



Reframing “Hadith Rejection”: Epistemological Reduction and Methodological Diversity in Contemporary Hadith Studies

This study seeks to clarify the labeling of hadith rejection by distinguishing between ontological rejection and methodological criticism in assessing the authority of hadith. Employing a qualitative approach grounded in library research and critical discourse analysis, it examines the intellectual debates surrounding key figures commonly associated with hadith rejection, including classical scholars, modern reformists, and Western Orientalists. The findings reveal that the label “hadith rejecter” is not a fixed epistemological category but rather a discursive construct shaped by methodological differences and ideological biases. Many scholars labeled as rejecters do not deny the Prophet’s authority; instead, they propose alternative criteria for the authenticity and interpretation of hadith. This study argues that the prevalent use of this term results in an epistemological oversimplification that obscures the diversity of approaches within hadith scholarship. By distinguishing among three categories, ontological rejection, methodological criticism, and epistemological differences, this research offers a more nuanced analytical framework. Ultimately, the study contributes to a more balanced and dialogical understanding of hadith studies, reduces polarization, and promotes a more inclusive interpretation of intellectual diversity within Islamic thought.

Keywords: Hadith rejection, epistemological reduction, methodological diversity, contemporary hadith studies.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengklarifikasi label pengingkaran hadis dengan membedakan antara penolakan ontologis dan kritik metodologis dalam menilai otoritas hadis. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif yang berbasis studi kepustakaan dan analisis wacana kritis, penelitian ini mengkaji perdebatan intelektual yang mengelilingi tokoh-tokoh utama yang kerap dikaitkan dengan pengingkaran hadis, meliputi ulama klasik, pembaru modern, dan orientalis Barat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa label “pengingkaran hadis” bukanlah kategori epistemologis yang bersifat tetap, melainkan sebuah konstruksi diskursif yang dibentuk oleh perbedaan metodologis dan bias ideologis. Banyak tokoh yang dilabeli sebagai pengingkaran hadis pada kenyataannya tidak menolak otoritas Nabi, namun justru menawarkan kriteria alternatif dalam menilai autentisitas dan penafsiran hadis. Penelitian ini berargumen bahwa penggunaan label tersebut secara luas telah menghasilkan penyederhanaan epistemologis yang mengaburkan keragaman pendekatan dalam studi hadis. Dengan membedakan tiga kategori, yaitu penolakan ontologis, kritik metodologis, dan perbedaan epistemologis, penelitian ini menawarkan kerangka analisis yang lebih benuansa sehingga dapat berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih seimbang dan dialogis terhadap studi hadis, mengurangi polarisasi, serta mendorong penafsiran yang lebih inklusif terhadap keragaman intelektual dalam khazanah pemikiran Islam.

Kata kunci: Pengingkaran hadis, reduksi epistemologis, keragaman metodologis, studi hadis kontemporer.

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Introduction

In contemporary hadith studies, one ongoing debate centers on the use of the label “hadith rejecter” for certain figures in the history of Islamic intellectual thought. This label serves not only as an academic classification but also as a tool for theological polemics, often oversimplifying the nuanced epistemological positions of these individuals. Recent approaches commonly described as rejectionist actually stem from attempts to reinterpret hadith in a rational, historical, and contextual manner, rather than from a complete dismissal of hadith as a source of Islamic teachings.¹ Consequently, this complex intellectual landscape is frequently reduced to a simplistic dichotomy of acceptance versus rejection, overlooking the diverse methodologies employed in understanding and evaluating the authority of hadith.

The phenomenon of labeling is crucial to examine because it not only shapes the construction of the history of Islamic thought but also affects how contemporary Muslims perceive religious authority.² Being labeled a hadith rejecter often carries connotations of intellectual delegitimization and can lead to social exclusion of certain individuals.³ Therefore, a critical and balanced study is necessary to determine whether this label accurately reflects the epistemological stance of the individuals in question or if it results from oversimplifications

arising from methodological disputes. Recent research in contemporary hadith studies further highlights that modern approaches cannot be understood through a simple “acceptance versus rejection” dichotomy; instead, they should be viewed as part of a complex and multidimensional epistemological spectrum.⁴

Numerous studies have examined criticism of hadith within both classical and modern traditions, including analyses of hadith skepticism and orientalist critiques.⁵ However, most of these works tend to categorize all hadith critics simply as rejecters of hadith, without sufficiently distinguishing between the outright rejection of hadith as an authoritative source and the critique of the hadith verification process. The originality of this research lies in its argument that not all individuals labeled as hadith rejecters actually deny the authority of the Prophet; rather, they advocate for different standards and criteria regarding the authenticity of hadith.

This gap becomes increasingly significant when considering that, throughout the history of Islamic intellectualism, several prominent figures, such as Abū Ḥanīfah and Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, have faced accusations of rejecting hadith in certain contexts. Similarly, reformist thinkers like Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Tawfīq Ṣidqī, Maḥmūd Abū Rayyah, Aḥmad Amīn, and Aḥmad Khān, known for their rationalist

¹ Mahmoud Fawzi, Walid Magdy, and Björn Ross, “‘The Prophet Said so!’: On Exploring Hadith Presence on Arabic Social Media”, in *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, vol. 9 (Association for Computing Machinery, 2025), 23; Khaerul Muttakin, Muhammad Aufa Yazidun Nuha, and Marhumah, ‘The Liberal-Rejectionist Approach in Hadith Studies: A Literature Review of the Concept and Impact on Societal Intellectual Discourses’, *Jurnal Living Hadis* 10, no. 2 (December 2025): 202.

² Fahmi Andaluzi and Devi Ganis Prameswari, ‘The Authority of Hadith in Contemporary Discourse: Rereading the Views of Orientalists, Occidentalists, and Modern Scholars’, *Universum* 19, no. 1 (June 1, 2025): 108–109.

³ Nur Maulidya Wardatur Rohmah et al., ‘The Legitimizing Power of Hadith in Anti-Maulid Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Salafi Ideology on Social

Media’, *Nabawi: Journal of Hadith Studies* 6, no. 2 (September 28, 2025): 347.

⁴ Muttakin, Nuha, and Marhumah, ‘The Liberal-Rejectionist Approach in Hadith Studies: A Literature Review of the Concept and Impact on Societal Intellectual Discourses’, 202–206.

⁵ Misbahuddin Misbahuddin, ‘Otentisitas Dan Validitas Hadis Nabi: Dialektika Antara Tradisi Islam Dan Kritik Orientalis’, *ats Tsiqah | Journal of Hadith Studies and Hadith Science* 1, no. 1 (May 2025): 1–14; Bidayatul Mutammimah, Muh. Husni, and Umi Sumbulah, ‘Hadith Authentication Method: Concept, Application and Critique of Orientalist Skepticism’, *Religia* 26, no. 1 (March 30, 2023): 58–75; Nik Mohd Zaim Ab Rahim, Munirah Abd Razzak, and Jannatul Husna Ali Nuar, ‘Skeptisisme Orientalis Terhadap Hadis: Analisis Kritis Pemikiran Goldziher Dan Schacht’, *al-Irsyad: Journal of Islamic and Contemporary Issues* 10, no. 2 (December 19, 2025): 1576–1591.





approaches, have also been labeled as such. Even within Western academia, scholars like Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht are often categorized under hadith rejection, although their work is more accurately described as historical criticism of hadith transmission.⁶

Although this phenomenon has been frequently discussed, there is still a lack of systematic studies that clearly differentiate between the ontological rejection of hadith and methodological criticism of hadith. Most research has not explicitly addressed whether labeling these figures as hadith rejecters accurately reflects their epistemological positions or if it instead stems from differing paradigms regarding the criteria for hadith authenticity. This study seeks to reevaluate the label "hadith rejecter" by critically analyzing the views of individuals commonly placed in this category. The central question is whether the accusations of hadith rejection stem from a denial of the Prophet's authority or are primarily due to differing methodologies and criteria for hadith authenticity.

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design to address the problem. This method is selected because the issue of hadith rejection involves not only the content of the figures' ideas but also how the label is constructed and perpetuated within Islamic intellectual discourse.⁷ Library research is utilized to systematically analyze various textual sources that represent the thoughts of the figures under study. This research aims to explore how methodological differences in the understanding of hadith have led to the emergence of the category known as the "hadith rejecter." Consequently, the unit of analysis is not limited

to the individuals themselves but extends to the discourse construction and epistemological arguments found in the works of figures such as Abū Ḥanīfah, Muḥammad 'Abduh, Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, as well as Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht. Therefore, the analysis focuses on mapping differences in epistemological approaches rather than simply classifying individuals normatively.

The data sources include primary materials, such as the original works of the figures, as well as secondary sources like scholarly journal articles and academic books related to hadith studies and orientalist criticism. Data collection is carried out through systematic documentation, involving the selection and categorization of texts based on their thematic relevance to the issues of hadith authority and criteria of authenticity. The data are then analyzed through a series of steps, including data reduction, theme categorization, and interpretation of meaning, to develop a comprehensive understanding of how the figures construct their views on hadith authority.⁸ This analytical process is iterative, enabling the researcher to identify patterns, themes, and relationships among ideas emerging from the various literature sources.

This study aims to demonstrate that the label "hadith rejecter" is not a neutral epistemological category but rather a discursive construct that frequently oversimplifies the methodological diversity within hadith studies. Consequently, this approach enables a more balanced conceptual framework for differentiating between methodological criticism and theological rejection of hadith. Within this framework, this study makes three key contributions. First, conceptually, it redefines the

⁶ Siti Qurrotul Aini, 'Kritik Matan Hadis Perspektif Mahmud Abū Rayyah', *Alhamra Jurnal Studi Islam* 2, no. 2 (2021): 170; Abdul Basid, 'Kritik Terhadap Metode Muhammad Al-Ghazali Dalam Memahami Hadits Nabi Muhammad SAW', *al-Kabilah* 2, no. 1 (2017): 1–35; Alimin Mesra, 'Kajian Atas Kredibilitas Imam Abu Hanifah Di Bidang Hadis', *Al-Fikra: Jurnal Ilmiah Keislaman* 14, no. 3 (2010): 88–106; Ida Ilmiah Mursidin, 'Ingkar Sunnah (Argumen Dan Tokohnya)', *El-Mizzzi: Jurnal Ilmu Hadits* 1,

no. 1 (2022): 1–21; Ab Rahim, Abd Razzak, and Ali Nuar, 'Skeptisisme Orientalis Terhadap Hadis: Analisis Kritis Pemikiran Goldziher Dan Schacht', 1579–1587.

⁷ Norman K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (SAGE Publications, 2011), 168.

⁸ Ahmad Rijali, 'Analisis Data Kualitatif', *Alhadharah: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 17, no. 33 (January 2, 2019): 81–95.





term “hadith rejecter” by highlighting the distinction between methodological criticism and theological rejection. Second, from a historical and intellectual perspective, it aims to rehabilitate the ideas of figures who have long been oversimplified in Islamic scholarly discourse due to excessive labeling. Third, on a practical level, this study seeks to promote more constructive dialogue in understanding various approaches to hadith, thereby helping to reduce polarization between textualist and rationalist groups in contemporary Islamic studies.

Epistemological Differentiation in Hadith Criticism Among Classical Groups

The findings of this study reveal that many academic works and Islamic discourses tend to label certain figures as rejecters of hadith simply because they criticize the authority or methodology of hadith. In doing so, figures like Abū Ḥanīfah and Muḥammad al-Ghazālī are often grouped together without acknowledging the differences in their historical and epistemological contexts. This approach leads to the oversimplification that any criticism of hadith equates to a complete rejection of hadith.

One example of this can be seen in the case of Abū Ḥanīfah. Aḥmad Amīn, in *Fajr al-Islām*, claims that Abū Ḥanīfah recognized only about seventeen authentic hadiths out of the many later compiled in hadith collections.⁹ Some writers have used this assertion to depict Abū Ḥanīfah as someone who prioritized *ra'y* (reasoned opinion) over hadith. Aḥmad Amīn's view is based on Ibn Khaldūn's explanation regarding the limited number of hadiths narrated by Abū Ḥanīfah. However, a closer examination of Ibn Khaldūn's account reveals that the small number of narrations should not be interpreted as a rejection of hadith, but rather as a reflection of Abū Ḥanīfah's highly selective criteria for

accepting or rejecting narrations. In fact, the claim that Abū Ḥanīfah acknowledged only seventeen hadiths is unfounded, as there are several works that specifically compile hadiths used as the basis for *istidlal* (legal reasoning) by Abū Ḥanīfah and the Hanafi school. These include *ʿAqd al-Jawāhir al-Munīfah fī Adillat Abī Ḥanīfah* by Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *al-Athar* by Abū Yūsuf, *al-Āthār al-Marfūʿah*, and *al-Āthār al-Marfūʿah wa al-Mawqūfah*.¹⁰

These findings suggest that the accusation of Abū Ḥanīfah denying the sunnah stems more from an oversimplification of his approach to hadith acceptance than from any genuine rejection of the sunnah's authority. Abū Ḥanīfah's highly selective method of accepting hadith is better understood as a cautious methodology shaped by the tradition of *ahl al-ra'y*, the intellectual environment of Kufa, and the complex legal issues emerging in that region.¹¹ Therefore, labeling Abū Ḥanīfah in this way reflects a misunderstanding of methodological differences in evaluating and applying hadith, rather than an outright denial of the sunnah.

A similar pattern is observed in the case of Muḥammad al-Ghazālī. One of the main reasons he is accused of denying the sunnah stems from his publication of *al-Sunnah al-Nabawīyyah bayna Ahl al-Fiqh wa Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, a book that sparked controversy in contemporary hadith studies.¹² In this work, al-Ghazālī critiques the tendency to interpret hadiths literally and stresses that they must be understood within the broader framework of the Qur'an's general principles as well as the social context of the Muslim community.¹³ Consequently, the hadiths he presents are often subject to critical evaluation

⁹ Aḥmad Amīn, *Fajr Al-Islām* (Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1975), 214–244.

¹⁰ Muṣṭafā Al-Sibāʿī, *Al-Sunnah Wa Makānatuhā Fī Al-Tashrīʿ Al-Islāmī* (Dar al-Qawmiyyah, 1966), 372–373.

¹¹ Muḥammad ʿAlī Al-Sāyis, *Tārīkh Al-Fiqh Al-Islāmī* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Muʿāshirah, 1999), 134–137.

¹² Abbas Langaji, *Inkar Hadits* (Malang: Madani, 2021), 109–111.

¹³ Muḥammad Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Sunnah Al-Nabawīyyah Bayna Ahl Al-Fiqh Wa Ahl Al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2001), 21–24.





rather than being used solely to justify a particular viewpoint.¹⁴

However, when his entire argument is taken into account, the accusation is not entirely justified. Al-Ghazālī's criticism targets the way hadith is interpreted and applied, rather than rejecting the sunnah as a source of Islamic teachings. In many of his other works, he continues to rely on hadith as a foundation for religious reasoning and even regards this approach as a defense of the Prophet's sunnah. A key feature of his methodology is interpreting hadith in light of the general principles of the Qur'an, while also considering the social context in which it is applied.¹⁵

His rejection of certain narrations is grounded in methodological criteria that he developed independently. Criticism of this approach may also be influenced by his role as an Islamic reformer with intellectual ties to the International Institute of Islamic Thought (*al-Ma'had al-'Ālamī li al-Fikr al-Islāmī*).¹⁶ However, this association should not be taken as evidence that the ideas presented in *al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah bayna Ahl al-Fiqh wa Ahl al-Ḥadīth* are products of that institution, especially since the book was published independently by Dār al-Shurūq in Cairo.¹⁷ Therefore, the accusations against al-Ghazālī are better understood as a response to his reinterpreted approach to hadith rather than as proof of an ontological rejection of the sunnah.

In the case of Abū Ḥanīfah, the accusation arises from the claim that he accepted only a limited number of hadiths. However, historical evidence shows that his selectivity was based on a rigorous methodology for accepting hadiths, rather than a rejection of the sunnah. Similarly, the accusation against Muḥammad al-Ghazālī

stems from interpretations of *al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah bayna Ahl al-Fiqh wa Ahl al-Ḥadīth*. Despite this, his entire body of work and methodology consistently regard hadith as a fundamental source of Islamic teachings. Both cases illustrate that the label of hadith rejecter is often the result of interpretations that fail to fully appreciate the epistemological complexities surrounding each figure.

As Wael B. Hallaq emphasizes, authority in the Islamic legal tradition emerges through a complex epistemological negotiation process and cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy of acceptance versus rejection.¹⁸ Within this context, labeling the figures studied tends to reflect a simplistic discursive construction rather than the true epistemological reality.

These findings confirm that the term "hadith rejecter" serves as a discursive category imbued with ideological implications. In many instances, the critical stances of these individuals toward hadith are more accurately seen as methodological disagreements rather than outright ontological rejections. Such oversimplification not only conceals the diversity of epistemological approaches but also distorts the understanding of Islam's intellectual history and perpetuates a uniform narrative about the rejection of hadith.

Epistemological Differentiation in Hadith Criticism Among Rationalist Thinkers

The second finding reveals that several modern Muslim thinkers inclined toward rationalism are often labeled as hadith rejecters in certain literatures. However, their intellectual stances actually reflect a more selective approach to the authority of hadith. Thinkers such as Muḥammad 'Abduh, Tawfīq Ṣidqī, Maḥmūd

¹⁴ Mukhlis Mukhtar, 'Pemahaman Tekstual Dan Kontekstual Pakar Hadis Dan Pakar Fikih Seputar Sunnah Nabi (Studi Kritik Atas Pemikiran Syaikh Muhammad Al-Ghazali)', *Jurnal Hukum Diktum* 9, no. 1 (2011): 89.

¹⁵ Muhammad Al-Baqir, *Studi Kritik Atas Hadits Nabi Antara Pemahaman Tekstual Dan Kontekstual* (Bandung: Mizan, 1993), 7; Mukhtar, 'Pemahaman Tekstual Dan Kontekstual Pakar Hadis Dan Pakar Fikih Seputar Sunnah

Nabi (Studi Kritik Atas Pemikiran Syaikh Muhammad Al-Ghazali)', 89.

¹⁶ Daniel W. Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 166.

¹⁷ Langaji, *Inkar Hadits*, 110–111.

¹⁸ Wael B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 14–30.





Abū Rayyah, Aḥmad Amīn, and Sir Syed Aḥmad Khān exhibit a critical attitude toward some hadith narrations, particularly concerning rationality, historical context, and the universal principles of Islamic teachings. As will be demonstrated, this labeling frequently results from an epistemological oversimplification of their methodological complexity.

In the case of Muḥammad ‘Abduh, the accusation of denying the sunnah arises from interpretations of his view that prioritizes the Qur’an as the primary source of Islamic teachings. For instance, Maḥmūd Abū Rayyah cites several statements by ‘Abduh emphasizing the supremacy of the Qur’an, which some interpret as diminishing the authority of the sunnah.¹⁹ Additionally, Mustafa al-Siba’i, while recognizing ‘Abduh as a philosopher and Islamic reformer, notes that ‘Abduh had a limited knowledge of hadith and relied more on logic and rational argumentation in defending Islam.²⁰ ‘Abduh’s critical stance toward hadith, including his rejection of *ahad* hadith as a basis for establishing creed and his caution in using hadiths related to *fitan*, has been used to associate him with groups that deny the sunnah.²¹

A careful examination of his entire thought reveals that the basis for these accusations is not entirely strong. Muhammad Mustafa Azami challenges the validity of these claims, asserting that there is no evidence that ‘Abduh explicitly rejected hadith as a source of Islamic teachings.²² On the contrary, ‘Abduh’s rational approach demonstrates methodological caution, placing hadith according to the strength of their evidence. His rejection of *ahad* hadith in matters of creed stems from the belief that issues of creed

must be founded on evidence that is truly *qaṭ‘ī al-wurūd* (definitively transmitted), rather than from a rejection of the sunnah as a source of teachings. His selective attitude toward hadith concerning *fitan* also reflects an effort to preserve the validity of hadith usage, not to deny the authority of hadith itself.²³ Therefore, accusations against ‘Abduh are better understood as a result of his rational-critical approach to hadith methodology, rather than as evidence of an ontological rejection of the sunnah.

Unlike ‘Abduh, Maḥmūd Abū Rayyah adopts a more radical approach to hadith criticism. In his work *Aḍwā’ ‘alā al-Sunnah al-Muḥammadiyyah*, he fundamentally questions the authority of hadith, challenging the authenticity of canonical collections, the concept of *mutawatir* hadith, and the probity of the companions (*‘adālat al-ṣaḥābah*).²⁴ Additionally, he emphasizes historical factors such as the late codification of hadith and the potential for forgery amid early Islamic political dynamics.

This approach provoked strong reactions from many scholars and was often likened to Orientalist methods. However, the characterization of Abū Rayyah as a rejecter of the sunnah should be approached with caution. This accusation stems from the tendency to conflate epistemological critiques of the historical construction of hadith with an outright ontological rejection of the sunnah. Within this research framework, Abū Rayyah’s stance is better understood as an epistemological deconstruction of hadith authority, albeit one that is more radical than that of other reformist

¹⁹ Mahmud Abu Rayyah, ‘Adwa’ ‘ala Al-Sunnah Al-Nabawiyyah’ (Riyad: Majmu’ al-Buhuts al-Islamiyyah, 1958), 4–5; Nurkholis Sofwan, ‘Kontroversi Pemikiran Hadits Mahmud Abu Rayyah’, *alashriyyah* 5, no. 2 (October 23, 2019): 242.

²⁰ Al-Sibā’i, *Al-Sunnah Wa Makānatuhā Fī Al-Tashrī‘ Al-Islāmī*, 30.

²¹ Langaji, *Inkar Hadits*, 96.

²² Ali Mustafa Ya’qub, *Kritik Hadis* (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 2000), 30.

²³ Nur Kholis, ‘Pemikiran Muhammad Rasyid Ridho Tentang Kritik Matan Hadis Nabi Muhammad’, *al-Afkar, Journal For Islamic Studies* 4, no. 1 (March 2021): 20–21.

²⁴ Langaji, *Inkar Hadits*, 99; Ahmad Hadi Pranoto et al., ‘Problematisasi Hadis Ahad Dan Mutawatir: Kritik Epistemik Terhadap Paradigma Kepastian Dalam Otoritas Sunnah’, *JISRev: Journal of Islamic Studies Review* 1, no. 2 (October 31, 2025): 127.





figures.²⁵ This demonstrates that even sharp criticism does not necessarily equate to a complete rejection of the sunnah.

Meanwhile, the case of Tawfīq Ṣidqī illustrates a different approach to hadith criticism. The accusation of him being a sunnah rejecter primarily arises from his article titled *al-Islām Huwa al-Qur'ān Waḥdah*, published in *al-Manār*.²⁶ In this article, Ṣidqī presented several ideas that later sparked widespread debate. He argued that Islam is essentially based solely on the Qur'an, as it is perfect and does not require additional sources for completion or explanation. From this perspective, Ṣidqī interpreted the Prophet's prohibition on writing hadith as an indication that the sunnah was not intended to serve as a legal source equal to the Qur'an. He even rejected the authority of all hadiths, both mutawatir and ahad, and maintained that the procedures of worship, including prayer and its pillars such as bowing, prostration, and sitting, are sufficiently grounded in the Qur'an.²⁷ Because of these views, Ṣidqī was often labeled a sunnah rejecter.²⁸

When examining the development of his thought more comprehensively, the accusation does not fully capture his final position. Rashīd Riḍā himself displayed an ambivalent attitude toward Tawfīq Ṣidqī. On one hand, he praised him as a pious modernist who contributed to the Islamic reform movement; on the other hand, he sharply criticized Ṣidqī's view, which was seen as limiting Islamic legal sources solely to the Qur'an.²⁹ Moreover, Ṣidqī later revised his initial stance, reaffirming that Islam is based not only on the Qur'an but also on the hadith, as understood by the majority of scholars.³⁰

Therefore, the accusations against Tawfīq Ṣidqī are better understood as reflecting the early phase of his Qur'an-centric thought rather than representing a final ontological rejection of the sunnah.

Aḥmad Amīn's case exemplifies a pattern of hadith criticism grounded in a historical-critical approach. The accusation that he denied the Sunnah arises from his perspectives in *Fajr al-Islām*, where he emphasizes the historical process of hadith transmission. In this work, Aḥmad Amīn argued that during the Prophet's time, hadiths were not systematically documented but were primarily preserved through the memorization of narrators. According to him, this situation allowed for the possibility of inserted narrations and the emergence of fabricated (*mawḍū'*) hadiths, making it necessary to critically examine the authenticity of certain hadiths. He also expressed skepticism toward some narrations found in hadith collections by questioning the validity of both the transmission *sanad* and the *matn*.³¹ Because of these views, some scholars accused Aḥmad Amīn of confusing truth with falsehood and doubting the authority of hadith, often associating his thought with Orientalism.

However, when considering his intellectual background, Aḥmad Amīn's position is more complex than the label suggests. His experience pursuing doctoral studies in the West reveals that he initially intended to write a dissertation criticizing Joseph Schacht. This plan was rejected by his supervisors, who even advised him to align his discussion with Schacht's framework. After transferring to another university, he encountered similar demands until he ultimately

²⁵ M. Bik Muhtaruddin, 'Analisis Metodologi Abu Rayyah Dan Mustafa As-Siba'i Dalam Mengkritik Hadis Periwatan Abu Hurairah', *al-Fatih* 12, no. 1 (2024): 239.

²⁶ Langaji, *Inkar Hadits*, 98.

²⁷ Muḥammad Tawfīq Ṣidqī, 'Al-Islām Huwa Al-Qur'ān Waḥdah: Ārā' Wa Afkār', *al-Manār* IX, 1906.

²⁸ Febriansyah Martono, 'Penyebaran Paham Ingkar Sunnah Modern: Motivasi, Tokoh, Dan Sanggahan Terhadapnya', *DIRAYAH: Jurnal Ilmu Hadis* 4, no. 02 (July 5, 2024): 144.

²⁹ Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, 'Al-Manār', *al-Manār* IX, 1906; Abdul Madjid Khon, 'Pemikir Inkar Sunnah Di Mesir Modern' (Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah, 2005), 906–907.

³⁰ Langaji, *Inkar Hadits*, 98.

³¹ Muhammad Mustafa Azami, *Dirāsāt Fī Al-Ḥadīth Al-Nabawī Wa Tārīkh Tadwīnih*, 2000; Aḥmad Amīn, *Ḍuḥā Al-Islām* (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa-al-Tarjamah wa-al-Nashr, n.d.), 33; Amīn, *Fajr Al-Islām*, 112.





decided to change his research focus in order to complete his doctoral studies.³² Regarding the criticism he faced later, Aḥmad Amīn affirmed that critical attitudes toward hadith are part of academic freedom and should not be viewed as an attempt to undermine Islam, but rather as an effort to promote more objective research.³³ Therefore, the accusations against Aḥmad Amīn are better understood as a consequence of his historical-critical approach to hadith transmission, rather than as an outright rejection of the Sunnah as a source of Islamic teachings.

The case of Sir Syed Aḥmad Khān illustrates a similar pattern. The accusation of him being a Sunnah rejecter stems from his highly rationalist approach, shaped by his educational background and exposure to Western intellectual traditions.³⁴ This rationalism is evident in his attitude toward hadith, leading some scholars to label him a hadith rejecter. For instance, Mukti Ali cites Aḥmad Khān's view that his thinking "is not shackled by the authority of hadith and fiqh." He subjected all teachings to rational scrutiny, making the Qur'an the primary source of Islamic teachings, while regarding hadith as supplementary. Within this framework, Aḥmad Khān rejected hadiths he found inconsistent with logic and natural law, including certain narrations related to the social morality of early Muslim society.³⁵

This perspective later served as the basis for accusations that Aḥmad Khān rejected the sunnah. However, a more thorough examination of the evidence reveals that his stance is more nuanced. Daniel W. Brown explains that Aḥmad Khān's criticism was primarily aimed at the methodology of classical hadith criticism. He developed the view that hadiths concerning spiritual matters remain relevant and binding,

whereas those regulating worldly affairs are not always normative for contemporary Muslim societies. His writings also reflect his rejection of *taqlīd* (blind imitation) and certain Sufi traditions, while simultaneously demonstrating his commitment to hadith as a key source of Islamic teachings.³⁶

Moreover, the label of "hadith rejecter" becomes even more problematic, as he authored works specifically defending the authenticity of the Prophet's hadith in response to Orientalist critiques, particularly those of William Muir.³⁷ While Aḥmad Khān's approach is highly rational and sometimes viewed as aligned with materialist philosophy, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that he ontologically rejected the sunnah. Rather, his perspective is better understood as a reinterpretation of the role and authority of hadith within a modern context, rather than an outright rejection of hadith itself.

From the data presented, it is clear that labeling this group of rationalist thinkers overlooks the epistemological differences in their approaches to hadith. Their criticism is primarily selective and methodological, though it varies in its degree of radicalism. At various levels, their critique targets the validity, function, and authorization processes of hadith rather than outright rejecting the Sunnah as a source of Islamic teachings. This is reflected in the diverse focuses of each thinker's criticism, which range from concerns about ahad hadith in creed, to critiques of hadith transmission and codification, and to reinterpretations of the role of hadith in the context of modern society.

This finding reveals that labeling this group of rationalist thinkers often overlooks the methodological differences underlying their critique of hadith. Their criticism typically

³² Abdul Choliq Mukhtar, *Hadits Nabi Dalam Teori Dan Praktik* (Yogyakarta: TH IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press, 2003), 123–124.

³³ Al-Sibā'ī, *Al-Sunnah Wa Makānatuhā Fī Al-Tashrī' Al-Islāmī*, 26–27; Langaji, *Inkar Hadits*, 103.

³⁴ Fuad Noorzeha, 'Pemikiran Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan "Pembaharuan Di India" Relevansinya Dengan Ideologi Islam Puritan, Moderat Dan Sinkretisme Dalam

Masyarakat', *Sophia Dharma: Jurnal Filsafat, Agama Hindu, dan Masyarakat* 2, no. 1 (May 2019): 66–67.

³⁵ A. Mukti Ali, *Alam Pikiran Modern Di India-Pakistan* (Bandung: Mizan, 1996), 50–51.

³⁶ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, 50–51.

³⁷ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, 34–36.





targets the validity of narrations, the role of hadith, or the way it is applied in specific contexts, rather than denying the existence of hadith altogether. Therefore, these rationalist thinkers should not be simply categorized as hadith rejecters but are better understood as representing a diverse epistemological spectrum within modern hadith studies.

Within this framework, the term "hadith rejecter" serves more as a discursive construct that oversimplifies the diverse approaches to hadith, rather than accurately reflecting the epistemological stances of the figures studied. This observation also encourages readers to differentiate between methodological criticism of hadith and the ontological rejection of the sunnah, as these positions do not always align.

Externalization of Hadith Criticism: Labeling Orientalists as "Hadith Rejecters"

The third finding reveals that, in some Islamic studies literature, hadith criticism by non-Muslim scholars is often labeled as hadith denial. Scholars such as Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht are frequently portrayed as leading figures of an approach that questions the authority of hadith.³⁸ In many studies, their analyses of the historical development of hadith, the evolution of *isnād*, and the dynamics of hadith transmission are interpreted as outright rejection of hadith altogether, rather than as methodological critiques focused on the history and authenticity of the texts.

This tendency illustrates what this research calls the externalization of hadith criticism; when

academic approaches from non-Muslim traditions are not interpreted as historical-critical analyses but are instead dismissed as mere narratives rejecting hadith. Consequently, the term "hadith rejecter" functions not only within the internal discourse of the Muslim community but also extends outward through Orientalist interpretations.³⁹

Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht are the two Orientalists most frequently cited in contemporary hadith criticism. In his seminal work, *Muhammedanische Studien*, Goldziher argued that most hadiths lack guarantees of historical authenticity. He maintained that hadiths emerged as products of the socio-political dynamics within early Muslim communities, particularly during the conflicts of the Umayyad dynasty, with many narrations reflecting the ideological interests of specific groups.⁴⁰ Goldziher also concluded that hadiths were historically constructed through the involvement of the companions (*ṣaḥābah*) and the Followers (*tābi'īn*), undergoing politicization over an extended transmission period. This process, he suggested, casts doubt on the authenticity of canonical hadith collections such as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*.⁴¹

Analytically, Goldziher's position reflects a historical-sociological approach to hadith rather than a theological rejection of the sunnah. However, in much of Muslim literature, this approach is often simplified into a wholesale delegitimization of hadith. This oversimplification obscures the crucial distinction between methodological criticism of

³⁸ Bakhtawar Siddique, 'Deniers of Hadith or Orientalists Whose Similarities Are Similar to Your Image', *Journal of Religion and Society* 3, no. 2 (May 2025): 127; Muhammad Ilham Baihaqqi and Nur Kholis, 'Harald Motzki's Method of Perspective Hadith Authenticity and His Response to Orientalist Skepticism of Hadith', *al-Afkar, Journal For Islamic Studies* 7, no. 4 (October 2024): 271; M. Ihsan Fauzi, 'Joseph Schacht Dan Teori-Teori Skeptisisme Tentang Hadis Serta Bantahan Terhadapnya', *al-Afkar, Journal For Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 2023): 14; Ahmad Isnaeni, Is Susanto, and Abdurrahman Raden Aji Haqiqi, 'Criticism of Mustafa Azami's Critical Thoughts in Study of Hadith', *Ulumuna* 27, no. 2 (December 31, 2023): 764–765.

³⁹ Siddique, 'Deniers of Hadith or Orientalists Whose Similarities Are Similar to Your Image', 127.

⁴⁰ Indra Wahyuddin and Syamsu Syauqani, 'Orientalisme Dalam Kajian Hadis: Telaah Historis, Ruang Lingkup, Dan Pemikiran Kaum Orientalis Terhadap Tradisi Hadis Nabi', *DIRAYAH: Jurnal Ilmu Hadis* 5, no. 02 (June 30, 2025): 198–199.

⁴¹ Muhammad Ulul Albab, 'Menyoal Koneksitas Kritik Hadits Ignaz Goldziher Dan Joseph Schacht', *An-Nisa Jurnal Kajian Perempuan dan Keislaman* 14, no. 1 (April 5, 2021): 24.





transmission and ontological rejection of the sunnah, thereby perpetuating the simplistic label of “hadith rejecter.”⁴²

Meanwhile, Joseph Schacht, in his legal studies, argued that many legal hadiths were later constructions by scholars who attributed them to the Prophet to gain normative legitimacy.⁴³ He also emphasized that, in the early period, the concept of sunnah primarily reflected the practices of the legal community rather than an established textual hadith tradition. Schacht himself acknowledged that his approach aligns with Goldziher’s view of hadith as products of historical development, rather than direct transmissions from the Prophet.⁴⁴

Within this framework, Schacht’s approach clearly aligns with the Western philological and historical tradition aimed at reconstructing the development of Islamic law. However, similar to Goldziher’s case, this approach is often simplistically interpreted as a wholesale rejection of the sunnah. From an epistemological perspective, Schacht’s critique is more accurately seen as a challenge to the historical construction of hadith authority, rather than a denial of its normative role within the Islamic theological framework.

This data indicates a trend toward epistemological homogenization, where diverse forms of criticism, originating from both internal Muslim traditions and Western academic studies, are grouped under a single label: “hadith rejection.” Consequently, the distinction between methodological critique and ideological

rejection becomes blurred, reinforcing categorical bias in contemporary hadith studies.

Recent academic literature clearly shows that hadith studies are evolving into an interdisciplinary field, integrating philology, history, and social analysis to gain a more nuanced understanding of the hadith tradition’s development.⁴⁵ This perspective supports the view that the works of Goldziher and Schacht should be seen as contributions to the advancement of historical criticism of the hadith tradition, rather than as outright rejections of hadith as a religious source.

The cases of Goldziher and Schacht demonstrate that labeling them as “sunnah rejecters” is closely tied to the differing epistemological paradigms between traditional Islamic studies and Western academic scholarship.⁴⁶ This label tends to be a discursive simplification that overlooks the methodological complexities of their intellectual positions, rather than an accurate or scientific characterization.

The implications of these findings extend beyond academia to social realms as well. Socially, the label “hadith rejecter” serves as a tool for both legitimizing and delegitimizing individuals within religious discourse.⁴⁷ It fosters polarization between groups deemed “orthodox” and “deviant” and deepens epistemic fragmentation within the Muslim community. Methodological differences in interpreting hadith are no longer regarded as normal intellectual variations but are instead viewed as theological deviations.

⁴² Albab, ‘Menyoal Koneksitas Kritik Hadits Ignaz Goldziher Dan Joseph Schacht’, 24.

⁴³ Qaem Aulassyahied, ‘Studi Kritis Konsep Sunnah Muhammad Syahrur’, *Kalimah* 13, no. 1 (March 31, 2015): 12.

⁴⁴ Albab, ‘Menyoal Koneksitas Kritik Hadits Ignaz Goldziher Dan Joseph Schacht’, 24–26.

⁴⁵ Daniel W. Brown, ‘Western Hadith Studies’, in *The Wiley Blackwell Concise Companion to the Hadith* (Wiley, 2020), 39–56.

⁴⁶ Lutfiah Adhwa et al., ‘Studi Orientalis Atas Hadis Nabi (Konsep Pemikiran Ignaz Goldziher Terhadap

Hadis Nabi)’, *Cerdika: Jurnal Ilmiah Indonesia* 5, no. 6 (June 21, 2025): 1588–1597; A Munawwir, Ani Lestari, and Fita Ratu Prilia, ‘Joseph Schacht Dan Transformasi Hadis Tentang Hukum Islam Dalam Konteks Dunia Timur’, *Islamika: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 20, no. 02 (April 27, 2021): 23–31; Ab Rahim, Abd Razzak, and Ali Nuar, ‘Skeptisisme Orientalis Terhadap Hadis: Analisis Kritis Pemikiran Goldziher Dan Schacht’, 1585.

⁴⁷ Mohammed Adnan Abdulrahman, ‘Cultural and Social Influences on Hadith Classification: An Analytical Study of Historical Transformations’, *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3, no. 8 (2024): 2783–2791.





Theoretically, these findings underscore the necessity of redefining the concept of hadith denial within a broader epistemological framework. This research highlights fundamental distinctions among ontological rejection, methodological critique, and epistemological divergence in the interpretation of hadith. Through this framework, the views of Goldziher and Schacht can be more accurately understood as part of the historical criticism tradition, rather than as theological rejecters of the sunnah.

Ultimately, these findings reinforce the central argument of the research: the label "hadith rejecter" is a discursive construct that oversimplifies diverse epistemological approaches into a single category. Therefore, academic caution is essential when using this normative label to avoid overlooking the intellectual complexity and historical development of hadith studies. Practically, this underscores the need to reorient hadith studies toward a more dialogical, inclusive, and epistemologically sensitive approach, both within academic circles and socio-religious contexts.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the label "hadith rejecter" in Islamic discourse does not denote a single epistemological category but is instead a discursive construct that oversimplifies the complexity of thinkers' ideas. Analyzing various groups, including classical scholars, modern reformists, and non-Muslim academics, reveals that accusations of hadith denial primarily stem from methodological differences in evaluating the validity and role of hadith, rather than outright rejection of the Prophet's authority. Therefore, the term "hadith rejecter" often serves as a discursive simplification that masks the rich epistemological diversity within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

This study theoretically contributes by presenting a new analytical framework that differentiates between ontological rejection, methodological critique, and epistemological

divergence within hadith studies. This framework enables a more nuanced reevaluation of figures traditionally labeled as hadith rejecters, shifting the paradigm from a binary perspective to a broader, more inclusive epistemological spectrum. Methodologically, the application of critical discourse analysis in this research highlights its effectiveness in uncovering label constructions and categorization biases in Islamic literature, thereby creating opportunities for more reflective and context-sensitive hadith studies.

This study has several limitations, primarily because it relies on a literature review without incorporating empirical data from contemporary social practices. Furthermore, the analysis is confined to certain representative figures, which does not encompass the full range of thought within the global Islamic tradition. Therefore, future research should adopt a more interdisciplinary approach, combining textual analysis with fieldwork, and extend investigations into contemporary Muslim social contexts to explore how the label of hadith denial is produced and reproduced in practice. Such studies are expected to deepen our understanding of the dynamics of hadith authority in an ever-evolving global context.

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The authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest or affiliations that may have impacted the research findings.

Author Contributions

Each author listed has made a substantive contribution to both the conceptual development and the writing of this manuscript.





Data Availability

This study did not involve the collection or analysis of new data; as such, data availability is not applicable.

Ethical Considerations

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