

# DECOLONIZING METHOD OF HADITH MATN CRITICISM ON THE CASE OF AISHA'S AGE AT MARRIAGE IN WESTERN SCHOLARSHIP

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**Abstract.** This paper critically examines the methodological framework employed in Western scholarship regarding the age of 'Aisyah at the time of her marriage to Prophet Muhammad PBUH. In the context of contemporary Western modernism, which has introduced new ethical standards and norms previously non-existent but now deemed authoritative, this study aims to investigate the impact of these norms on the interpretation within the scholarship of hadith. Through a decolonial perspective applied to the critique of hadith matan (text), this paper seeks to uncover or deconstruct colonial biases and Eurocentric perspectives that have historically shaped academic discourse on this issue. Additionally, the research highlights the contributions and perspectives of prominent figures in Western hadith scholarship, including Jonathan AC Brown, to enrich the dialogue on this subject. Using content analysis methodology, this study concludes that inherent biases of Western modernity are present in Jasser Auda's method of hadith matan criticism regarding the hadith on 'Aisyah's age at marriage. Furthermore, Joshua Little's

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dissertation also contains Western biases, such as the standardization of underage marriage for women.

**Keywords:** Decolonizing, Method of Hadith Matn Criticism, Aisha's Age at Marriage.

## INTRODUCTION

Recent critiques of hadith matn appear to be heavily influenced by various interests or ideologies held by their critics. As Linda Smith has stated, such phenomena are forms of colonization that dominate minds and shape methodologies deemed correct (Smith, 2021). One example is the colonization of Western values in the criticism of matn hadith concerning the age of Aisha's marriage (Muzakkir, 2022). According to an argument presented by Jasser Auda in a seminar, this hadith should be rejected or considered unauthentic because it describes actions that he believes are inappropriate for the prophet. However, as noted by Jonathan Brown (Rofiq, 2019a), ethical standards regarding the appropriateness of marrying a young girl only emerged after the advent of Western modernity. This indicates an epistemic imposition on the critique methods previously established by hadith scholars (ulama).

The colonization of hadith criticism methods—including hadith matn criticism—by some Western scholars marginalizes these methods. In fact, the criticism methods born from the early Islamic intellectual tradition have the right to speak for themselves, at least through the hadith scholars of that period (Tayob, 2018). If this continues unchecked, such hegemonic colonization will become objectified (justified), thereby oppressing or dominating hadith scholarship, particularly the methods of hadith criticism (Stilz, 2015). Moreover, there exists an inherent hegemonic system among many circles that views Western contributions as more authoritative, such as being valid, academically methodological, or more scientific—which only emerged post-Western Enlightenment (Husaini, 2020). Therefore, it is important to expose such colonial discourse to defend the criticism methods that are appropriate and aligned with the knowledge produced by hadith scholars.

To uncover or dismantle the colonial discourse (colonization) present in the methods of matn criticism, further investigation into recent literature is necessary. This can be achieved by mapping the

opinions of Western scholars that contain colonial discourse, such as Jasser Auda. Additionally, mapping should include opinions that seek to liberate from this colonial discourse, or what can be termed as decolonization. A well-known reference in this context is Jonathan A.C. Brown's perspectives, expressed through various media. Using the content analysis method, this paper aims to reveal both discourses within the context of matn criticism. These approaches operate under the umbrella of decolonization as an effort to analyze colonial discourse, such as Western biases.

### **Development of Hadith Matn Criticism**

Matn criticism has existed in works addressing contradictory hadiths and has gradually evolved into a systematic and theoretical discipline. According to research, the first work of this nature was written by al-Shafi'i (d. 204 AH) titled *Ikhtilaf al-Hadith*. Following him, Ibn Qutaibah (d. 276 AH) authored *Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith*. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 463 AH) then continued this tradition with his work *al-Kifayah fi 'Ilm al-Riwayah*, followed by Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597 AH) with *al-Mawdu'at*. Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751 AH) later wrote *al-Manar al-Munif fi al-Sahih wa al-Da'if*, and al-Zarkashi (d. 794 AH) contributed with his book *al-Ijabah li Iradi ma Istadrakathu A'ishah ala al-Sahabah* (Kusnandar, 2020).

In recent times, matn criticism has begun to be systematically organized and formulated by hadith scholars. One contemporary scholar who has significantly contributed to this field is Muhammad Mustafa al-A'zami (d. 1439 AH). He not only sought to critique the views of Orientalists on hadith but also formulated works centered on matn criticism. One of his renowned works on this subject is *Manhaj al-Naqd 'ind al-Muhaddisin Nasyatuh wa Tarikhuh* (Al-A'zami, 1990). In the same era, Muhammad Tahir al-Jawabi (d. 1433 AH) also enriched the scholarly discourse on matn criticism with his work *Juhud al-Muhaddisin fi Naqd Matn al-Hadith al-Nawabi al-Sharif* (Al-Jawabi, 1986).

Subsequently, Salah al-Din al-Adlabi contributed with his work *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn 'ind 'Ulama al-Hadis al-Nabawi*, which has become a reference for many contemporary scholars in the field of hadith matn criticism (Al-Adlabi, 1983). He is even considered by some to be a pioneer in formulating systematic works in matn criticism, inspired by al-A'zami (Maulanida & Kamalia, 2022).

Therefore, to this day, al-Adlabi's work stands as the most current theoretical source on hadith criticism written by a hadith scholar.

The formulation of hadith criticism itself has undergone development over time. For instance, al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 463 AH) proposed six criteria for the authenticity of the matn. In subsequent developments, Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751) even formulated twelve criteria for rejecting a matn (Hudaya, 2014). Salah al-Din al-Adlabi then summarized the opinions of these two earlier figures by formulating four accepted (*maqbul*) criteria for the matn. Among these four criteria are: firstly, it should not contradict the Quran; secondly, it should not contradict authentic hadiths and the Prophet's biography (*sirah*); thirdly, it should not contradict reason, senses, and history; fourthly, it should be similar to the Prophet's sayings (Al-Adlabi, 1983). These criteria represent at least the current reference for the acceptance of a hadith matn.

In addition to its peak period, hadith criticism has also undergone various dynamics due to the development of modernity, accompanied by the increasing complexity of life's issues. One example is the criticism posed by Ignaz Goldziher regarding the lack of matn criticism among scholars. According to him, many hadiths that were initially deemed authentic based on the *isnad* aspect are, upon examination of the matn aspect, found to be false (Idri & Baru, 2019). Matn criticism can also be influenced by the ideological backgrounds of specific groups. For instance, matn criticism among Sunni and Shia differs in several aspects (Hasan, 2020). Furthermore, the dynamics of matn criticism are also greatly influenced by recent Western modernity, such as feminism, humanistic values, and individual freedom regarding LGBTQ issues. One hadith subject to this influence is the hadith regarding female leadership by Fatima Mernissi (Dadah, 2018). Based on this exposition, it can be mapped that hadith criticism has undergone significant development and dynamics in recent times.

### **Hadith Matn Criticism on the Case of Aisha's Age at Marriage**

Based on exploitation employed, the matn of the hadith concerning the age of 'Aisyah at the time of her marriage has been narrated by various credible hadith scholars. Among them is al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* collection. The following presents the complete matn and *isnad* (chain of transmission) as found in this collection.

*Muhammad ibn Yusuf narrated to us, Sufyan narrated to us, from Hisham, from his father, from Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), that "the Prophet married her when she was six years old, and consummated the marriage with her when she was nine years old, and she remained with him for nine years."* (Al-Bukhari, 2006)

The above hadith is not only narrated by al-Bukhari but also by Muslim in his *Sahih* (Al-Naisaburi, 1989). Additionally, it is narrated by al-Nasa'i, Ibn Majah, and al-Darimi in their respective *Sunans* (al-Khurasani, 1984; Al-Quzwaini, 1985), as well as by Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his *Musnad* (Al-Syaibani, 2001). When the status of the narrators in the chain of transmission is traced through al-Bukhari's route, it is found that all of them are considered trustworthy (*siqab*) by the majority of hadith critics (Al-Mizzi, 1980). The uninterrupted chain of transmission from the hadith codifiers to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), along with the absence of any anomalies (*shas*) or hidden defects (*'illah*) (Al-Syafi'i, 1986), makes this hadith, according to the authenticity standards established by classical hadith scholars, classified as *sahih*. Therefore, the above hadith, besides being found in many canonical hadith collections, is also regarded as *sahih*.

### **Colonization within Method of Hadith Matn Criticism**

The colonial discourse asserting the 'more scientific' recognition of the methods employed by Western scholars over traditional hadith criticism methods can be found in Joshua J. Little's dissertation. He conducted his research under the title "The Hadith of 'Ā'ishah's Marital Age: A Study in the Evolution of Early Islamic Historical Memory." In his dissertation, he utilizes the Historical Critical Method, which is employed by Western scholars and considered sufficiently accurate for testing the historicity of hadith sources (Hashmi, 2022). A notable distinction of this method is its emphasis on the reasonableness of content within the historical context itself. Moreover, he does not employ the source criticism methods commonly formulated by the majority of hadith scholars but rather uses the Isnad Cum Matn Analysis theory popularized by Harald Motzki (Little, 2022). It is evident that he adopts tools from the perspective of Western scholarship, along with the theories and methods associated with it.

One notable aspect worth highlighting here is the testing of a hadith matn's reasonableness as historical information. The standard of testing whether the content of a hadith is reasonable or not is a point that requires scrutiny. This is because the standard of what is considered reasonable can vary significantly between different regions or eras (Afwadzi, 2017). If marrying someone deemed underage is considered taboo in the present day, it does not necessarily mean that it was perceived the same way a thousand years ago. Historical data shows that the standard of underage marriage, particularly in the context of sexuality, only emerged around the 1900s (Green, 2002). This indicates the presence of Western bias and the assumption of more scientific methods attributed to Western theories. The author underscores this as a colonial discourse specifically intervening in the method of hadith matn criticism.

Another source found on Jasser Auda's official website explains that the hadith concerning 'Aisyah's age at marriage to Prophet Muhammad does not indicate that she was 6 or 9 years old, but rather 16 years old (Auda, 2016). Another relevant discussion is presented by Muhammad Rofiq Muzakkir in his book, "Decolonization: Critical Methodology in the Study of Humanities and Islamic Studies." He recounts his experience attending a seminar featuring Jasser Auda. During the seminar, Jasser Auda criticized the hadith about 'Aisyah's age at marriage, asserting that it is inauthentic, fabricated, and filled with political intrigue. He argued that the portrayal in the hadith does not reflect the propriety expected of a prophet (Muzakkir, 2022). Following Muzakkir's perspective, the author suggests that Auda's hadith criticism method is influenced by Western colonial discourse, particularly the standardization of marriageable age (Rofiq, 2019b). Consequently, both Jasser Auda and Joshua Little engage in the colonization of hadith matn criticism methods, whether consciously or not. The adoption of these standards indirectly implies that the source criticism methods formulated by Western scholars are more scientific and reliable, regardless of their appropriateness.

## **Decolonizing Method of Hadith Matn Criticism**

A form of decolonization in the context of the hadith about 'Aisyah's age at marriage has been undertaken by Jonathan AC Brown. In many of his writings available online, including various public debates on social media, he highlights the Western biases

inherent in the criticism methods employed by hadith critics. He reveals that Jasser Auda, among others, employs a criticism methodology tainted with Western modernity biases. Brown argues that the modern standards regarding the minimum age for marriage have only emerged recently. Furthermore, if the hadith in question were problematic in that aspect, it would have been cited by several scholars before the Western Enlightenment era. However, according to Brown, the hadith was not challenged in earlier works, such as al-Shafi'i's "Ikhtilaf al-Hadith," which was authored by an early generation Islamic scholar (Muzakkir et al., 2023). This indicates a clear decolonization effort by Jonathan AC Brown against the matn criticism method employed by Jasser Auda.

In addition to the case of Jasser Auda, the author also regrets what Little has done in his dissertation, as discussed in the previous subsection. According to the author, Little—perhaps unconsciously—has colonized the sources and methods of matn criticism used by hadith scholars. He predominantly employs the Historical Critical Method, which is well-known in the West as a highly accurate method in historical science. However, what is considered scientific in one context may not be scientific in another. Furthermore, the standardization of what is deemed 'appropriate' regarding the marriage age of women has only emerged recently (Green, 2002). This represents a methodological gap in the matn criticism approach taken by both Jasser Auda and Joshua Little.

## CONCLUSION

The development of hadith matn criticism methods has not been immune to Western biases, such as modernity and general ethical standards. Regardless of their awareness, researchers can fall into tendencies that lead to the domination and even colonization of hadith criticism, marginalizing the original scholarship of hadith scholars. By analyzing the arguments put forth by Jasser Auda and Joshua Little, this paper can reveal the presence of colonial discourse (colonization) within the methodological aspects of Western scholarship. Jonathan AC Brown, as one who engages in decolonization in this area, plays a significant role. Evidently, Western modernity and its ethical standards, perhaps unconsciously, inherently shape methods that intervene in the traditional methods of hadith scholars. Such decolonization efforts represent a concrete step in

challenging this by uncovering the colonial discourse underlying these methods.

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