

# The making of Living Ḥadīth: a new direction of ḥadīth studies in Indonesia

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## Abstract

Ḥadīth studies identifies Islamic practices that originate from the text of the ḥadīths or the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. The term "living ḥadīth" has emerged as a new direction to ḥadīth studies. This article seeks to explore the dynamics of living ḥadīths as they have emerged in and revitalized *ḥadīth* studies, especially within academic discourse of Indonesian Islamic universities. Important findings include that the living ḥadīth has become a subdiscipline of ḥadīth studies that examines on how Muslims interpret and express the ḥadīths in their daily lives, as well as how Indonesian Muslims link, communicate, and relate ḥadīths to local traditions and how local cultures assimilate and interact with the texts. This article also finds that the paradigm of living ḥadīth differs from the disciplines of sociology and anthropology of religion, presenting its epistemology through five areas of focus: practice, reception, text, transmission, and transformation.

Keywords: Living ḥadīth; local culture; text, reception, Islam.

## Introduction

Prior to 2000, ḥadīth studies in Indonesia experienced stagnation and received limited scholarly attention. The study of the Prophet's tradition in peripheral Muslim regions had made minimal impacts to its revitalization and scientific development (Foody, 2023; Rohmana, 2015). Consequently, the discipline was perceived as having lost its relevance. This perception was partly attributable to the dynamic nature of Indonesian society, where learning often took place through intermediaries such as leaders, preachers, and literature. Notably, these sources did not place significant emphasis on the laws and guidance derived from ḥadīths (Qudsy, 2016, p. 186). Despite the profound influence of Islam on modern Indonesian society, Muslims

sometimes overlook the fact that teachings of their faith emanate from the Qur'ān and ḥadīths.

In contrast, living ḥadīth as a subdiscipline of ḥadīth studies emphasizes the importance of fostering a dialogue between the universality of ḥadīth text and the cultural context in which Muslims reside. At the community level, both individual and collective intermediaries of ḥadīth often strive to establish religious legitimacy for practices that lack textual basis in ḥadīths. Drawing on Geertz's concept of "cultural brokers" in his research on Javanese Muslims in Mojokuto (Geertz, 1957, 1973), this article highlights the role of shekhs, *ustādhs* (religious preacher), *kiais* (charismatic leader, commonly used in Javanese context), and *ḥabā'ib* (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) as "religious brokers" in socio-religious practices such as *nyekar* (purifying graves of Muslim saints and seeking blessings) and *slametan* (socio-religious rites or ceremonies expressing gratitude). These religious brokers attempt to legitimize such practices by employing religious arguments (*dalīl*). This reflects the diverse nature of Islam, as exemplified by the historical insertion of religious codes into traditional performances like puppetry (*wayang*) and music (*gamelan*) by Nine Saints of Java (Wali Sanga), including Sunan Kalijaga (Lutfianto & Junaidi, 2022; Muzammil et al., 2022).

Additionally, certain brokers are expanding traditions originating from Islam itself, such as the practice of fasting on Monday and Thursday. While this voluntary fasting is individually practiced and recommended as part of the sunna for Muslims, in the hands of agents and cultural brokers, it has become a communal practice in specific communities and villages (Qudsy et al., 2017). This underscores the influence of culture, represented by cultural brokers or agents, in shaping the reception of religious texts. The term "living ḥadīth" in this context refers to the practice and lived experience of ḥadīths in society. Therefore, living ḥadīth, borrowing from Redfield, explores peripheral traditions and incorporates various local elements into Islam (Dewi, 2016, p. 200). Through this discourse, an interdisciplinary research of Muslim practices, rituals, customs, and even lifestyles becomes possible, leading to a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between religious teachings and cultural contexts.

This article argues that the transmission and transformation of ḥadīth knowledge distinguish the living ḥadīth studies from other disciplines such as religious sociology and anthropology, a point that will be detailed in the subsequent section. This research on "the making of living ḥadīth" is based on an extensive review of existing literature, highlighting the necessity for a comprehensive understanding of this subject matter. This qualitative study employs a literature review, drawing on data from studies conducted on living ḥadīth between 2005 and 2022. After the data collection phase, a

process of sorting and reduction is applied. Subsequently, an analysis is carried out, utilizing interpretation and historiography techniques to trace the evolution of living ḥadīth within the Indonesian academic milieu over the past two decades.

This article details how the idea of living ḥadīth emerged. It then distinguishes between the living ḥadīth and the disciplines of sociology and the anthropology of religion, describing how the living ḥadīths paradigm emerged in Indonesia's Islamic universities and revitalized ḥadīth studies. The article then delineates living ḥadīth as a discipline that examines how Muslims interpret and express the text of the ḥadīths in their daily lives; how they link, communicate, and relate the text of ḥadīths to their traditions; and how culture assimilates and interacts with the text through five areas of focus: practice, reception, text, transmission, and transformation. In short, this article demonstrates that living ḥadīth has evolved into a well-developed, structured subdiscipline within last two decades, and has increasing relevance to Muslims in contemporary society.

### **Trends of Ḥadīth Studies in Indonesia**

The development of classical ḥadīth studies in the academic milieu of Indonesian scholarship has experienced less significant changes. Studies of Ahmad, Amiruddin, and Gaffar (2015) and Qibtiyatul (2017) have observed trends of ḥadīth studies in two major State Islamic Universities in Indonesia and concluded that hundreds of undergraduate/graduate theses and dissertations of Indonesian scholars are limited to criticism of ḥadīth transmission (*sanad*) and narrative (*matn*). Otherwise, Isbaria (2020) found out that the ḥadīth scholarship in Yogyakarta has been encouraging a field-based investigation of ḥadīth phenomenon among Muslim societies, or the 'living ḥadīth' discourse. To shed a context on such subject, two recent doctoral dissertations of Rohmansyah (2020) and Ahmad Mustofa (2021) focused on the performances and receptions of ḥadīths among Indonesian muslims. The initial study observed ḥadīth-based philanthropic traditions of Islamic organization in Yogyakarta for the last three centuries, while the later examined philosophical and practical negotiations of local sculptors as their responses to certain iconolatory ḥadīth narrative. This article argues that recent studies of living ḥadīth put great attention on both performance, memory, text, tradition, and transformation dimensions of the Prophet's tradition, while arguing that classical ḥadīth discourse among Indonesian scholars has not experienced significant development from its study of the *sanad* and of the ḥadīth, in term of quantity.

As aforementioned, ḥadīth studies in Indonesia have focused on *sanad* and *matn*, with the former being most prominent. *Matn* studies, after all, must be conducted with consideration of the validity of transmission.

Ḥadīth scholars generally review and criticize the *sanad* (chain of ḥadīth narrators) and its aspects, including *takhrīj ḥadīth* (researching variants of ḥadīth), *i'tibār*, *rijāl* (narrators of ḥadīth), *jarh ta'dīl* (discrediting and accrediting), and then continue to *matn* (content of ḥadīth) studies.

*Isnad* studies may be divided into two phases: manual and digital. In the manual phase, studies of ḥadīth transmission is conducted by exploring the transmissions of narrators through the main books of *sanad* (among others, *Tahzīb al-Kamāl*), or summaries (among others, *Tahzīb al-Tahzīb*). Therefore, during this phase *sanad* studies needs a longer time as scholars are required to read main references of the *rijāl ḥadīth* as well as to conduct *takhrīj* and *i'tibār* analysis. Meanwhile, the digital phase is marked by the publication of the CD *Mausū'ah Kutub al-Tis'ah* in 1997, which contained the narrators and their qualities in the nine trusted ḥadīth books, i.e. those considered the most outstanding books in ḥadīth studies. This digital phase was further supported with the 1998 release of the software Gawami' Kalim, which encompasses and covers all ḥadīth narrators (about 1,400 ḥadīth books). This software was initiated by www.islamweb.net with support of the Qatar Ministry of Waqf. Approximately 12 years later, an Indonesian-language translation of *Mausū'ah Kutub al-Tis'ah* was published, complete with information on the qualities of its transmitters. This was initiated by the Lidwa Pusaka team through the website www.lidwa.com. These three sets of software have facilitated *sanad* studies. Other tools, such as *Maktabah Shamela*, and websites, such as sunnah.com, can be used to track the hadith sanad, but they cannot be utilised to explicitly trace the reliability of the ḥadīth narrators.

Meanwhile, *matn* of ḥadīth studies examining the text of the Prophet Muhammad's speech focuses on the linguistic dimensions of the language, using an *asbāb al-wurūd* (history of the emergence of a ḥadīth) perspective. In certain studies, ḥadīth contents are contextualized with present conditions. Although not universal, it is often done by certain mass organizations or preachers who use the ḥadīths for cultural criticism (Metcalf, 1993, p. 588). If a ḥadīth text is understood outside of its textual meaning, it will be rejected as deviant.

The contextualization of ḥadīths is essentially influenced by the inclusion of hermeneutics among modern Muslim scholars. The idea of contextualizing ḥadīth texts using hermeneutical paradigms, or “ḥadīth hermeneutics” (Qudsy, 2012, pp. 42–44), challenges the notion of authority and textuality in the classical ḥadīth criticism. Traditional ḥadīth criticism prioritize the textual content of ḥadīths as the measure of truth, often disregarding cultural changes and geographical differences. Any interpretation deviating from a *matn* is considered a form of perversion. However, this approach overlooks the emphasis on non-violence in Islamic

dogma, which is often ignored by fundamentalists and terrorists with limited and superficial understanding of its verses (Baidowi et al., 2021). These individuals' misinterpretations of the ḥadīth lead to distorted perceptions of Islam, manifested through violent acts and the misuse of religion to justify persecution and the destruction of cultural properties by selectively focus on the 'verses of the sword.'

Ḥadīth hermeneutics highlights the need for a more nuanced approach that integrates both textual and contextual readings of Prophet's sayings. It acknowledges cultural changes and fosters a comprehensive understanding of religious texts to address contemporary challenges and promote a more inclusive interpretation of Islam. The failure to consider this context when interpreting ḥadīth has contributed to the persecution and discrimination against minorities in religious worship and public spaces. For example, the persistence of beliefs that Indonesian Muslims' worship practices must be recited in Arabic have resulted in unrest and anarchy, as seen in the cases of Yusman Roy and Suratman (Najwah et al., 2022; NU Online, 2006), where individuals contextualizing traditions faced restrictions and legal consequences on their religious activities.

Living ḥadīth studies is based on the Islamic practices and teachings of Muslims in their daily lives (Qudsy, 2016, pp. 178–196); in other words, it is contextual, looking at practices in society that are inspired by the text of the ḥadīths. At this point, it can be recognized as its own approach to ḥadīths as it differs from the *ma'ānil* (meaning) and *fahmil* (understanding) approaches. Unlike *ma'ānil* and *fahmil* studies, which rely on the texts of the ḥadīths, the living ḥadīth approach examines practices in society. Living ḥadīth studies do not consider *matn* and *sanad*, as they focus on the practices that exist in society, rather than the history or content of the text.

In *matn* and *isnad* studies, a ḥadīth text must have certain standard qualities, such as *sound* (ṣaḥīḥ), good (*ḥasan*), weak (ḍa'īf), and false (mauḍū'). Such qualities are not considered in living ḥadīth studies. Religious practices may rely on ḥadīths without questioning its quality or authenticity. As such, the principles of ḥadīth validity are not the standpoint and the priority of living ḥadīth phenomenon. This is supported by two important arguments. First, living ḥadīth as a discourse examines the living practices of ḥadīth in society hence the principle of *tarjīh* criticism to determine which ḥadīths are more dominant than others that appear *mukhtalif* (different) cannot be used for living ḥadīth studies. Second, this study observes how people practices certain ḥadīth in a given culture, how they get the ḥadīth narratives, how comes the texts act as the basis for these practices. However, if a researcher or practioner of certain living ḥadīth phenomenon wants to know the validity and originality of

Prophet's tradition, one might put it in quotations as a supplementary information.

### **The Journey of Living Ḥadīth, 2005-2022: A Literature Review**

This article divides the literature review into specific time periods, with a focus on the development of living ḥadīth studies at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta. This decision is based on several assumptions. First, the living ḥadīth approach originated at this university, and as such it is beneficial to examine the data from its digital library for the period 2005–present. Second, this university has alumni migrating all over Indonesia; it can be said that every Islamic university in the country likely has at least one lecturer who graduated from the university, the oldest state Islamic university in Indonesia. This literature review will examine the writings of Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University alumni as well as other writings.

It identifies three periods in living ḥadīth studies. The first period (2005–2010) was the period in which the concepts of living ḥadīth studies were formulated. Subsequently, in the second period (2011–2016), living ḥadīth studies were included into curricula as specific courses, either under the name ‘Living Ḥadīth’ or ‘Ḥadīth and Social Culture’; this period may also be named the formation period, as in the second semester of the 2015–2016 academic year the Ḥadīth Studies program was established. The third phase (2016–present) may be identified as the maturation period of living ḥadīth studies.

#### **1. The first period (2005–2010)**

This period was one in which the ideas discussed above were made and disseminated and was also one of self-discovery for the discipline of living ḥadīth studies. During this period, most students completing their final assignments tended to focus on Qur’ānic studies and *tafsīr* (exegesis) rather than ḥadīths. Even if the students choose the study of ḥadīth, they will choose *ma’ānil* ḥadīth (study of the meaning of Ḥadīth) or study key figures or scholars on ḥadīth. In comparison to the Qur’ān studies, only 10-15 percent of the final assignment of students choose the study of ḥadīth. Other works that we have mentioned tend to make ḥadīth as a mechanism of criticism and even become a tool in viewing the existing culture. Such conditions then led to certain claims in the study, such as deviation, heresy, and so forth.

However, some studies showed signs of a living ḥadīth perspective. In this period, studies showed two tendencies. First, although there was a focus on phenomena that existed in society, studies departed from the texts

of the ḥadīths before examining the context. As such, these studies explicitly used a *ma'ānil* ḥadīth approach. Examples include studies by Farhan Abdullah (2005), Ahmad Ghozali (2009), Abdul Fatah Ulumi (2009), Fauzan Rahmat Harisno (2008), and Istikaroh (2009). Abdullah (2005) wrote “Jimat (amulet) in Ḥadīth: A Study of Meaning and Practice in Rambutan Masam Village, Muara Tembesi, Batang Hari Regency, Jambi”, taking a topic that may be approached using a living ḥadīth perspective but applying a *ma'ānil* approach. As such, his study judges the practices of *jimat*-keeping as forbidden by Islam, blaming one *ustādh* for “falsely” interpreting certain ḥadīths. He argues that the keeping of *jimat* around the necks of babies contradicts the teachings of Islam, and views the community as lacking an understanding of the ḥadīths and as failing to receive proper explanations from religious figures. The thesis, defended on July 14, 2005, marks a tendency to choose themes that exist in communities. A similar study was conducted by Syamsul Kurniawan (Kurniawan, 2005), titled ‘Ḥadīth Jampi-Jampi in Malay Mujarrobot and the Book of Tajul Mulk According to the Village People's View at the Seberang Pontianak Province of West Kalimantan’. Such works had signs of a living ḥadīth perspective, but students—lacking a clear formula and pattern—chose a *ma'ānil* ḥadīth approach to support their work.

Second, a number of studies applied a living ḥadīth perspective but remained unclear about its methodological foundation. This can be seen in several academic papers, including works by Ahmad Mujtabah, Nur Istifa'ah, and Ahmad Arrofiqi. Ahmad Mujtabah (Mujtabah, 2009), in his “*Isbāl* from the Perspective of the Jamaah Tabligh”, stated that Jamaah Tabligh categorizes *isbāl* as the ethical dress of Muslims and derived from the teachings and guidance of the Prophet. Members of the group refer to the book of *Riyāḍus Shālihin*. Although he did not mention the keyword “living ḥadīth” in his paper, this paper was a pioneering work in living ḥadīth studies. Unfortunately, Mujtabah did not quote Metcalf’s “Living Ḥadīth in Tablighi Jamaah”; had he referenced this text, he would have been able to find and use its methodology to study the living ḥadīth. Meanwhile, the article by Arrofiqi (2010) is a fairly well-conceived work that describes the relationship between Islamic doctrines/teachings and cultural locality in Wonokromo. Discussing the tradition of *nyadran* (another term for, praying and cleaning the grave), Arrofiqi saw the tradition as actualizing the understanding of the need to do good to one's parents and maintain *silaturrahim* (close ties) between residents.

This methodological unclarity can be traced back to last two decades. Taufik argues that the formative discourse of living ḥadīth begins in 2005 as the Indonesian Forum of Communication for Students in Tafsīr-Ḥadīth Studies [*Forum Komunikasi Mahasiswa Tafsir Hadist Indonesia-FKMTHI*]

held a national seminar “The Living Qur’ān: The Qur’ān in Everyday’s Life” in 2005 (Amin et al., 2020; Taufik, 2022). Later in 2006, lecturers of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta held an academic workshop on “Methodology of the Living Qur’ān and Ḥadīth” which event successfully published two anthology book in Bahasa, *Metodologi Penelitian Living Quran dan Hadis* (2007) and *Metodologi Penelitian Hadis* (2009), and it became a technical textbook for students in Qur’ānic and Ḥadīth studies. Collectively, these writers indicated their anxiety and the necessity of borrowing from the social sciences in studying the living Qur’ān and ḥadīth. However, no clear guidelines were provided in the book. As such, it may only be considered to indicate the necessity of living Qur’ānic and Ḥadīth studies and of borrowing from the social sciences.

## **2. The second period spans from 2011 to 2016**

This period is marked by the inclusion of ‘Living Ḥadīth’ and ‘Ḥadīth and Social Culture’ courses in the Tafsir-Ḥadīth Study Program. As these were compulsory courses, they taught students various concepts. We identify this period as characterized by two categories of study. First were those studies that focused on practices and traditions. At Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, as well as other institutions, references to the “living ḥadīths” were not made in 2011–2012. Some later works, such as that by Qudsy and Imron, attempted to propose a new point of view in living Qur’ānic and Ḥadīth studies under the shadow of the Qur’ānic and ḥadīth text. Similar research was conducted by Suryadilaga (Suryadilaga, 2014). Although the studies by Suryadilaga have interesting narrative phenomenological descriptions, they lack sharpness in methodological and theoretical aspects. They have, nevertheless, been referenced by later writers. Other writings that examined specific practices include those of Sa’diyah (2013), Najih (2013), Suryadilaga (2014, 2017), Bashir (2015), Abu Hanif (2015), Aini (2015), Ismail (2015), Malichah (2016), Asriady (2016), Amin (2017), Rizqon (2016). Some of these studies use specific theories and approaches, while others do not. Such studies also raised further questions: what is the difference between living ḥadīth studies, sociology, and the anthropology of religion? Such studies could not answer this question.

The second category of studies are those that theorize about living ḥadīth studies, including those of Muhamad Ali (2015), Rohmana (2015). One interesting point, the theoretical debate and perspectives on living ḥadīths, is examined in this literature. The study by Muhamad Ali is a particularly interesting epistemological record. Ali tried to link the textual study of texts and the phenomenon of faith.

In the study of religion, the study of the Living Qur'ān and Ḥadīth is part of the study of 'lived religion', 'practical religion', 'popular religion', 'lived Islam', which aims to explore how humans and societies understand and practice their religion, rather than religious elites (thinkers, religious authorities, preachers, etc.). The methods of the social sciences enter the realm of religious studies and scholars, moving from the study of the text to the study of present-day communities of living faith. In comparative scripture study, the living Qur'ān and ḥadīths are part of scripture study, which has not developed well. Anthropological studies generally approach practical aspects of understanding and practicing religion, such as symbols, myths, rituals, shamanism, and magic, but have little interest in understanding, using, and practicing scripture in their everyday lives (Ali, 2015, p. 150).

Ali positions the living Qur'ān and ḥadīths as part of a continued and lived religion, popularly known in the West as religion in everyday life. When scripture is set in the full context of users' everyday lives, its use is plain. How believers use scripture shows its status and role in a religion (Van Voorst, 2008). In this context, a holy book can be studied in informative and performative terms. On the one hand, scripture is a source of information, a source of knowledge, doctrine, and historical past, of clues and knowledge, etc. On the other hand, scripture has a performative function in the sense that it is experienced, made holy, contested, and musicalized. As van Voorst writes:

Sam D. Gill proposed the use of scripture that is informative and performative. Informative means imparting information in various ways, such as in doctrine and history. Performative, in contrast, means doing something, as for example when scripture is used to make sacrifice, to make the laws of a religious or civil community, or to bless and curse. (Van Voorst, 2008, p. 10)

In this context, the ḥadīths are viewed as scripture that is understood and practiced in the daily life of Muslims. They are received by Muslims through such agents as *kiai*, *ustādh*, and Muslims intellectuals. In this case, the study of the living ḥadīths examines both aspects, i.e. informative and performative. In the context of the relationship between the ḥadīths and culture, tradition, and rituals, informative positions should be mutually supportive, as described by Metcalf in her study of how the Tablighi use the ḥadīths to critique modern culture (Metcalf, 1993). Using a living ḥadīth approach, writers such as Ali, Rohmana, Qudsy and Dewi emphasized the need to use methods from the social sciences and anthropology as alternative analytical approaches. Prasojo (Prasojo, 2017, p. 199), for example, showed in his research in the hinterlands of

Kalimantan that the Muslims living along the banks of the Kapuas River learned from both from the Qur'ān and the ḥadīths and contextualized religious teachings in their everyday lives. This level of organization and preparation is what distinguishes these scholars' writings from those included in *Metodologi Penelitian Living Quran dan Hadis* (The Methodology of Living Qur'ān and Ḥadīth Studies) (Syamsuddin 2007) from the recent writings on living ḥadīth.

### **3. The third period (2016–2022)**

The Ḥadīth Studies department, of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, began publishing the academic journal of *Living Ḥadīth*. The journal has been published eight volumes focusing on the interrelation of ḥadīth and modern Muslim traditions. In 2016, the department explored a theoretical basis for "Living Ḥadīth" in two articles "Living Ḥadīth: Genealogy, Theory, and Application" (Qudsy, 2016), and "Text Authority as a Center of Islamic Practice" (Dewi, 2016). Various articles published in this journal, as well as the presence of the journal itself, inspired other journals to include the phrase "living ḥadīth" in their focuses and scopes, such as *Universum* (State Islamic Institute of Kediri, East Java) and *Mutawatir* (Sunan Ampel State Islamic University of Surabaya).

This period was also marked by a change in the national curriculum from the 2013 curriculum to the Indonesian National Qualification Framework (Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia, KKNI) that required all Indonesian universities to revise their curricula to include both compulsory national courses as well as courses unique to each program. Some Ḥadīth Studies programs, such as those at the State Islamic Institutes of Kudus and Kediri as well as Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University and the Qur'ānic Studies Institute (both in Yogyakarta), included living ḥadīth studies as a main course. As such, it may be said that living ḥadīth studies became more institutionalized and recognized at universities.

The books on Living Ḥadīth began to appear in 2018-2019 such as Qudsy and Dewi entitled *Living Hadis: Praktik, Resepsi, Teks, Transmisi* (2018) then the publication of Hasbillah (2019) with the book of *Living Qur'ān-Ḥadīth*. The difference between these two books can be shown that, Hasbillah shows the basic structure of the ontology, epistemology and axiology of the Living Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, while Qudsy and the Dewi emphasize the aspects of ḥadīth and the structure of traditions that have lived in society. These two books are complementary in the study of Living Ḥadīth and are increasingly establishing their position in the realm of the discipline of ḥadīth. These two books then become handbooks and guides for researchers of living traditions, in addition to journal articles.

After the appearance of books and articles on living ḥadīth, criticisms of living ḥadīth began to emerge. We classify this in two parts: first, studies that place the study of living ḥadīth as an enlightening new study phenomenon. Wahyudin Darmalaksana, et al., (2019) emphasized that the study of the living Qur’ān and ḥadīth experienced rapid development and it was necessary to emphasize training in living Qur’ān and ḥadīth research. Meanwhile, by conducting a systematic review of the literature review of living ḥadīth studies in Indonesia, Salleh et al., (2019) showed that living ḥadīth study is a discipline that needs to conduct a comprehensive study in understanding a ḥadīth, so that a ḥadīth does not seem to conflict with one another. The novelty of the study examined in this article confirms that the study of living ḥadīth is a study that is still new in Malaysia, because this study is a new finding and needs to be highlighted.

The periods we describe above illustrate the evolution of living ḥadīth studies, as well as how the discipline has improved over time. Expanding upon the above, we will discuss the main points emphasized in this study, namely the important keywords practice, reception, text, transmission, and transformation. All five aspects are important characteristics of living ḥadīth studies.

## **Living Ḥadīth and Methodological Considerations**

### **1. The use of reception theory**

One may wonder the reasoning of using the theory of reception in ḥadīth studies. This is a question that emerges in living ḥadīth studies. Reception is also termed reader-response criticism by Holub, and is related to how people perceive, understand, and paraphrase a text (2003, p. xi). This theory, originally used in literary studies (Rahima, 2017), emphasizes how people accept and perceive textual meaning. Reception theory is grounded in people's role in contextualizing the meaning of a text within their daily social practices and lives. An anthropological approach is important to help understand society, specifically in social and humanity issues. Within the context of ḥadīths, one must ask how people perceive, accept, understand, and paraphrase the text of the ḥadīths, which they obtain from books, *kyais*, *ustadhs*, etc. within their cultural sphere.

In regard to the reception of ḥadīth, we borrow Stuart Hall’s concept of representation. Following his notion of ‘dominant and hegemonic code,’ this article tries to understand power-relations within religious traditions in contemporary Muslim world. We argue that the religious ideas, practices, and symbols are communicated, understood, and reproduced, hence religious code is everchanging. Ḥadīth transmission and narrative can be subject to contestation, negotiation, and reinterpretation by different individuals or groups. Within the religious landscape of Indonesia, there

are diverse interpretations and practices that deviate from or challenge the dominant code. These alternative interpretations and practices may emerge from different religious traditions, cultural contexts, or individual interpretations of religious texts. In contrast to Rafiq's phenomenological investigation of Banjar Muslim which works by determining the place of religious text in society using Smith, Coward, Graham and Gail's theoretical bases (Rafiq, 2012, 2014, 2021; 2020), our idea of living ḥadīth studies initially starts from observing the phenomenon of reception within a Muslim tradition using ethnographical approach before exploring the position of the ḥadīth itself within the society.

We shall provide a case that exemplifies the reception of the ḥadīth text in religious community. One of which is the practice of birth sacrifice (*'aqīqa*, or *akikah* in Bahasa) in a non-Arabic speaking community, or—adopting Foody's term (2023)—the peripheral Muslim world. The ḥadīth is literally translated as follows: "*The Prophet said: A child is pledged for his 'aqīqa. A sacrifice is made for it on the seventh day. Its head is shaved, and it is given a name,*" (Ibn Mājah, no. 3165). Exemplifying on the role of agents in interpreting the meaning of ḥadīth, Javanese *kiais* in a small village of Yogyakarta exercise their authority by reinterpreting the ḥadīth on birth sacrifice. These religious brokers argue that the aforementioned ḥadīth text establishes an obligation to slaughter a goat when a child is born. Consequently, some of *kiais'* students and followers perceive that if a newborn baby is not celebrated by the sacrifice of a goat, the grown baby will remain a "loaned baby" (*ghulām murtahan*), or a "collateral" (*ghulām rahīnah*) as stated in another ḥadīth narrative (Abū Dāwud, no. 2838). Drawing from the concept of a pawnbroker in modern society, Javanese Muslims in Yogyakarta believe that an unsacrificed baby becomes a collateral. If the payment through the *'aqīqa* is not properly fulfilled, the child becomes liable to be claimed by other parties at a "public auction" by paying the expense of a goat to the religious broker themselves.

In our previous research, we emphasized that when the audience receiving a text shares the same cultural background as its producer, their reception of ḥadīth is likely to align with its historical meaning. Conversely, when audiences come from different cultural frameworks (*aḥwāl an-nafs*), such as differing social classes, geographical locations, or genders, they may interpret the text in distinct ways (2016, p. 184). As such, the cultural understanding of 'loaned baby' in the context of the Arab society of the Prophet's time differs from the understanding in contemporary Muslim world (Taufik, 2020). As such, Indonesian Muslims have had different interpretations of *'aqīqa*. Again, we must underscore the role of agents, who, in many cases of societies, are influential to religious practices in society. The case of 'loaned baby' might be different, for

example, if an agent were to communicate another ḥadīth about *birth sacrifice* to the public, such as follows: "For a boy there should be an 'aqīqa, so shed blood for him, and remove harm from him" (Bukhārī, no. 5049).

The same reception will generally offer the informative meaning of the text, while different receptions may lead to new receptions, or even receptions that are entirely unrelated to the textual meaning of the text—what Sam Gail terms "the performative" aspect of ḥadīth. The work of Muhlis & Norkholis (2016, 242–258) is one of example in performative meaning of the text. In this article he locates living ḥadīth as a field of study that emphasize form of an oral tradition. Weber's theory on social action, that they used in this article, is useful to understand the motives and the goal of the agents of the tradition the reading of the book of *Mukhtashar Al-Bukhārī*. The process of acculturation, of bridging the gap between the cultural space in which a ḥadīth emerged and the cultural space in which it is conveyed results in different receptions. Thus, ḥadīth reception is one of the cornerstones of living ḥadīth studies.

## **2. The position of the text**

The textual basis of practices, rituals, and traditions are sometimes recognized, as in the case of the Monday–Thursday fasting tradition in Pekaten Village, Kotagede (Qudsy et al., 2017, 564–573). However, following Bourdieu's term, social practices are "misrecognized" in certain circumstances (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 118; James, 2015). Social practices may essentially be inspired by the text of the ḥadīths, but with an unrecognized textual foundation. The question often arises as to whether, in living ḥadīth studies, the existence of a *matn* must always be recognized. In particular social practices that seem to come from ḥadīths, for example, informants may be incapable of explicitly identifying ḥadīths that lie behind their practices. In such circumstances, researchers are stuck; anthropological studies often teach that research should apply an emic approach, as shown by the study of Malay Muslim tradition of protecting public cemetery in Banjarmasin. In her work, Jannah (2014) used an anthropological approach to observe the custom of meditating and praying in public cemetery as a living ḥadīth phenomenon, but her research put no attention to the textual dimension of the ḥadīth tradition.

Qudsy (2016, 184) explained that textual foundations are not solely realized by religious brokers but are transformed into established practices. Phenomenological studies advocate for emic approaches, wherein data and information are gathered directly from informants without researcher intervention or interpretation. When there is a lack of awareness regarding textual sources, researchers can substantiate practitioners' understandings

of the purposes behind their practices. This process necessitates indicators that demonstrate the practice's basis in ḥadīths. For instance, consider the shallow pools of water in front of mosque washrooms used for foot purification. It is likely that few individuals understand that this practice is rooted in ḥadīths; instead, they perceive it as derived from fiqh rather than the ḥadīth stating, "If water has reached two qullah, then let nothing defile it" (narrated by ad-Darimī; Aḥmad, no. 4561; Ibn Mājah, no. 517). When informants do not refer to a specific ḥadīth text, researchers of living ḥadīth can further develop indicators to substantiate the practice.

For example, researchers can substantiate the location of washrooms in mosques. Mosques are sacred spaces, and not all individuals entering mosques have already performed ablution. Conversely, washrooms are considered impure (*mutanajjis*) places, necessitating that Muslims have clean hands and feet upon leaving them to enter the mosque. The creative reception of the ḥadīth in this context is intriguing to study. Living ḥadīth studies encompass more than just phenomenological approaches; they also involve tracing and reconstructing sources, as well as identifying their development and interpretation. In this regard, researchers can employ the sociology of knowledge method. For instance, they could trace the processes of objectification, externalization, and internalization involved in constructing such shallow pools, followed by a review of transmission process. This can be achieved through examinations of primary religious literature on the genre of ḥadīth and Islamic jurisprudence studies.

### **3. Transmission and transformation of ḥadīth knowledge**

In our periodization above, we have delineated how living ḥadīth has become a distinctive subdiscipline in ḥadīth studies. This section provides an explanation of ḥadīth practices with its transmission and transformation to different contexts and audiences. Welbourne (1979) and Possamai et. al (2020) delves into the intricate dynamics of knowledge transmission and transformation, highlighting its crucial role in understanding multifaceted roles assumed by religious brokers should not be homogenised and that they should be apprehended with a more nuanced measurement. Traditions, practices, and rituals surrounding ḥadīth are deeply influenced by the specific historical moments and social structures that shape the lives of these agents. The profound significance of knowledge transmission and transformation in the realm of living ḥadīth lies in its ability to; First, depict the trajectory of particular practices, actions, rituals, and traditions, thus tracing the evolution of agents' receptions over time. Second, identify social changes, shifts in practices, and the creative-scholarly knowledge of these agents. Last, identify the intricate evolution of ḥadīth studies within

specific social practices, shedding light on the continuous transformative processes within this dynamic field of study.

Exploring the transmission and transformation of religious knowledge in certain practices necessitates an in-depth investigation as explained in the previous section. Classic Islamic literature such on jurisprudence (fiqh), ethics (akhlāq), and sufism are significant in explaining cultural diffusions of ḥadīths among its readers. This article not only highlights the paramount importance of religious brokers in the contemporary Muslim world but also aims to shed light on the gradual progression of how the agents' ingenious capabilities and erudition perceive ḥadīth over time and how sociocultural transformations in religious practices offers valuable insights into religious landscape and scholarly discourse in the globalized Muslim world.

Another illustrative example is found in an article titled "Tradisi Mitoni: Studi Kasus di Daerah Mlangi" (Shofa & Mujarofah, 2018). This paper explores the ritual practice known as Mitoni, which takes place during the seventh month of pregnancy in Islam. Shofa and Mujarofah delve into the origins and transmission of knowledge surrounding this tradition. Through interviews with a religious leader in Mlangi, they reveal that historically, the Mitoni tradition has been passed down in Mlangi and can be traced back to Mbah Nur Iman, the founder of Mlangi in the 18th century. The tradition is believed to have derived from Sunan Kalijaga, a revered figure in Indonesian Islamic history. Textually, this traditional practice finds support in the book *Qurratu al-'Ain bi-Fatāwa Ismā'īl az-Zayn*. Isma'īl Uthman, a charismatic Ḥadhrami scholar in 19th century Indonesia, argues that the recitation of Qur'ān and ḥadīth verses as blessings and acts of charity, as seen in the *Mitoni* tradition, is permissible within the Islamic tradition (az-Zayn, 1992). These customs primarily rely on Arabic verses and phrases extracted from Islamic scripture and traditions. We argue that examinations of other practices in the contemporary Indonesian context, such in the performances of important stages in Muslims' life, or the Islamic rites of passages (Qudsy, 2018), demonstrates the utilization of knowledge transmission rooted in ḥadīth narratives.

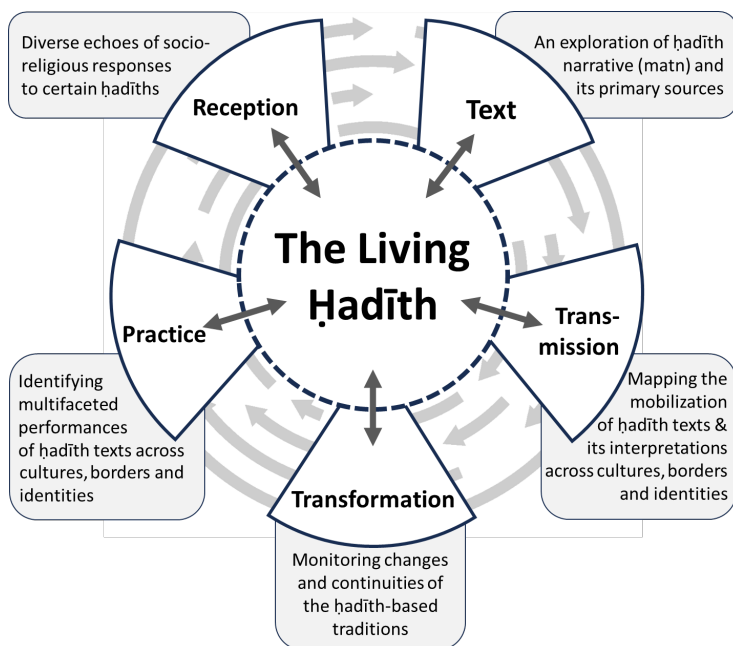


Figure 1. Five concepts of living ḥadīth

Figure 1 encompasses five key aspects that provide a comprehensive understanding of this dynamic field; First, the aspect of ‘practice’ involves identifying the multifaceted performances of ḥadīth texts across diverse cultures, borders, and identities. This highlights the varied ways in which ḥadīth is enacted and embodied within different social and cultural contexts; Second, the aspect of “reception” explores the diverse echoes of socio-religious responses to specific ḥadīths. This entails examining the ways in which different communities and individuals interpret and engage with ḥadīth texts, reflecting the rich tapestry of socio-religious dynamics; Third, the aspect of “text” delves into an exploration of the ḥadīth narrative (matn) and its primary sources, providing insights into the textual foundations and intricacies of ḥadīth literature; Fourth, the aspect of “transmission” involves mapping the mobilization of ḥadīth texts and their interpretations across various cultures, borders, and identities. This ḥadīth phenomenon elucidates transnational and transcultural flows of ḥadīth knowledge and its impact on diverse communities. Last, the aspect of “transformation” entails monitoring the changes and continuities of ḥadīth-based traditions over time. This aspect investigates the dynamic nature of ḥadīth practices, as they respond to sociocultural transformations. By examining these five aspects, the study of the living ḥadīth provide a

comprehensive framework for understanding the complexity, diversity and evolution of ḥadīth traditions in contemporary societies.

## Conclusion

As a new subdiscipline to ḥadīth studies, living ḥadīth has experienced significant changes in last two decades. The term "living ḥadīth" refers to the practice and lived experience of ḥadīths in society. Within the religious landscape of Indonesia, there are diverse interpretations and practices that deviate from the hegemonic code. These alternative interpretations and practices may emerge from different religious traditions, cultural contexts, or individual interpretations of religious texts. Drawing on Geertz's concept of "cultural brokers", the discussion highlights the role of ustādhs, kiais, shekhs, and ḥabā'ib as religious brokers in socio-religious practices. These religious brokers attempt to legitimize such practices by employing religious arguments. The study of living ḥadīth departs from observing the phenomenon of ḥadīth reception within a Muslim environment using ethnographical approach before questioning the position of the textual dimension of the ḥadīth within the society.

The mapping of living ḥadīth as a subdiscipline to ḥadīth studies through periodization shows how the discourse has formed and become included in curricula and well-developed methodologically. The focus on transmission and transformation of ḥadīth knowledge was expanded over time and the study of living ḥadīth today cover five aspects: practice, reception, text, transmission, and transformation. This subdiscipline on interdisciplinary approach to ḥadīth and social culture studies is also open to other creative and distinct approaches to the field, such as socio-legal ethics, philology, politics, education, hermeneutics, and digital humanities.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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