75–80.

Type 4	Preservation of Tradition	Reconstruction of Tradition
Type 5	High Methodological Consistency	Variable Methodological Consistency

Source: Author's Analysis (2026)

Before examining the table above, it is necessary to clarify the two typological terms employed in this study. First, Intra-Systemic Epistemology refers to a construction of knowledge that employs standards of validity derived from within the *ḥadīth* tradition itself: the Qur'an functions as an explanatory framework for the text, other *ḥadīths* serve as complementary evidence, and reason functions as an instrument for understanding—rather than evaluating—texts that have already been accepted as authentic. This concept corresponds to what Jonathan A. C. Brown describes as “inner-systemic coherence” in classical *ḥadīth* criticism. Second, Open Contextualist Epistemology refers to a construction of knowledge that allows evaluative standards originating from outside the traditional system of *ḥadīth* transmission, including modern rationality, contemporary social realities, and normative readings of the universal values of the Qur'an as criteria for assessing *ḥadīths*, rather than merely as interpretive tools. This designation is intentionally adopted in place of the term “Semi-Extra-Systemic” because it more accurately characterizes Riḍā's position. Riḍā does not abandon the *ḥadīth* tradition altogether; rather, he selectively and openly incorporates external evaluative standards into the process of *matn* criticism.

The comparative matrix demonstrates that the principal difference between Ibn Ḥajar and Rashīd Riḍā does not lie in their acceptance or rejection of the authenticity of *ḥadīths*, but rather in the way each constructs the criteria for evaluating the *matn*. Ibn Ḥajar consistently adopts a harmonizing approach aimed at preserving the internal coherence of the *ḥadīth* tradition, whereas Riḍā employs a more contextual approach that grants a broader role to modern rationality, contemporary social realities, and the universal principles of the Qur'an. These findings indicate that the debate surrounding gender-related *ḥadīths* is fundamentally an epistemological debate concerning the sources of authority and the standards of validity of religious knowledge, rather than merely a difference in the interpretation of *ḥadīth* texts.

Multi-Tiered Matn Criticism Model

The findings of this study confirm that debates surrounding gender-related *ḥadīths* cannot be understood merely as a matter of accepting or rejecting the authenticity of a *ḥadīth*. Rather, they are fundamentally rooted in the epistemological framework employed in *matn* criticism. The analysis of Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī and Rashīd Riḍā demonstrates that both scholars acknowledge the importance of *matn* criticism, yet they employ it for different purposes. Ibn Ḥajar positions *matn* criticism as a mechanism for preserving the internal coherence of the Sunnah through harmonization in interpretation, whereas Riḍā utilizes it as an instrument for reconciling *ḥadīths* with the dynamics of modern social change. These differences stem from the distinct standards of religious epistemic validity adopted by each scholar rather than from the content of the *ḥadīths* themselves. Consequently, the principal challenge in contemporary *ḥadīth* studies is not to choose between the traditionalist and reformist paradigms, but to develop a methodology that transparently articulates the epistemological foundations underlying *ḥadīth* evaluation. Such an approach would enable *matn* criticism to function as a space for dialogue between the Islamic intellectual heritage and the needs of modern society without becoming trapped in the polarization between conservatism and liberalism.⁹¹

91 Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 2nd ed. (London: Oneworld Publications, 2017), 284–289.

This study further finds that both the traditionalist and reformist paradigms possess significant methodological strengths as well as limitations that must be assessed proportionally. The strength of the traditionalist approach lies in its consistent application of *matn* criticism criteria across diverse categories of *ḥadīths*, thereby preserving the continuity of the *ḥadīth* scholarly tradition while minimizing excessive subjectivity in textual evaluation.⁹² Nevertheless, its assumption of the internal coherence of the *ḥadīth* corpus often limits its flexibility in responding to rapid social transformations. By contrast, the reformist paradigm offers a more historical and contextual reading, enabling *ḥadīths* to be interpreted in ways that are more relevant to contemporary issues, particularly those concerning gender and social relations.⁹³ However, the expanded role assigned to rationality and social reality within the reformist approach occasionally results in methodological applications that are not entirely consistent across different *ḥadīths*. Therefore, both paradigms require further methodological refinement in order to provide a framework for *matn* criticism that is more comprehensive, consistent, and relevant to the continuing development of *ḥadīth* studies.

As a synthesis of these two paradigms, this study proposes the Multi-Tiered Matn Criticism Model, a layered approach to *matn* criticism that integrates the strengths of both traditionalism and reformism without sacrificing the fundamental characteristics of either. The model consists of three sequential levels of analysis. The first level is classical *matn* criticism, which examines the compatibility of a *ḥadīth* with the Qur'an, stronger *ḥadīths*, and rational principles as formulated by the *muḥaddisūn*.⁹⁴ The second level involves historical-contextual analysis aimed at identifying the social, political, and cultural background surrounding the emergence of the *ḥadīth*, thereby enabling a more precise understanding of its scope of application. The third level is normative evaluation, which relates the *ḥadīth* to the overarching objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*) as well as universal Islamic values such as justice, public welfare (*maṣlahah*), and human dignity. Through this layered structure, *matn* criticism not only preserves the integrity of the *ḥadīth* tradition but also enhances its capacity to address evolving social challenges in a systematic manner.

The application of the Multi-Tiered Matn Criticism Model to the *ḥadīth* of *nāqishāt 'aql wa dīn* demonstrates that each analytical level performs a distinct yet complementary function. At the first level, the *ḥadīth* is examined in light of its consistency with the Qur'an and other relevant *ḥadīths*, leading to the conclusion that no explicit textual contradiction exists. The second level then investigates the social context of seventh-century Arabia in order to determine whether the content of the *ḥadīth* should be understood as universal or context-specific, ensuring that the analysis extends beyond normative objectives to include the particular historical circumstances in which the *ḥadīth* was articulated. The third level evaluates the *ḥadīth* according to Islamic ethical principles, including justice, the equality of human dignity, and *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*. The findings indicate that Riḍā tends to operate primarily at the level of normative evaluation without consistently passing through the preceding two stages, thereby giving rise to methodological inconsistency. By contrast, the proposed layered model requires that all three stages be completed sequentially so that every normative conclusion remains firmly grounded in prior textual and historical verification, ensuring greater academic transparency and methodological accountability.

Within the field of gender-related *ḥadīth* studies, the Multi-Tiered Matn Criticism Model offers a middle path between the apologetic tendency to uphold all *ḥadīths* normatively and the

92 Musfir al-Dumainī, *Maqāyis Naqd Mutūn al-Sunnah*, (Riyadh: Jāmi'at al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa'ūd al-Islāmiyyah, 1984), 246–252.

93 Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 88–91.

94 Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Aḥmad al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn 'inda 'Ulama' al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadidah, 1983), 98–121.

deconstructive tendency to reject certain *ḥadīths* on the grounds that they conflict with modern values.⁹⁵ The model emphasizes that a *ḥadīth* should neither be accepted nor rejected outright. Instead, it should first be examined through its quality of transmission, the historical context of its emergence, and its relevance to the overarching objectives of Islamic law in a gradual and transparent manner. This approach shifts the debate on gender-related *ḥadīths* from an ideological contest toward a more objective and academically accountable methodological evaluation. Ultimately, modernity does not diminish the relevance of *matn* criticism; rather, it expands its function as a bridge between religious texts and the dynamic social changes of contemporary society. Accordingly, the future of *ḥadīth* studies depends upon the development of methodologies that remain open to dialogue among tradition, history, rationality, and the universal values of Islam, thereby ensuring that the *ḥadīth* heritage remains both authentic and relevant for contemporary Muslim societies.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the fundamental difference between the traditionalist approach represented by Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī and the reformist approach represented by Rashīd Riḍā does not lie in their acceptance of the authenticity of *ḥadīths*, but rather in the epistemological framework underlying their practice of *matn* criticism. Both scholars acknowledge the importance of the Qurʾān, reason, and historical context in understanding *ḥadīths*; however, these three instruments are assigned different methodological functions. Ibn Ḥajar maintains a paradigm of harmonization aimed at preserving the internal coherence of the Sunnah, whereas Riḍā develops a reconstructive paradigm that employs the universal values of the Qurʾān, social realities, and rational considerations as the basis for limiting or reorienting the normative scope of *ḥadīths*. An analysis of five *ḥadīths* concerning women's leadership, *nāqīṣāt ʿaql wa dīn*, the origin of women, women's social space, and husband–wife relations reveals that Ibn Ḥajar exhibits greater methodological consistency, while Riḍā offers greater interpretive flexibility but also displays a tendency toward selectivity in applying the parameters of *matn* criticism across different cases.

The principal contribution of this study lies in shifting the focus of the debate on gender-related *ḥadīths* from the question of whether particular interpretations are correct or incorrect toward an examination of the epistemological foundations that generate those interpretive differences. By applying the same standards of *matn* criticism to two major paradigms, this study demonstrates that the tension between traditionalism and reformism is fundamentally a methodological issue within *ḥadīth* studies rather than merely an ideological dispute concerning gender. These findings contribute to contemporary *ḥadīth* scholarship by proposing a systematic typology of *naqd al-matn* that distinguishes between preservative and reconstructive orientations. Furthermore, the study highlights the close relationship between the development of *ḥadīth* criticism methodologies and the dynamics of modernity, thereby opening a more objective space for dialogue between the classical tradition and contemporary interpretations. Accordingly, this research provides a stronger conceptual foundation for developing *matn* criticism methodologies capable of explaining the dynamics of religious authority in issues related to gender and social relations within Muslim societies.

95 Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991), 49–68; Amina Wadud, *Qurʾān and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 72–91.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The analysis is confined to five *ḥadīths* that are most frequently debated in discussions of gender and compares only two principal representatives, namely Ibn Ḥajar and Rashīd Riḍā. Consequently, it does not fully capture the diversity of *matn* criticism methodologies developed across the broader spectrum of classical scholars, contemporary scholars, and Muslim feminist thinkers. Moreover, the study places greater emphasis on epistemological analysis than on the practical implications of *istinbāt* (legal derivation) or the social implementation of these methodologies in diverse Muslim contexts. Future research is therefore encouraged to expand the corpus of *ḥadīths* under investigation, include a wider range of scholars from different legal schools and historical periods, and integrate interdisciplinary approaches such as *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*, hermeneutics, the sociology of knowledge, and comparative Islamic legal studies. Empirical research on how Muslim communities receive and apply different models of *matn* criticism is also recommended in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between academic methodology, religious authority, and social practice.

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