Intellectual Discourse

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Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	ʿ
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ء	ʾ
ض	ḍ		ي	y

Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
◌َ	a		◌َا، ◌َى	an
◌ُ	u		◌ُّو	un
◌ِ	i		◌ِّي	in
◌َا، ◌َ، ◌َى،	ā		◌َوْ	aw
◌ُو	ū		◌َيْ	ay
◌ِي	ī		◌ُوّ	uww, ū (in final position)
			◌ِيّ	iyy, ī (in final position)

Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: http://rotas.iium.edu.my

Equal Before Allah, Unequal Before the Prophet? Ongoing Discourse on *Matn* Criticism and Its Influence on Muslim Feminist Thought

Nuzulul Qadar Abdullah[*]

Abstract: The question of whether Muslim scholars evaluated *mutūn* has garnered considerable interest that evolved into vigorous debates within Islamic studies. Muslim academics countered pioneering orientalists' narrative by asserting that *matn* criticism has always been integral to text verification. Others maintained that it was mainly the domain of the *uṣūliyyūn*. Based on the varying stances, this article presents four viewpoints with regards to *muḥaddithūn's* engagement in *matn* criticism. In the realm of Muslim feminist thought, such debates are often considered peripheral. They underscore a substantial lacuna in *matn* criticism, thus advocating for innovative approaches such as the *tawhidic* paradigm and the *Qur'ānic-weltanschauung* analysis. To provide a more nuanced analysis, the first part of this article proposes a new schema that distinguishes between *isnād*-based and text-based *matn* criticism. Utilising a qualitative research methodology, this paper contends that not all principles of *naqd* were employed by the *muḥaddithūn*, as some have been applied by other scholars, particularly the *uṣūliyyūn*. The second part explores the impact of classical methodologies on contemporary Muslim feminist thought. Findings of this paper prove that the principles introduced by Muslim Feminists are relatively subjective, rather than being conclusively objective, therefore rendering it insufficient to unequivocally reject established narrations. Instead, it suffices only to be used as tools for new readings. This article represents the inaugural scholarly effort to delineate contrasting perspectives on *matn* criticism, which offers a unique contribution, especially for non-Arabic readers.

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Keywords: *Women Ḥadīth, Matn Criticism, Feminism, Tawhidic Paradigm, Gender Studies,*

Abstrak: Perbincangan sama ada para sarjana Muslim menilai *mutūn* telah berkembang menjadi perdebatan yang sengit dalam kajian Islam. Cendekiawan Muslim menyangkal naratif orientalis dengan menegaskan bahawa kritikan *matn* merupakan elemen penting dalam pengabsahan teks. Namun, terdapat juga pandangan bahawa kritikan *matn* berada dalam kerangka kerja *uṣūliyyūn*. Berdasarkan ini, kajian ini membentangkan empat perspektif berhubung penglibatan muḥaddithūn dalam kritikan matn. Dalam pemikiran Feminis Muslim, arus pemikiran mereka menekankan adanya kekurangan dalam kritikan *matn* dan mencadangkan pendekatan inovatif seperti paradigma tawhid dan analisis *weltanschauung* Qur'ān. Kajian ini mencadangkan skema baru yang membezakan antara kritikan matn berasaskan *isnād* dan teks. Dengan menggunakan metodologi penyelidikan kualitatif, kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa data yang sedia ada tidak mencukupi untuk membuktikan bahawa setiap prinsip *naqd* telah digunakan oleh *muḥaddithūn*. Bahagian kedua meneroka impak metodologi kritikan *matn* klasik terhadap Feminis Muslim kontemporari. Hasil kajian membuktikan bahawa prinsip-prinsip Feminis Muslim lebih bersifat subjektif daripada objektif, menjadikannya lemah untuk menolak riwayat-riwayat yang telah diabsahkan kesahihannya. Sebaliknya, prinsip ini hanya sesuai untuk menyumbang kepada wacana pembacaan yang baru.

Kata kunci: *Kritikan Matn, Feminisme, Tawhidic Paradigm, Kajian Gender, Hadis-Hadis Wanita*

Introduction

Since the sayings ascribed to the Prophet (PBUH) constitute a fundamental source of epistemological authority and legal guidance within Sunni Islam, it is imperative for scholars to undertake a meticulous verification process in order to use them as sources of knowledge. In contemporary Islamic discourse, the critique of the authentication process of *ḥadīths* has emerged as a significant area of debate. However, a pertinent question remains: do these scholars also possess equally rigorous, or at least methodologically comparable, frameworks for the analysis of *mutūn* and how did it impact contemporary Islamic thought such as Muslim feminist approaches to *ḥadīth* texts?

The present study seeks to address the research questions by arguing that *matn* criticism, though secondary to *isnād* evaluation, was an integral part of early *ḥadīth* methodology. It further undertakes a critical analysis of contemporary feminist approaches to *ḥadīth*, by acknowledging their innovative contributions while evaluating the epistemological soundness of the principles employed in rejecting Prophetic texts. This study examines how these principles are constructed, applied, and whether they are rationally grounded to challenge established methodologies of authentication.

This article contributes to the discourse on *matn* criticism in two ways. First, it presents four contemporary perspectives on classical *muḥaddithūn's* use of *matn* criticism, leading to a proposed analytical schema: *isnād*-based and text-based criticism. Second, it identifies and assesses the epistemological foundations of Muslim feminist critiques of *ḥadīth*. A review of the relevant literature indicates that neither of these dimensions has been systematically explored in existing Arabic or English scholarship.

Based on the above, the terms *"naqd"* and *"matn"* are crucial to this study. Linguistically, *naqd* refers to the meticulous examination of elements to distinguish what is genuine from what is spurious (al-Jawharī, 1987; Ibn Manẓūr, 1994). In a more specialised sense, early *muḥaddithūn* did not provide an explicit definition of *naqd* in the context of *ḥadīth* criticism. Rather, the term emerged organically in their writings, which indicated evaluative practices that evolved over time (al-Rashīd, 2005).

In response to the absence of a formal definition, contemporary scholars have sought to articulate a clearer understanding of the concept. Nūr al-Dīn ʿItr (1981, pp. 32-33) defines *al-Naqd al-Ḥadīthī*, as the comprehensive analysis of "both *isnād* and *matn* in order to distinguish between the *maqbūl* and the *mardūd*." This definition reflects the practices of early *muḥaddithūn*, who scrutinised both the chains and the content of narrations. Similarly, Muṣṭafā al-Aʿẓamī (1990, p.5) stated that term *naqd* involves "differentiating between *ṣaḥīḥ* and *saqīm ḥadīth*s and issuing judgments on narrators, either by validating their credibility (*tawthīq*) or impugning them (*jarḥ*)." I reckon that ʿItr's use of *"maqbūl or mardūd"* is more precise than *"saḥīḥ"* and *"saqīm,"* as the scope of acceptability in *ḥadīth* studies is broader than authenticity (*dāʾirat al-Qabūl awsaʿ min al-Ṣiḥḥah*).

Despite slight variations, these definitions are fundamentally aligned as it emphasised two critical aspects: assessment of narrations, as well as evaluation of statuses of narrators independent of their individual narrations. Accordingly, I propose a refined definition of the term *naqd* in the context of *ḥadīth* criticism as: "the systematic evaluation of transmitters, along with the examination of the *asānīd* and *mutūn* of narrations." This definition highlights the dual process of *naqd* which encompasses both the critique of narrations and the assessment of narrators.

On the other hand, the most significant definition of *matn* is by Ibn Ḥajar (1997, p.724): "The *matn* is the ultimate content to which the *isnād* leads, whether it reaches the Prophet (PBUH) directly or indirectly (*ḥukman*) in the form of his sayings, actions, or tacit approvals, or whether it terminates with a companion or a *tābiʿī*." In simpler terms, it refers to "what comes after the *isnād*" (Al-Khayrābādī, 2009, p.24).

The Concept of *Naqd al-Matn* in Islamic Scholarship

Since *ḥadīth* consists of two fundamental components, the *isnād* and the *matn*, it stands to reason that critical analysis would be applied to both. The Syrian scholar Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Idlibī (2013) categorised *ḥadīth* criticism into two: external criticism, commonly known as *isnād* analysis, and internal criticism, as referred to by historians, which corresponds to *matn* analysis. However, I argue that *matn* criticism, as practiced by *ḥadīth* scholars, is far more comprehensive than the textual analysis employed by historians. It includes methods such as *mudraj* (detecting interpolations), *muḍṭarib* (inconsistencies), and *muṣaḥḥaf* (transcriptional errors), many of which are absent from historical methodologies (al-ʿUmarī, 1997).

Following that, al-Rashīd (2005) analysed contemporary applications of *naqd al-matn* and identified five main interpretations:

1. Reconciling the *matn* with contradictory evidences (*al-Tawfīq*)
2. Preferring certain narrations over others (*al-Tarjīḥ*)
3. Disregarding an accepted narration due to contradictions (*tark al-ʿAmal*)
4. Critiquing a *matn* that appears to be reliable in broader *ḥadīth* analysis (*intiqād al-Mutūn*)
5. Rejecting a *matn* despite a sound *isnād* (*radd al-Ḥadīth*)

I contend that this five-fold categorisation does not represent the methodology of the critics. As defined earlier, *naqd* is fundamentally about distinguishing the acceptable from the unacceptable. Thus, methods like reconciling conflicting texts are not strictly part of *matn* criticism. Rather, it can be considered as strategies for resolving apparent contradictions (*ṭuruq ḥal al-Taʿāruḍ*). The essence of *matn* criticism lies in prioritising usage of certain narrations over others, covering *al-Tarjīḥ*, *intiqād al-Mutūn* and radd *al-Ḥadīth*, as outlined in points two, four, and five in Rashīd's schema, or to a lesser degree, *tark al-ʿAmal,* as in point three.

Due to this, I propose a more precise schema that divides *matn* criticism into two: *naqd al-Matn al-Nāshiʾ ʿan al-Isnād* (*isnād*-based *matn* criticism) and *naqd al-Matn al-Nāshiʾ ʿan al-Matn* (content-based *matn* criticism).[1] The former involves examining the *matn* by comparing it with other narrations, where the critique arises from discrepancies among transmission chains. Examples include *mudraj*, *muḍṭarib* and *muṣaḥḥaf*. This type of *matn* criticism generally preserves the broader meaning of the *ḥadīth* and addresses only minor inconsistencies. Therefore, it differs fundamentally from the content criticism raised by orientalists, and excessive elaboration on it is of limited benefit in refuting doubts.

The second type, *naqd al-Matn al-Nāshiʾ ʿan al-Matn* evaluates the *matn* for contradictions with established evidence, independently of the transmission chains. This critique focuses solely on the content's internal inconsistencies, often resulting in the rejection of attribution to the Prophet (PBUH) or, though less decisively, the suspension of its application due to doubts about its authenticity. I argue that the term "content criticism" is less precise than *naqd al-Matn al-Nāshiʾ ʿan al-Matn*, as the former could encompass content critiques rooted in *isnād* analysis.

An illustrative case for *the latter* is the narration by Abū Dāwūd, 28: 3778 and al- Nasāʾī, 22:2243, in which the Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said: "Do not cut meat with knives, for this is the practice of

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[1] I could not find anyone who preceded Ḥamzah al-Bakrī in using these two terms. He introduced them in his lectures on matn criticism delivered at Ibn Haldun University, Istanbul, in 2020.

non-Arabs." Ibn Ḥanbal rejected this *matn* because it contradicts with well-established practices of the Prophet (PBUH), who used knives to carve meat then stood up for prayer and set the knife aside (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1966; Ibn Qudāmah, 1968). Here, the critique is directed at the *matn* itself, independently of other chains of transmission.

It becomes incumbent to note that *naqd al-Matn al-Nāshiʾ ʿan al-Matn* should not be necessarily deemed invalidated if critics ultimately attribute the defect to the *isnād*, as this falls within their area of expertise and specialisation. What is more important is to demonstrate that critics engaged in *matn* criticism independently, whether before or after identifying defects in its *asānīd*. This is consistent with al-ʿAṭāwī's (2007) finding that most of the narrations that al-Bukhārī critiqued for their content, he also critiqued for their chain of transmission.

Contemporary Perspectives on *Muḥaddithūn's* Engagement in *Matn* Criticism

The *isnād* and the *matn* of a *ḥadīth* are fundamentally interconnected and deeply rooted, making it extraordinarily difficult to evaluate it independently. Numerous *ḥadīths* possess outwardly reliable chains yet contain weak or problematic content. Ibn al-Jawzī (1966, p.99) remarked, "there may be an entirely trustworthy chain, yet the *ḥadīth* itself is fabricated, reversed, or tainted by *tadlīs* (obfuscation in transmission). This is the most difficult scenario and can only be identified by expert critics." Despite the growing body of scholarship on the subject, a comprehensive and systematic framework that classifies contemporary perspectives on the *muḥaddithūn's* engagement in *matn* criticism remains absent. Based on that, I have identified four primary viewpoints regarding *matn* criticism as practiced by early *muḥaddithūn*.

First: Absolute Affirmation

The absolute affirmation viewpoint emerged in response to assertions made by orientalists who aimed to undermine the legitimacy of the *sunnah*, by arguing that early *muḥaddithūn* paid insufficient attention to *matn* criticism (Motzki, 2016). In reaction, Muslim scholars produced numerous studies defending the claim that early *muḥaddithūn* did, in fact, engage in *matn* criticism.

Musfir al-Dumaynī (1984b), a leading figure of this viewpoint, claimed that he extracted the criteria used by *muḥaddithūn* to criticise

mutūn from their own writings. He identified seven criteria, including comparing the *matn* with the Qurʾān, cross-examining variants of *ḥadīths* and assessing coherence with historical events. Despite this, al-Dumaynī (1984a, pp.18-19) acknowledged that *ḥadīth* scholars prioritised *isnād* over *matn*, admitting, "we would not be far from the truth if we said that their focus on content analysis was comparatively less than their attention to *isnād* evaluation."

Al-Idlibī (2013) agreed that *muḥaddithūn* had established standards for critiquing *mutūn*, articulated by figures like Ibn al-Qayyim. These standards included examining content for contradictions with Qurʾānic and rational principles. Nevertheless, al-Idlibī (2013) concedes that some scholars focused on *isnād* in an imbalanced manner which resulted to neglecting a holistic view that includes *matn* analysis. Later researchers, including Ṭāhir al-Jawwābī (1991) and Mūzah al-Kūr (n.d.), also added other principles, such as evaluating coherence with historical facts or sensory evidence.

Despite the commendable efforts to revive the contributions of *muḥaddithūn* in criticising *matn*, this prevailing approach has faced criticism regarding how accurately it represents early *hadīth* scholarship. First, there is a tendency to overgeneralise certain criticisms made by later figures such as Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn al-Qayyim, as if their approaches epitomise the methods employed by all *muḥaddithūn*, especially in the formative first three centuries of Islam. Examples were drawn exclusively from the works of these two scholars, with a noticeable absence of references to the books of *al-ʿilal*. In fact, some researchers outrightly denied that such practices were documented in the genre of *al-ʿilal* (al-Dumaynī, 1984b).

Second, these scholars have not been able to demonstrate that the principles were widely applied by early *muḥaddithūn* in post-ṣaḥābah generations. While it is possible to find one or two examples, the challenge lies in proving that *matn* criticism was a fundamental component of *muḥaddithūn's* work.

Second: Denial

The denial viewpoint holds that early *ḥadīth* scholars did not engage in *matn* criticism. Ḥamzah al-Malībārī (2003), a prominent advocate of reviving the methodology of early critics, argues that evaluating

a *ḥadīth* based on its content's coherence with the Qur'ān or reason was not a consistent principle among early *muḥaddithūn*. He suggests that such assessments were only employed sporadically and not as a systematic method. Similarly, Ḥāfiẓ al-Ḥakīmay (2012) rejects the claim that early critics used content-based criteria, as the cited examples are either weak or fabricated. On the other hand, some scholars emphasise the importance of distinguishing between the roles of *muḥaddithūn* and *fuqahāʾ* (jurists). An example would be al-Rashīd's five-fold classification which was discussed earlier. Al-Rashīd (2005) notes that the first three categories pertain to the domain of *fiqh*, while the fourth and fifth are specific to *ḥadīth* criticism. Hence, failure to distinguish between these two roles has led many researchers to conflate between the two methodologies (al-ʿAzzūzī, 2021).

Along the same lines, Ṭāhā Jābir al-ʿAlwānī (2014) stated that many principles associated with *matn* criticism belong primarily to the realm of *fuqahā.ʾ* He outlines nineteen criteria for rejecting *ḥadīths*, including contradictions with scientific knowledge and the promotion of sectarian ideologies. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Abū Sulaymān (2005) also alludes to the limited scope of the *muḥaddithūn's* methodology and calls for its revamp in modern times.

In a more detailed analysis, Muʿtaz al-Khaṭīb (2011), widely regarded as one of the most prominent critics of the absolute affirmation viewpoint, argues that the criteria for *matn* criticism, such as incompatibility with the Qur'ān or established *sunnah*, are primarily the domain of *uṣūlīs* and not rooted in the critical methodology of the *muḥaddithūn*. Al-Khaṭīb (2011, pp.453-4) highlights two major issues in the contemporary literature on *matn* criticism. Firstly, the overgeneralisation of isolated examples from figures such as Ibn al-Jawzī or Ibn al-Qayyim portrayed false impressions as being a representative of the methodology of early *ḥadīth* critics. Secondly, a failure to demonstrate that principles like rejecting a *ḥadīth* due to contradictions with rational evidence were systematically applied by early *muḥaddithūn*.

Despite the compelling arguments presented against the former, the second viewpoint has not sufficiently addressed inherent shortcomings within its own framework. It is notable that the majority of writings aligned with this viewpoint have largely overlooked the contributions

of other researchers that clearly demonstrated the existence of explicit examples of *muḥaddithūn* in the early periods engaging in *naqd al-Matn al-Nāshiʾ ʿan al-Matn*. These works, which will be mentioned in the fourth viewpoint, provide critical data that early *muḥaddithūn* did engage in *matn* criticism. A closer analysis of these data would have been crucial to clarify whether such examples indicate the presence of a clear methodology among the early *muḥaddithūn* or if they merely represent isolated cases unlinked to systematic principles of *ḥadīth* criticism.

Third: Non-Differentiation

This viewpoint posits that there is no substantive difference between the methodologies of *muḥaddithūn* and *uṣūlīs* when it comes to criticising *mutūn*. Sharīf Ḥātim al-ʿAwnī (2008), a major advocate of this position, asserts that the comprehensive framework developed by *muḥaddithūn* was relied upon by *fuqahāʾ* and *uṣūlīs* alike. He contends that claims of a distinct methodology employed by *fuqahāʾ* for *matn* criticism are unfounded, as the principles of *ḥadīth* authentication laid down by *muḥaddithūn* were universally accepted across disciplines (al-ʿAwnī, 2023).

Al-ʿAwnī further emphasises that the reliance of *fuqahāʾ and uṣūlīs* on the critical standards of *muḥaddithūn* demonstrates a methodological unity. He notes that many jurists explicitly stated that a prerequisite for *ijtihād* was familiarity with *ḥadīth* scholars and their criticism. Moreover, al-ʿAwnī suggests that the occasional disagreements of *fuqahāʾ* with *ḥadīth* scholars stemmed from differing interpretations rather than methodological divergence (al-ʿAwnī, n.d.).

Framed by the subsequent two premises, I contend that al-ʿAwnī's view did not represent the holistic reality of the *muḥaddithūn-uṣūliyyūn* scholarship. Firstly, the origins of the principles cited, except for a few, find their roots more suitably in the framework of *uṣūl al-fiqh* rather than in the practices or statements of the *muḥaddithūn*. Secondly, his analysis did not sufficiently address the critiques found in *uṣūl al-fiqh* literature and their application by jurists, particularly from the Ḥanafī and Mālikī schools. These jurists often criticise narrations beyond its *isnād*. In essence, I argue for the need of a more nuanced understanding of the *muḥaddithūn-uṣūliyyūn* relationship, as I view these disciplines as intersecting but not interchangeable.

Fourth: Conditional Affirmation

Researchers aligning to this viewpoint acknowledges that early *muḥaddithūn* engaged in *matn* criticism but maintains that it was applied selectively and within strict parameters (Balhī, 2021). They emphasise on the existence of abundance of examples from early *muḥaddithūn* who engaged in *matn* criticisms due to inconsistencies with external evidences. For instance, Jonathan Brown (2008) contends that by establishing a significant correlation between the *ḥadīths* documented in early works on transmitter criticism and those later classified as forged with explicit *matn* criticism, it becomes evident that early critics engaged in *matn* analysis far more frequently than traditionally assumed. However, this practice was often embedded within the framework and terminology of *isnād* criticism, thus rendering it less apparent. Other researchers, such as Khālid Drays, Nabīl Balhī and Mehmet Ali Çalgan, asserted that *matn* analysis was typically employed when *isnād* scrutiny left certain ambiguities unresolved (Balhī, 2021; al-Drays, 2005; Çalgan, 2024).

This selective approach reflects the *muḥaddithūn's* commitment to preserving the authenticity of *ḥadīth* while acknowledging the necessity of content-based criticism in specific cases. However, it also emphasises that their methodological rigor was centred on *isnād* analysis, with *matn* criticism serving as a complementary tool rather than a primary focus. Thus, this viewpoint offers a nuanced understanding of early *ḥadīth* criticism that harmonised the numerous examples of early *muḥaddithūn* engaging in *matn* criticism with the overuse of such methods by later scholars.

The lack of visibility of *matn* criticism among early *ḥadīth* critics has been explained by contemporary researchers through different perspectives. Brown (2008) attributes it to their effort to not be aligned with *ahl al-raʾy,* therefore prioritising *isnād* over *matn*. Balhī (2021) links it to the dominance of explicit *isnād* criticism, with *matn* issues addressed briefly. Al-Drays (2005) suggests it stems from critics favouring *al-Jamʿ* (synthesis) and *al-Taʾwīl* (exegesis) over *al-Tarjīḥ* (preference), thereby limiting explicit *matn* criticism. The preference for *al-Jamʿ* and *al-Taʾwīl* can be witnessed from the attitudes of critics when addressing *ḥadīth al-Turbah*, where others inferred its direct contradiction with the Qurʾān (Abdullah, 2023).

The above contestations make it apparent that the fourth viewpoint reflects more accurately the balanced reality of *muḥaddithūn-uṣūliyyūn* scholarship. I contend that, based on the examples cited, by my estimation, to over 50 distinct cases, not all the principles can be fully attributed to the craftmanship of the *muḥaddithūn*. Approximately 90 percent of the examples can be encapsulated in three principles only: contradictory to a well-known *sunnah (mukhālafat al-Sunnah al-Mashhūrah)*, contradictory to an established historical fact (*mukhālafat al-Tārīkh al-Thābit*), or determining whether it resembles the speech of the Prophet (PBUH) *(lā yushbih kalām al-Rasūl)*. This suggests that the remaining principles employed in *matn* criticism were deeply rooted in the *uṣūlī* intellectual framework, albeit occasionally utilised by the *muḥaddithūn*. Given that many pre-modern *muḥaddithūn* were also *uṣūliyyūn*, it reflected a likely and significant overlap in their scholarly engagements (al-Shaykh, 2018; ʿĪdū, 2014).

The Origins and Development of Muslim Feminist Critiques of Islamic Texts

Feminist philosophy, whether Western and Islamic, is developed in response to perceived gender biases embedded within traditional systems, particularly religious traditions. It often views traditions as patriarchal structures that marginalise women as active members of society. Scholars in gender studies have highlighted that, while Western (WF) and Islamic feminism (IF)[2] share some foundational principles, they diverge significantly due to their distinct cultural and historical contexts (Badran, 2009; Walters, 2005). IF, for instance, seeks to reconcile Islamic teachings with principles of gender equality, whereas WF often critiques religion as inherently patriarchal (Barlas, 2011).

From a historical standpoint, WF emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries alongside the women's rights movement, which aimed to address legal and social inequities. Initially rooted in Enlightenment ideals of individual rights and equality, WF has evolved through three major waves, beginning with issues such as women's suffrage and

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[2]   While acknowledging the contestations, I employ 'Islamic Feminism' to refer to feminist discourses rooted in Islamic teachings, aimed at reconciling these teachings with contemporary gender-based ethos.

expanding to varied women-based themes, particularly race, gender identity, and nationality (Tong, 2009).

In contrast, IF did not share the same wave-like development but gained prominence in the late 20th century, as Muslim women pursued Western-inspired paths of modernisation and progress, ranging from dress and lifestyle to the conception of a contemporary society (Esposito, 1998). Therefore, it is understandable why critics usually equate IF to its Western counterpart. As Hidayat Tuksal (2013) noted, it is not wholly erroneous to attribute Muslim women's questions pertaining to Islamic framework, to the influence of Westernisation, modernisation, and Western feminist ideologies.

From a philosophical standpoint, WF has undergone significant evolution over time, with a consistent focus on issues such as political representation, workplace equality, and sexual freedom. This movement frequently critiques patriarchal structures and advocates for systemic changes across all sectors of society (Hooks, 2000; Tong, 2009). Opposingly, IF seeks gender equality within a philosophical framework that is based on Islamic principles to ensure compatibility with religious tenets. Central themes include reinterpreting Qurʾānic texts, promoting women's *qiwāmah*, and challenging patriarchal non-Qurʾānic based texts such as *ḥadīth*s or *fatāwā* that were revered as religious mandates of the *sharīʿah* (Ahmed, 2021; Wadud, 1999).

From a theological standpoint, WF has historically critiqued religion, often viewing it as a patriarchal institution that reinforces gender inequality. Secular feminists, such as Simone de Beauvoir (2011) who framed religion as being inherently oppressive to women, have called for its separation from public life to build an egalitarian society. However, contemporary discourse increasingly acknowledges religion-infused feminism which purport gender equality within their traditions, or feminist theology. Thinkers like Rosemary Ruether (1983) have highlighted feminist reinterpretations of Christian theology that challenge traditional gender norms. She, along with the Jewish feminist Judith Plaskow and Muslim feminist Amina Wadud, supported the feminist projects within the Abrahamic tradition (Plaskow et al., 2015).

By comparison, IF is rooted in Islam, with proponents often framing their intellectual and social activism as acts of faith. Muslim feminists argue that a correct interpretation of Islam supports gender

equality and that many oppressive practices attributed to it are cultural traditions incoherent with Quranic principles (Ahmed, 2021; Wadud, 1999). Consequently, IF has faced opposition not only from Muslim traditionalists but also from certain strands of secularists, who confine concepts such as justice and equality to the framework of secular practices (Mir-Hosseini, 2006).

Recognising these challenges, proponents of IF contend that the relevance of feminism will persist until and unless Muslims, particularly their scholarship, begin to embody the Islamic attitudes towards women (Chaudry, 2015). Asma Sayeed (2013) even advanced the view that historically, traditionalist Sunni Islam, as opposed to recent analyses, was the strand responsible for inclusion of women in the public domain in matters pertaining to *ḥadīth* studies. This position starkly contrasts with the perspective of traditionalist Muslims, who assert that Islam promotes general equality between both sexes in terms of rights and responsibilities, rather than absolute equality or identicality (Aliyu, 2010).

Ḥadīth Studies Through Muslim Feminist Frameworks

By playing a salient role in reinterpreting religious texts, Muslim feminists aim to provide new readings from a non-hierarchical perspective that promotes gender justice and equality. While numerous scholars have addressed the subject of IF, I will specifically highlight figures who have critically engaged with *ḥadīth* texts from a feminist perspective, and they include:

1. Fatima Mernissi (1940-2015): A Moroccan feminist and one of the pioneers of IF. She critiques the political and historical contexts that led to patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts, particularly those found in *ḥadīths* that justified gender segregation and inequality (Mernissi, 1991).

2. Riffat Hassan (1943-): A Pakistani-American academic, Hassan emphasises on the reinterpretation of Qur'ānic verses and rejection of selected *ḥadīths*, in order to align with gender equality and social justice. She even reinterpreted the story of creation, that may be Adam, a second creation, was created from Eve (Hassan, 1993).

3. Nimat Hafez Barazangi (1943-): A Syrian-born academic at Cornell University, Barazangi is highly regarded within the feminist circles for her engagement with gender justice in Islam. She presents a contemporary approach that contrasts *ḥadīth* with established Qur'ānic principles, shifting the discourse from textual dogmatism to a religio-moral rational framework, and challenging widely accepted narrations (Barazangi, 2017).

4. Asma Barlas (1950-): Born in Pakistan, Barlas is an academic specialising in feminist readings of Islamic texts. She challenges traditional interpretations of Islamic texts and even questions the authenticity of some *ḥadīths* that, according to her, marginalise women. (Barlas, 2011).

5. Amina Wadud (1952-): Wadud is an American Muslim feminist. Her influential books, *Qur'ān and Woman* and *Inside the Gender Jihad* offer feminist readings of the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*. Wadud gained international attention in 2005 as the first woman to lead a mixed-gender Friday prayer, a move that sparked controversy among traditional Islamic scholars (Wadud, 1999, 2006).

6. Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal (1963-): A Turkish feminist academic raised in Istanbul within a conservative environment, Tuksal is renowned for her works on feminism in Turkish societies. Her works offer a feminist analysis and gender-just readings of traditional interpretations of the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* (Tuksal, 2013).

7. Olfa Youssef (1964-): A Tunisian professor at the University of Manouba, Youssef is known for integrating psychological theories into her feminist critiques of Islamic texts. She firmly believes in the non-sutured nature of Islamic texts, contesting the institutionalised phallocentric readings of *ḥadīths* that do not align with gender equality (Youssef, 2017).

Undeniably, many additional names could be included in this list, particularly among the growing number of Indonesian researchers examining the societal impact of seemingly misogynistic narrations on students in Islamic institutions such as *pesantren* (Marhumah, 2015; Nasrullah, 2015; Suryani et al., 2024). However, my discussion

revolves around selected researchers who have directly addressed or utilised principles of *matn* criticism rooted in feminist ethos.

The Muslim Feminists' Approach to *Matn* Criticism

Generally, Muslim feminists do not outrightly reject the authority of the *sunnah*. Hence, it would be unfair to label Muslim feminists as adherents of the Qur'ān-only movement. However, many adopt Fazlur Rahman's interpretive framework, which considers *ḥadīth* as a historical phenomenon rather than a definitive source of law (Rahman, 1965; Wadud, 1999). Even Hassan's (1993) argument that a post-patriarchal Islam is nothing other than a Qur'ānic Islam, embraces *ḥadīths* that are coherent with Qur'ānic moral compass. Consequently, individual *ḥadīths* are often viewed as not carrying binding injunctions.

Mernissi (1991), for instance, contends that many *ḥadīths* that were traditionally used to subjugate women, stem from patriarchal interpretations rather than authentic Islamic teachings. Similarly, Wadud (2006) emphasises that *ḥadīths* should be interpreted in light of its historical and social context rather than used as legitimacy to impose restrictions on women's rights. She calls for the reinterpretation through a hermeneutic model grounded in the concept of *tawḥīd*. In the same manner, Barlas (2011) contends that *ḥadīths* should be assessed through universal values like justice and equality. She rejects traditional interpretations that uphold male dominance and accepts only those aligning with the Qur'ān's egalitarian vision.

It can be drawn that the primary reason feminist thinkers prioritise *matn* criticism over *isnad* analysis lies in the perceived historical male dominance that shaped the vessel of tradition, consequently influencing the preservation of Islamic texts. They highlight how figures like Abū Hurayrah and Abū Bakrah have faced criticism for perceived gender biases in the narrations they transmitted (Barlas, 2011; Brown, 2009; Mernissi, 1991).

Although some voices within Muslim feminist thought assert that early *muḥaddithūn* did engage in *matn* criticism, these perspectives are often regarded as having limited influence, as they have not significantly shaped mainstream discourse. Feminist thinkers underscore a substantial lacuna in *matn* criticism and promote innovative approaches in critiquing it. Apart from claiming that *mutūn of sunnah* consist of irreconcilable

inconsistencies, several Muslim feminists argue that male-dominated interpretations of *ḥadīths* have led to the social construction of an androcentric attitude to Islamic theology (Hassan, 1993).

The Muslim feminist's approach to *matn* criticism involves a focused examination of the content of narrations, striving to move beyond the traditional emphasis on *isnad* while examining the broader implications of a *ḥadīth's* message. The status of a narration, including its inclusion in the *Saḥīḥay*n, is deemed immaterial to their criticisms. When examining Qur'ānic texts, Aysha Hidayatullah (2014) discerns three primary methodologies employed by Muslim feminists: the historical contextualisation method, the intratextual method, and the *tawḥīdic* paradigm. However, except for the *tawḥīdic* paradigm, these methodologies have not been systematically applied to *matn* criticism. Instead, I have identified four key principles: the *tawḥīdic* paradigm, *Qur'ānic-Weltanschauung* analysis, influences of Israelite traditions, and gender-discriminatory content. Feminist academics use these principles to reject *ḥadīths* that they deem inconsistent with the egalitarian spirit of Islamic teachings while addressing the historical and cultural biases present in it.

First Principle: Contradictory to the Tawḥīdic Paradigm

The concept of *tawḥīd*, or the oneness of God, is foundational to Islamic theology. It mandates that worship and submission be directed exclusively to Allah while rejecting any notion of associating partners or equivalents with the divine (*shirk*). Feminist exegetes employ the *tawhidic* paradigm to assert that sex-based preferences are forms of "idolatry since it attributes a God-like role to men over women" (Hidayatullah, 2014, p.110). Wadud (2006), who coined the term, argue that certain *ḥadīths* conflict with this cardinal Islamic principle by promoting ideas that elevate the male gender, thus undermining the principle of equality, which is central to the *tawḥīdic* paradigm.

A prominent example is the *ḥadīth* reported by al-Tirmidhī, 12:1159; Abū Dāwūd, 12:2150, Ibn Mājah, 9:1853 and others: "If I were to command anyone to prostrate to another, I would have commanded women to prostrate to their husbands." Feminist exegetes reject this *ḥadīth* by arguing that prostration is an act of worship reserved for Allah alone and that any suggestion of human beings being worthy of prostration violates the essence of *tawḥīd*. They posit that such

narrations originate from patriarchal contexts rather than divine intent, as they attribute a near-divine status to men in marital relationships and depict the wife as "husband's humble servant" (Fadl, 2013, pp. 211-13). Hence, the *Tawḥīdic* hermeneutic paradigm aims to reevaluate *ḥadīths* that appear to elevate men above women in ways inconsistent with exclusive obedience to Allah.

Feminist thinkers have extended this principle to other *ḥadīths* with hierarchical undertones, such as the *ḥadīth* in al-Bukhārī, 56:2858 and Muslim, 39:2225: "Inauspiciousness lies in the house, the woman, and the horse." They purport that the belief in inauspiciousness of women is not only erroneous but wholly superstitious, which contravenes the doctrinal tenets of *tawḥīd* (Tuksal, 2013).

Second Principle: Contradictory to the Qur'ānic Weltanschauung

Another core principle in feminist approaches to *ḥadīth* criticism is the alignment of *ḥadīths* with Qur'ānic *Weltanschauun*g, or an all-encompassing Qur'ānic worldview, which signifies a framework for understanding life, ethics, and human relationships grounded in broad values such as *ʿadl* (justice), *musāwah* (equality), and *raḥmah* (compassion) (Izutsu, 1964; Wadud, 1999). Feminist academics argue that *ḥadīths* conflicting with these principles should be re-examined or rejected. A frequently cited example is the *ḥadīth* narrated by al-Bukhārī, 6:304 and Muslim, 1:79: "The majority of the inhabitants of Hell are women."

Mernissi, Barlas, Barazangi and Tuksal have all criticised this *ḥadīth*. Mernissi (1991) argues that this narration reflects cultural biases rather than divine truth. She highlights the potential for misogynistic attitudes within the early Islamic community to have influenced such narrations. Therefore, it is imperative to scrutinise their authenticity. Barlas (2011) also emphasised the need for *ḥadīth* contents to align with the Qur'ānic portrayal of women as spiritual and moral equals to men. Supporting her claims, Barazangi (2017) added that the Qur'ān categorically rejects collective punishment based on gender, rendering such *ḥadīth* as inconsistent with Islamic principles of justice. Similarly, Tuksal (2013) questioned the *ḥadīth*'s authenticity, noting its resemblance to fabricated fables and its contradictions with the Qurʾān. She argues that Qurʾānic ethical principles should take precedence. Another famous narration that has not been spared from criticism is

the one reported by al-Bukhārī, 59: 3237 and Muslim, 16:1436: "If a man calls his wife to bed and she refused to answer him, the angels will curse her till the morning". Offering new readings, Youssef (2017) opines that the narration reflects a prevalent gender-discriminatory social imagination that equates women to slaves, and marriages to ownership. She further questioned how can one reconcile between the higher objectives of marriages such as amicable companionship, mercy and compassion embedded in the Qur'ān, with coercion to engage in undesired sexual relationships.

This approach aligns with Wadud's (1999, pp. 4,31,85) teacher, Rahman's historical-contextual method, which she often references in her work. Rahman (1984) argued that the ethical spirit of Islam, as captured in the Qur'ān, must guide the interpretation of traditions rather than rigid adherence to literalist readings of texts. Rahman's methodology has influenced feminist academics, who highlight the Qur'ānic emphasis on equality and justice as a lens to criticise *ḥadīths* that seem to perpetuate inequality. The view was further expanded by Barazangi (2017) who asserted the rejection of all *ḥadīths* texts that do not corroborate with Qur'ānic teachings. She argued that Muslims failed to heed to the Prophet's (PBUH) praxis of giving preference the Quran as the primary epistemic source.

Third Principle: Rejecting Ḥadīths with Roots in Israelite Narratives

Feminists criticised *ḥadīths* that appear to have origins in Israelite traditions (*isrāʾīliyyāt*), by basing their arguments that such narrations often introduce foreign theological and cultural biases to authentic Islamic teachings. An example frequently scrutinised is the *ḥadīth* reported by al-Bukhārī, 6:3331 and Muslim, 17:1468: "Woman was created from a rib, and the most crooked part of the rib is its upper part."

Hassan, Hatice Arpaguş, Tuksal and others have challenged this *ḥadīth* on multiple grounds. They point out that the Qur'ān explicitly states that humanity was created from a single soul (*nafs wāḥidah*) (Qur'ān 4:1), without specifying gender hierarchies in creation. As aforementioned, Hassan (1993) even attempted to reinterpret the narrative of creations, arguing that it is plausible Adam was created from Eve and not vice versa. Correspondingly, Tuksal (2013) critiques the symbolic use of the rib in this narration, which portrays women as inherently crooked or deficient. She contrasts it with Qur'ān 4:1 to reject

any notion of ontological hierarchy, arguing that the rib metaphor has been weaponised to justify unequal treatment of women. As a response, Arpaguş (2013) demands a return to Qur'ānic descriptions of human creation: a description that emphasises equality and mutual respect. She argues that such narrations reflect patriarchal narratives borrowed from Jewish and Christian traditions rather than authentic Islamic teachings.

Fourth Principle: Rejecting Gender-Discriminatory and Misogynistic Ḥadīths

Feminists reject *ḥadīths* that portray women in derogatory or discriminatory ways, as such narrations are deemed incompatible with the Islamic ethos and decorum. A closer analysis of this principle reveals that it closely aligns with the second principle, the Qur'ānic *Weltanschauung*. Nevertheless, I categorised it as a distinct principle in *matn* criticism because feminist thinkers often reject narrations they perceive as gender-discriminatory without explicitly analysing their alignment, or lack of it, with Qur'ānic principles. This approach parallels their treatment of narrations with roots in *isrāʾīliyyāt*, where rejection is based on the source rather than a detailed argument of contradiction with Qur'ānic values. Similarly, in the case of gender-discriminatory narrations, Muslim feminists consider it sufficient to reject them solely on their perceived misogynistic content. One oft-cited example is the *ḥadīth* reported by Muslim, 4:510: "A woman, a dog, and a donkey interrupt the prayer if they pass in front of the praying person."

Mernissi (1991) devoted extensive sections of her work to refuting this narration. She concluded that the abyss came from Abū Hurayrah, whom she characterised as perpetuating a tradition of misogyny. Furthermore, she emphasised the necessity of reassessing this narration's authenticity via its historical context and the sociocultural dynamics of early Islamic society. In a parallel fashion, Tuksal (2013) argues that such *ḥadīths* reflect cultural prejudices and patriarchal social norms rather than authentic Islamic teachings. She notes that such reports have facilitated woman being associated with negative connotations in the *ḥadīth* literature.

This principle can also be exemplified in Mernisi's criticism of the contentious *ḥadīth* that equates women to satan. It has been narrated in Muslim, 16:1403, that the Prophet (PBUH) saw a woman, and so he came to his wife, Zainab, and had sexual intercourse with her. He

then went to his companions and told them: "The woman advances and retires in the shape of a satan, so when one of you sees a woman, he should come to his wife, for that will repel what he feels in his heart." Mernissi (1991, p.41) proclaimed that such narrations identify women with "*fitna*, chaos, and with the anti-divine and anti-social forces of the universe."

Critical Reassessment of the Muslim Feminists' Approach to *Matn* Criticism

Muslim feminists draw from a diverse array of sources in their approach to understanding *ḥadīth*s. By and large, these sources include works of Western academics and orientalists, though exceptions exist. Many feminist researchers do not reference classical Islamic scholars nor engage with conventional methodologies such as *isnād* verification or traditional *ḥadīth* commentaries.

For instance, Hassan (1993, pp.40,46,63) draws on the works of Goldziher, Guillame and other orientalists to challenge traditional Islamic paradigms. She even adopts external frameworks, such as Fred Cantwell's definition of a true *mu'min*, which underscored her reliance on non-Islamic interpretive models (Hassan, 1993, p.60). Similarly, Barlas (2011, pp. 43,47-50) depended heavily on Goldziher's convictions such as his distinction between *sunnah* and *ḥadīth*. As a result, feminist thinkers employ modern interpretative tools such as contemporary hermeneutics or develop their own interpretive frameworks for critiquing *ḥadīth* texts (Duderija et al., 2020). This methodological dependence on external, often non-Islamic frameworks marks a significant departure from the classical tradition of the *muḥaddithūn*. By privileging modern gender theories and secular hermeneutics over conventional methodologies such as *isnād* analysis and *ḥadīth* commentaries, such approaches risk imposing foreign paradigms onto Islamic texts, thereby undermining the internal coherence and integrity of the Islamic intellectual tradition.

On another note, it is interesting to observe that while the number of total criticised narrations that are deemed to be misogynistic present in authentic canons do not exceed ten, many feminists still maintain a sceptical attitude towards *ḥadīth* corpus. Barlas (2011) identified six misogynistic narrations classified as *ṣaḥīḥ*, while Tuksal (2013) broadly categorizes these into five narrations, akin to the categorisation of Guillame (n.d.). A more extensive study by Saadah Khair (2018)

concludes that only nine narrations from the acceptable collections have been scrutinised by feminist thinkers. Even by the most expansive estimates, which include any women-related narration questioned primarily by Arab modernists, they amount to no more than 29 narrations (Balūj, 2014). When the highest estimate, 29 narrations, is compared to the approximate 4,000 narrations in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (excluding repetitions), it constitutes less than 1%. Alternatively, if it is compared to the 696 narrations in *al-Bukhārī* specifically addressing women, it accounts for less than five percent (Khair & Dahlan, 2017). Despite this, Tuksal (2013) postulated that misogyny is a common characteristic of women-related reports. This position has been contested by Sultan (2023) who conducted stylistic analytical studies on 18 accepted narrations, employing methodologies such as Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, Speech Act Theory and Semantic Field Analysis, and concluded that the Prophet's (PBUH) semantic representation of women is often positive.

At first glance, it appears that Muslim feminists have developed a sophisticated framework for criticising *ḥadīth* texts independently of their *isnād*. However, it must be argued that these four principles are relatively subjective rather than conclusively objective, rendering them insufficient as definitive grounds for rejecting established narrations. The examples provided for each principle are open to multiple interpretations and may not necessarily align with a deeper understanding of the principles themselves. As noted in the introduction, this study does not seek to engage every feminist critique, but focuses on evaluating the epistemological soundness of the core principles used to reject *ḥadīth* texts in light of conventional methodologies.

The first principle, which focuses on the *tawḥīdic* paradigm, asserts that all *ḥadīths* must not promote *shirk*. Based on this rationale, it is implausible to argue that any *ḥadīth* authenticated by early *muḥaddithūn* would fall into this category, as doing so would inherently contradict their faith and their commitment to Islam. Even in the case of the *ḥadīth* on "possible prostration" to husbands, none of the critics who authenticated this report equated husbands with God or even elevating their statuses beyond humanhood. Such a comparison would constitute heresy, an accusation that is incongruent with the faith and methodology of these critics. Instead, the *ḥadīth* is interpreted as a rhetorical device denoting the seriousness of a wife's duty, not a literal call for

subjugation. Classical commentators explain that the statement is based on an impossible condition, as *sujūd al-ʿibādah* is reserved for Allah alone. Although *sujūd al-taʿẓīm* was once permitted for the angels to Adam, the Prophet (PBUH) clarified that even this is no longer allowed. (al-Munāwī, 1937). Thus, the statement underscores the husband's rights without implying divine-like authority.

Similarly, the ḥadīth about inauspiciousness of women has not been utilised by scholars as a tool to subjugate women. Instead, two major interpretive trajectories emerge in the commentarial tradition. The first group took the narration at face value but argued that it was either abrogated or descriptive of pre-Islamic or non-Muslim beliefs, though these claims lack strong evidentiary support (al-Quḍāh, 2003). The second, which is the more prominent view held by scholars such as Mālik, al-Subkī, Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, al-Nawawī, and Ibn Qayyim, maintained that the narration referred to specific individuals rather than women. (al-Nawawī, 1972; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, n.d.) Some even affirmed that inauspiciousness is also found in certain men (Balūj, 2014). Taken together, these interpretations suggest that the ḥadīth, when read within its exegetical context, should not be dismissed on the grounds of shirk-related connotations. Rather, it highlights the spiritual danger of any spouse who diverts their partner from God, thereby reinforcing the principle of *tawḥīd*.

The other principles similarly lack foundational grounding. For example, the principle regarding alignment with "broad Qurʾānic concepts" remains inherently ambiguous. What precisely constitutes the "broad concepts" of the Qurʾān? Under whose interpretative framework should these concepts be understood? If a ḥadīth does not espouse absolute equality between husbands and wives, should it therefore be dismissed as spurious? If so, what would this imply for narrations that emphasise the preferential status of mothers over fathers? Should such narrations also be rejected? These questions expose the principle's inherent subjectivity and its susceptibility to varying interpretations.

A case in point is the ḥadīth that the majority of hell's inhabitants are women. While often cited as oppressive, several scholars have responded by highlighting that the majority of paradise's inhabitants are also women, due to their larger numbers closer to the *ākhirah*. This view is upheld by the often-mischaracterised companion Abū Hurayrah,

along with Ibn Taymiyyah, Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, al-ʿIrāqī, and others (al-ʿIrāqī, n.d.; ibn Taymiyyah, 1995). *Ḥadīth* commentators further clarified that the narration addresses specific blameworthy traits observed among certain women, rather than inherent deficiency in their gender, thereby distancing the report from essentialist or misogynistic interpretations. (Balūj, 2014)

Even Youssef's comparison of wives to slaves appears to be far removed from classical interpretations. Adversaries argue that Islam's approach to addressing differing treatments in sexual relations requires context-specific analysis, as generalising texts from specific contexts weakens their evidentiary value and fails to withstand scientific scrutiny, thereby rendering it methodologically unsound to conclusively reject the authenticity of the *ḥadīth* (Chekireb, 2020). Scholars such as al-Nawawī (1972) and al-Munāwī (1937) affirm that a wife may refuse sexual intercourse for valid reasons, such as illness, but caution against misusing this concession as a means of harm or manipulation.

Furthermore, the principle concerning the influence of *isrāʾīliyyāt* should not be applied indiscriminately. Scholars generally agree that not all *isrāʾīliyyāt* should be outrightly rejected. Instead, such narrations should be cautiously evaluated: acceptance, rejection, or abstention, based on their alignment, or lack thereof, with Islamic teachings and principles (Al-Dhahabī, 1990). Evidently, it is reasonable to posit that certain narratives derived from the shared themes of the Abrahamic faiths may exhibit general similarities, such as the creation of Adam and Eve, while differing significantly in details. Rejecting the narration of woman's creation from the rib solely due to its resemblance to broad Israelite narratives is inadequate, as this logic would also invite the dismissal of major Qurʾānic narratives.

Lastly, the fourth principle, which criticises narrations that perpetuate gender discrimination, is theoretically sound and epistemologically rooted in Islamic traditions. However, its application remains a matter of debate. If a *ḥadīth* critic compares a woman to an animal, for example, this raises an issue of interpretative understanding rather than one of authenticity. Such cases necessitate nuanced analysis to distinguish between the *ḥadīth's* intent and the critic's perception of its implications. In the *ḥadīth* that a woman, a dog, and a donkey interrupt a man's prayer, scholars have clarified that ʿĀʾishah's objection was not

about defending women's dignity per se, but about challenging the legal equivalence made between women and animals in terms of rulings. Balūj (2014) drew a parallel: if one claims that urination and contact with a woman both nullify wuḍūʾ, this does not imply a moral or ontological equivalence, but rather reflects a shared legal effect. This is consistent with the legal maxim: *al-iqtirān fī al-naẓm lā yastalzim al-iqtirān fī al-ḥukm* (conjunction in wording does not necessitate conjunction in ruling) (al-Shawkānī, 1999). It is also inaccurate to attribute misogyny to Abū Hurayrah due to this narration, as it was transmitted by other companions, including Abū Dharr, Ibn ʿAbbās, and Anas. Asserting that all of them held misogynistic views requires substantiating evidence, a point that is frequently overlooked by critics such as Mernissi (Balūj, 2014).

The same can be argued for the case of comparing women to Satan. By expounding on the cosmological creation of Satan in Islamic scholarship, Katherine Bullock (2002) adequately addressed Mernisi's claims and proved that no scholar ever did consider women to be equal to Satan. If any, there were metaphorical allegories that considered certain men and women as heirs or apprentices of Satan.

In essence, these four principles are largely subjective and lack the definitive objectivity required to unequivocally reject established narrations. The criticisms offered by these principles are often grounded in historical analyses, which examine the impact of external traditions, yet bypassing conventional methodologies such as *isnād* verification and classical commentaries. While they provide a framework for interpreting *ḥadīth*, their subjective nature accentuates the need for careful and context-sensitive application.

Conclusion

The debate over the role of *matn* criticism within the methodologies of early *muḥaddithūn* reveals the complexity of Islamic scholarly traditions and the evolving interpretations of Prophetic narrations. This study underscores the diversity of scholarly opinions, categorising them into four distinct viewpoints: absolute affirmation, denial, non-differentiation, and conditional affirmation. It demonstrates that while *muḥaddithūn* undeniably engaged in rigorous *isnād* evaluation, evidence from classical texts such as the *ʿilal* and *mawḍūʿāt* indicates that aspects of *matn* criticism were also employed, albeit not as systematically as

some contemporary scholars suggest. The distinction proposed in this article between *naqd al-Matn al-Nāshiʾ ʿan al-Isnād* and *naqd al-Matn al-Nāshiʾ ʿan al-Matn* offers a nuanced framework to understand the interplay between the two. It also affirms that *matn* criticism was often influenced by broader *uṣūlī* principles and contextual considerations.

This study also explores the methodologies and limitations of contemporary feminist Muslim thought in criticising *ḥadīth* texts. While significant principles, such as the *tawḥīdic* paradigm and *Qurʾānic-weltanschauung* analysis, provide innovative perspectives, they remain subjective and open to multiple interpretations. Therefore, it has been concluded that they are insufficient to categorically reject well-established narrations. If any, these principles can serve as tools for offering alternative readings that align with contemporary understanding of societal values.

In conclusion, this paper represents the inaugural scholarly effort to delineate contrasting perspectives on *matn* criticism, especially for non-Arabic readers. It bridges classical and contemporary approaches and expounds on the strengths and limitations of both, and offers a comprehensive understanding of the intellectual trajectories shaping contemporary Islamic thought. Ultimately, this study contributes to a more holistic appreciation of *muḥaddithūn's* methodology and encourage continued interdisciplinary dialogue for a deeper exploration of Islamic traditions.

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Alias, A. (2009). Human nature. In N. M. Noor (Ed.), *Human nature from an Islamic perspective: A guide to teaching and learning* (pp.79-117). Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press.

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Chapra, M. U. (2002). Islam and the international debt problem. *Journal of Islamic Studies, 10*, 214-232.

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The glorious Qur'ān. Translation and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (1977). US: American Trust Publications.

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(i) Al-Bukhārī, 88:204 (where 88 is the book number, 204 is the ḥadīth number)
(ii) Ibn Hanbal, vol. 1, p. 1

Reference:
(i) Al-Bukhārī, M. (1981). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.
(ii) Ibn Ḥanbal, A. (1982). *Musnad Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari.

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