



## A Critical Gadamerian Review of M. Syuhudi Ismail's and Muhammad Syahrur's Readings of the Hadith on Female Leadership

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### Abstract

The hadith of Abu Bakrah on the prohibition of female leadership (Sahih al-Bukhari nos. 4425 and 7099) has become a battleground for competing paradigms in contemporary hadith hermeneutics. M. Syuhudi Ismail classifies it as a temporal-local hadith, opening space for female leadership in all public domains. At the same time, Muhammad Syahrur—through al-sunnah al-nabawiyah and the theory of al-hudud—treats such hadiths as products of the Prophet's historical ijthad that are not absolutely binding. This article examines both readings through the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, particularly Vorurteil (prejudice), Wirkungsgeschichte (history of effect), and Gadamer's rehabilitation of authoritative tradition. The study is a library-based study employing a descriptive-analytical-critical method, drawing on primary hadith sources, classical commentaries (especially Fath al-Bari and Umdat al-Qari), the works of both figures, and recent secondary literature. It argues that Syahrur performs a prejudice against prejudice, that Syuhudi's temporal-local classification lacks testable operational criteria, and that a reading which situates the commentarial tradition as a productive Wirkungsgeschichte—while preserving the classical distinction between al-wilayah al-uzma and other public roles—is more defensible both hermeneutically and within the manhaj al-muhaddithin. The article also reflexively applies Gadamerian critique to the classical reading itself.

**Keywords:** Hans-Georg Gadamer; M. Syuhudi Ismail; Muhammad Syahrur; female leadership.

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## Introduction

The question of female leadership in Islam has never truly subsided in Indonesia's public sphere. Khofifah Indar Parawansa's victory in the East Java gubernatorial election, Tri Rismaharini's ministerial leadership, and Megawati Soekarnoputri's record as Indonesia's first female president repeatedly bring socio-political reality into collision with religious texts regarded as prohibiting women from holding public leadership.<sup>1</sup> Among the various proof-texts invoked, the hadith of Abu Bakrah narrated by al-Bukhari *lan yufliha qawm wallaw amrabum imra'ah*, "never will a people succeed who entrust their affairs to a woman," occupies a central position because of its well-established authenticity and the categorical character of its wording.<sup>2</sup>

The hermeneutical problem arises when this hadith is brought into contact with two epistemological demands that pull in opposite directions. On the one hand, a literalism that ignores the historical context of the hadith's emergence risks producing an anachronistic understanding that is harsh toward a changing social reality.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, a contextualization undertaken without clear methodological guardrails risks undermining the authority of sound hadith and opening the door to imposing modern values on the text.<sup>4</sup> This impasse has prompted two contemporary paradigms of hadith hermeneutics to advance differing proposals: M. Syuhudi Ismail (1943–1995), with a reformist-moderate universal-temporal-local classification, and Muhammad Syahrur (1938–2019), with a deconstructive-radical distinction between *al-sunnah al-rasuliyah* and *al-sunnah al-nabawiyah*.<sup>5</sup>

A survey of the literature shows that scholarship on these two figures is dense. Single-figure studies of Syuhudi have been explored by Amrulloh (2017), Nasrulloh and Witro (2022), Rifai et al. (2023), Abdurahim and Sa'adah (2025), and Aldi and Toriquddin (2025).<sup>6</sup> Single-figure studies of Syahrur have been undertaken by Mustaqim (2017), Hakim and Rini (2020), Khoiri (2022), and Sa'adah and Masruhan (2025).<sup>7</sup> Comparative studies pairing Syuhudi with other thinkers have also been produced, for example, by Saputera and Muhazir (2023), who compare Syuhudi with Khaled Abou El Fadl,<sup>8</sup> and Hadiana and Muhid (2024), who compare

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<sup>1</sup> Akhmad Arif Junaidi, "Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) and Mubadalah Approach in Interpreting the Gender Biased-Qur'anic Verses," *Sawwa: Jurnal Studi Gender* 18, no. 1 (2023): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.21580/sa.v18i1.17269>.

<sup>2</sup> M Habib and Arbianita Arbianita, "Hukum wanita menjadi pemimpin menurut pandangan fiqh kontemporer," *Jurnal Action Research Literate* 4, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>3</sup> Muh. Nasrullah H., Jannatul Husna, and Waharjani Waharjani, "Syuhudi Ismail dan Pengembangan Pemikiran Hadis di Indonesia: Studi Analisis Konsep Pemahaman Hadis," *Risalah: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Studi Islam* 8, no. 2 (2022): 441–58.

<sup>4</sup> Qaem Aulassyahied, "Studi kritis konsep sunnah Muhammad Syahrur," *Kalimah* 13, no. 1 (2015): 139–64, <https://doi.org/10.21111/klm.v13i1.282>.

<sup>5</sup> Amrar Amrulloh, "Kontribusi M. Syuhudi Ismail dalam kontekstualisasi pemahaman hadis," *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith* 7, no. 1 (2017): 76–104, <https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2017.7.1.76-104>.

<sup>6</sup> Nasrulloh Nasrulloh and Doli Witro, "Pemikiran Syuhudi Ismail tentang paradigma hadis tekstual dan kontekstual: Sebuah tinjauan umum," *An-Nida'* 46, no. 1 (2022): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.24014/an-nida.v46i1.19226>.

<sup>7</sup> Abdul Mustaqim, "Teori hudud Muhammad Syahrur dan kontribusinya dalam penafsiran al-Qur'an," *Al-Quds: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Hadis* 1, no. 1 (2017): 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v1i1.163>.

<sup>8</sup> A R A Saputera and Muhazir Muhazir, "Studi kritis komparasi metode hermeneutika hadist perspektif Khaled M. Aboe Fadl dan M. Syuhudi Ismail," *AL-WAJID: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Quran dan Tafsir* 4, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.30863/alwajid.v4i1.5696>.

Syuhudi with Mahmud Abu Rayyah.<sup>9</sup> A direct comparative study of Syuhudi and Syahrur, however, is very limited and, to the author's knowledge, is represented only by Amrulloh (2017),<sup>10</sup> which is not a balanced comparison but rather a critique of Syahrur using Syuhudi's framework.

Beyond studies of the two figures, the hadith of female leadership itself has been examined from numerous angles: thematic Qur'anic exegesis,<sup>11</sup> hadith-based juristic analysis,<sup>12</sup> feminist hermeneutics,<sup>13</sup> the Qur'anic precedent of Queen Balqis,<sup>14</sup> comparative surveys of classical and contemporary scholars,<sup>15</sup> and the practice of women's leadership in da'wah institutions.<sup>16</sup> These studies, however, largely converge on competence-based or gender-justice conclusions; none subjects the modernist readings themselves to a philosophical-hermeneutical critique.

This is precisely where the novelty of the present research lies. No article has yet to read the two figures comparatively, placing them on an equal footing within a single, broader framework of philosophical hermeneutics. The hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) is chosen for three reasons. First, Gadamer supplies the conceptual apparatus for identifying the prejudice (*Vorurteil*) at work in every reading—including the classical reading and the present author's own, not only the modernist ones. Second, the concept of *Wirkungsgeschichte* allows the tradition of hadith commentary to be taken into account as an intrinsic part of understanding rather than as a burden to be cast off. Third, it is often misunderstood that Gadamer is a theorist of relativism; yet in *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960; rev. trans. 2004), Gadamer rehabilitates authority and tradition against what he calls the Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudice."<sup>17</sup> It is precisely for this last reason that Gadamer can serve as a methodological ally for a reading that respects the *manhaj al-muhaddithin*.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> S N Hadiana and Muhid Muhid, "Polemik periwayatan hadis bil ma'na: Studi komparasi pemikiran Syuhudi Ismail dan Mahmud Abu Rayyah," *Jurnal Riset Agama* 4, no. 2 (2024): 94–107, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jra.v4i2.33750>.

<sup>10</sup> Amrar Amrulloh, "Integralitas sistem sanad dan kontekstualisasi pemahaman hadis versus konsep sunah Muhammad Shahrur," *Tafaqquh: Jurnal Penelitian dan Kajian Keislaman* 5, no. 2 (2017): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.52431/tafaqquh.v5i2.103>.

<sup>11</sup> Lutfiyah Lutfiyah and Lailatud Diyanah, "Kepemimpinan perempuan dalam al-Qur'an: Kajian tafsir tematik," *Al-Furqan: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 5, no. 2 (2022): 270–87, <https://doi.org/10.58518/alfurqon.v5i2.1399>.

<sup>12</sup> N R Kurniawati, "Kontroversi peran aktif wanita dalam urusan umum (Studi hadis kepemimpinan wanita)," *Journal of Islamic Studies and History* 2 (2023): 29–46.

<sup>13</sup> Arsal Arsal, Busyro Busyro, and Muhammad Imran, "Kepemimpinan perempuan: Penerapan metode tafsir hermeneutika feminisme Amina Wadud," *Al Quds: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Hadis* 4, no. 2 (2020): 481–500, <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v4i2.1976>.

<sup>14</sup> Putri Setiawati et al., "Islam dan kepemimpinan perempuan: Prototipe leadership Ratu Balqis perspektif Tafsir Al-Azhar," *Al-Qudwah* 2, no. 2 (2024): 137–51, <https://doi.org/10.24014/alqudwah.v2i2.27172>.

<sup>15</sup> S Z Kamila, D Akbar, and A S Rachmat, "Kepemimpinan perempuan dalam hukum Islam: Studi terhadap pandangan ulama klasik dan kontemporer," *Al-Zayn: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial & Hukum* 4, no. 1 (2026): 3133–48, <https://doi.org/10.61104/alz.v4i1.3598>.

<sup>16</sup> R S Pohan, E Rambe, and R Wahyuni, "Women's Leadership in Da'wah Management: As-Salmaniyah Islamic Boarding School, Mandailing Natal," *Waraqat: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 10, no. 2 (2025): 305–20, <https://doi.org/10.51590/waraqat.v10i2.1158>.

<sup>17</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Revised (Continuum, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> M I R Kurniawan, "Pengaplikasian teori hermeneutika Hans-Georg Gadamer terhadap hadis Nabi Muhammad," *Universum* 15, no. 1 (2021): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.30762/universum.v15i1.717>.

Three research questions guide this article. First, how is the hadith of Abu Bakrah understood within the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the classical commentarial tradition? Second, how do Syuhudi Ismail and Muhammad Syahrur—both applicatively and reconstructively—read this hadith through their respective methodological frameworks? Third, how can Gadamer's hermeneutics serve as a critical benchmark for assessing all three readings, including the classical reading? The study is a library-based study employing a descriptive-analytical-critical method and relying on three layers of sources: primary hadith and classical commentaries (*Sabih al-Bukhari*, *Fath al-Bari*, *Umdat al-Qari*, and others); the works of the two figures; and recent secondary literature, with a preference for publications from the past decade.

The argument defended in this article is critical-constructive. Both Syuhudi's and Syahrur's modernist readings, each in its own way, suffer from hermeneutical problems that can be identified through a Gadamerian framework. A more defensible reading, both philosophically-hermeneutically and according to the *manhaj al-muhaddithin*, situates the commentarial tradition as a productive history of effect while preserving the classical distinction drawn by the majority of scholars between *al-wilayah al-uzma*, which is prohibited to women, and other public roles that remain open. This position, as will be shown, is in fact more responsive to modern reality than the total deconstruction offered by Syahrur or the substitution of a universal principle performed by Syuhudi.

## Result and Discussion

### Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics as a Critical Benchmark

Gadamer's hermeneutics was built as a dialectical response to two currents of nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought: the methodical-psychological Romantic hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, and Heidegger's phenomenology, which shifted hermeneutics to an ontological level. In *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), Gadamer develops what he calls "philosophical hermeneutics" (*philosophische Hermeneutik*), namely an inquiry into how understanding is fundamentally possible, rather than merely a method for obtaining correct understanding.<sup>19</sup> Three concepts in Gadamer's thought are relevant to this article and will be briefly outlined before being used as analytical benchmarks in the following sections.

The first concept is *Vorurteil*, or prejudice. In contrast to the common view that associates prejudice with a bias to be eliminated, Gadamer insists that all understanding always proceeds from within a particular horizon of prejudice. There is no neutral standpoint of nowhere; the reader always comes to the text with a pre-understanding shaped by tradition, language, and historical situation.<sup>20</sup> What determines the validity of understanding is not whether prejudice can be removed—that is impossible—but whether it is tested against "the thing itself" (*die Sache selbst*) or imposed upon it. A productive prejudice makes the reader aware of the limits of the reader's horizon and thereby opens a dialogical space with the text; an unproductive prejudice conceals itself as "universal rationality" and thus blinds the reader to the reader's own particularity.

The second concept is *Wirkungsgeschichte*, commonly rendered as "history of effect," together with its derivative *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* (historically effected consciousness). For Gadamer, the meaning of a text is not separable from the history of its reception. When we

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<sup>19</sup> Richard E Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Northwestern University Press, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> Zaki Jamaly et al., "Menganalisis pemikiran filsafat Gadamer (pemikiran hermeneutika)," *Leksikon: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa, Sastra, dan Budaya* 2, no. 1 (2024): 1–6, <https://doi.org/10.59632/leksikon.v2i1.190>.

understand a text, we always understand it through the chain of readings that has shaped our framework of comprehension; prior readings become the medium through which meaning reaches us.<sup>21</sup> In hadith studies, this means that the commentarial works of the *muhaddithin* and the *fuqaha* are not an external layer that can be discarded for the sake of a "direct" reading of the text; rather, they are the very horizon that makes understanding the hadith possible. Ignoring the *Wirkungsgeschichte* does not yield a purer reading but a reading naive about its own horizon.

The third concept is the rehabilitation of authority and tradition. In Part II of *Wahrheit und Methode*, Gadamer explicitly attacks the Enlightenment formulation that places authority and reason in diametrical opposition. For Gadamer, the Enlightenment is itself grounded in a prejudice—namely, the prejudice against prejudice (*das Vorurteil gegen die Vorurteile*)—which in fact blinds modern thought to its own historical condition.<sup>22</sup> Authority, in Gadamer's analysis, is not a dogma imposed but a rational acknowledgment of superior knowledge attained through excellence in learning and integrity. Tradition, including the tradition of hadith commentary, is an authority that is earned, not simply given, and therefore becomes a source of truth that cannot be surpassed by any individual who merely claims "modern rationality" as a banner.

Together, these three concepts form the critical framework that will be applied in the following sections. It must be stressed that the use of Gadamer in this article is selective and instrumental. As Mudin et al. (2021) note, the wholesale application of Gadamer to Islamic sacred texts raises serious theological problems because his framework is rooted in a tradition of biblical reading that differs from the ontology of the Qur'an and the hadith. Nevertheless, the instrumentation of Gadamerian concepts as a critical scalpel against modernism, particularly against modernist readers of hadith who are dogmatic about tradition, is highly productive. This aligns with the strategy of Mudin et al., who also use Gadamer to dismantle Amina Wadud's rational pretensions, even as they ultimately reject Gadamer philosophically. A comparable instrumentation underlies Muhtador's (2018) Gadamerian rereading of hadiths conventionally deemed misogynistic, an approach the present article extends to the specific problem of female leadership.<sup>23</sup>

A second methodological caveat must be stressed: this Gadamerian scalpel is applied reflexively, including to the classical reading and to the present author's own constructive position. A critique that exempted the classical tradition from the question of *Vorurteil* would itself fall into the naivety of the neutral observer it claims to expose. The classical reading, too, proceeds from a horizon of prejudice; the relevant question, pursued in the critique section below, is not whether that horizon is free of prejudice—no horizon is—but whether its prejudice is productive: tested against *die Sache selbst* and verified across independent schools and eras, or merely concealed as timeless certainty.

### **The Hadith of Abu Bakrah: Canonical Status and Classical *Wirkungsgeschichte*** ***Text, Sanad, and Status of Authenticity***

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<sup>21</sup> M Ihsan Mudin, M D Fikri, and M M Shobirin, "Hermeneutika Hans-Georg Gadamer: Studi analisis kritis penafsiran Amina Wadud tentang ayat kepemimpinan," *Intisjar* 27, no. 2 (2021): 113–26.

<sup>22</sup> Mudin, Fikri, and Shobirin.

<sup>23</sup> Moh. Muhtador, "Memahami hadis misoginis dalam perspektif hermeneutika produktif Hans-Georg Gadamer," *Diya al-Afkar: Jurnal Studi al-Qur'an dan al-Hadis* 6, no. 2 (2018): 257–78, <https://doi.org/10.24235/diyaafkar.v6i02.3787>.

Al-Bukhari narrates this hadith in two chapters of his collection. First, in the *Kitab al-Maghazi* (no. 4425), with the wording: "Allah benefited me with a single statement during the days of the Battle of the Camel, when the Prophet heard that the Persians had crowned the daughter of Khosrow as their ruler; he said: *lan yusliha qawm wallaw amrabum imra'ab.*" Second, in the *Kitab al-Fitan* (no. 7099), with the same chain and text. The narration passes through the line of Uthman ibn al-Haytham, from Awf, from al-Hasan al-Basri, from Abu Bakrah Nufay ibn al-Harith al-Thaqafi.<sup>2425</sup>

The muhaddithin agree upon its authenticity. The hadith appears in *Sabih al-Bukhari*, the most authoritative book after the Qur'an. Al-Tirmidhi categorizes it as *hasan sahib*, while al-Albani in *Sabih al-Jami al-Saghir* (no. 5225) declares it *sabih*. Some modern scholars question the solitary narration of Abu Bakrah, particularly because he once received the *badd qadhf* (the punishment for slander) during the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab. The majority of the *muhaddithin*, however, respond that the application of the *badd qadhf* based on testimony does not invalidate one's transmission, and that scholars have never doubted the other narrations of Abu Bakrah.<sup>2627</sup>

### ***Asbab al-Wurud***

The historical context of this hadith is quite specific. After the killing of Khosrow II Parviz by his son Shiruyeh and the subsequent chain of dynastic killings, the Sasanian Empire entered a succession crisis in 628–632 CE. Owing to the near-extinction of the male line of Khosrow's descendants, the Persian throne passed to Buran (Boran), Khosrow's daughter, who ascended around 630 CE. It was this news that reached the Prophet Muhammad, who then responded with the statement in question. Abu Bakrah later recalled this hadith when he was about to join Aisha's forces at the Battle of the Camel (36 AH/657 CE), which led him to withdraw from that internal conflict.<sup>2829</sup>

### ***Wirkungsgeschichte: The Classical Commentarial Tradition***

The commentarial tradition on this hadith stretches from the fifth century AH to the modern era, forming what Gadamer would call a history of effect that delimits the range of legitimate interpretation. Several major layers can be identified. Al-Khattabi (d. 388 AH), one of the early commentators on *Sabih al-Bukhari*, understood this hadith as the basis for prohibiting women from holding the office of *qada* (judgeship) and *al-imamah al-kubra* (supreme leadership). Al-Mawardi (d. 450 AH), in *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah*, made this hadith one of the principal foundations for prohibiting women from holding the *wizarah* and similar positions, with an argument woven together with the general principles of *siyasah shariyyah*.

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (d. 852 AH), in *Fath al-Bari*, provides the most comprehensive analysis. In his commentary on the *Kitab al-Maghazi*, Ibn Hajar affirms the general signification (*dalalah umum*) of this hadith based on the *usuli* rule that the terms *qawm* and *imra'ab* are both

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<sup>24</sup> Muhammad ibn Ismail Al-Bukhari, *Sabih Al-Bukhari* (Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers, 1997).

<sup>25</sup> Tasmin Tangngareng, "Kepemimpinan wanita dalam perspektif hadis Nabi SAW (Pemahaman makna tekstual dan kontekstual)," *Sulesana: Jurnal Wawasan Keislaman* 10, no. 2 (2016): 50–64, <https://doi.org/10.24252/v10i2.2934>.

<sup>26</sup> Ahmad ibn 'Ali Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalanī, *Fath Al-Bāri Bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī and Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1379).

<sup>27</sup> Habib and Arbianita, "Hukum wanita menjadi pemimpin menurut pandangan fiqh kontemporer."

<sup>28</sup> Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalanī, *Fath Al-Bāri Bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*.

<sup>29</sup> Tangngareng, "Kepemimpinan wanita dalam perspektif hadis Nabi SAW (Pemahaman makna tekstual dan kontekstual)."

indefinite (*nakirah*) occurring within a context of negation (*siyaq nafi*), so that they encompass all peoples and all women. He also connects the hadith with the rule *al-ibrab bi-umum al-lafẓ la bi-khusus al-sabab*, which means that what counts is the generality of the wording, not the specificity of the occasion, so that the hadith's connection with the case of Buran does not restrict its applicability.<sup>30</sup> Al-Ayni (d. 855 AH), in *Umdat al-Qari*, follows a similar line, citing the consensus of most scholars on the prohibition of women serving as qadis, while acknowledging a minority Maliki view permitting it in certain cases.

In the subsequent period, al-Shawkani (d. 1250 AH), in *Nayl al-Awtar*, affirms that this hadith serves as proof that women are not entitled to hold public leadership (*wilayah ammah*) and that the community may not appoint them to such positions. Al-Sanani (d. 1182 AH), in *al-Tanwir Sharh al-Jami al-Saghir* and *al-Tabbir li-Idab Maani al-Taysir*, offers a subtle distinction that is highly important for this article: what is prohibited in this hadith is *al-wilayah fi al-umur al-azaim* (leadership in major affairs), which therefore does not conflict with other hadiths such as "a woman is a guardian in her husband's house and is responsible for her charge" (narrated by al-Bukhari).

Al-Sanani's distinction becomes the pivot of the traditional moderate reading. The prohibition established by the hadith of Abu Bakrah applies to the *wilayah uzma* (supreme leadership/caliphate/*imamah kubra*) and equivalent leadership positions such as the *wizarah*, *qada*, and general *imarah* (*imarah ammah*). Other public roles for women, however, such as the management of endowments (*waqf*), organizational leadership, professional roles, and responsibilities in particular communal affairs (*umur kbassah*), are not covered by this prohibition. This is the position of the majority of scholars (*jumhur*) across the schools, reaffirmed by contemporary authorities, including the Permanent Committee of Saudi Arabia (Lajnah Da'imah) and Ibn Baz; it is the constructive position elaborated in the synthesis section.<sup>31</sup>

It is important to note that this *Wirkungsgeschichte* is not a collection of individual opinions that can be readily surpassed; it is a chain of mutually reinforcing readings operating through the mechanism of tradition as the recognition of superior knowledge precisely in Gadamer's sense. Each commentator stands on the shoulders of his predecessor, correcting where necessary, preserving where there is consensus. The convergence of interpretation among al-Khattabi, al-Mawardi, Ibn Hajar, al-Ayni, al-Shawkani, and al-Sanani, who come from different schools of *fiqh* and different historical periods, shows that the universal reading of this hadith's signification is not a contingent artifact of a single school but a rational conclusion that reaches the reader through a chain of independent verification. Diversity of opinion exists, such as the Malikis' limited acknowledgment of a woman's *qada* in certain cases, but that diversity itself unfolds within the same horizon, namely, the recognition of the hadith's basic signification as a prohibition against women's *wilayah ammah*.

### M. Syuhudi Ismail's Reading of the Hadith on Female Leadership

Syuhudi's reading of the hadith of Abu Bakrah can be traced directly to his work *Hadis Nabi yang Tekstual dan Kontekstual: Telaah Ma'ani al-Hadith tentang Ajaran Islam yang Universal, Temporal, dan Lokal*, which is the primary source for the following account. As noted by several later

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<sup>30</sup> Ahmad ibn Ali Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari bi Syarh Sahih al-Bukhari* (Riyadh: Dar al-Salam, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> Habib and Arbianita, "Hukum wanita menjadi pemimpin menurut pandangan fiqh kontemporer."

scholars, this hadith is one of the most frequently cited applications of Syuhudi's methodology.<sup>32</sup>

Syuhudi operates his four approaches in sequence. At the grammatical-linguistic level (*al-lughawi*), Syuhudi examines the construction *lan yufliha*. The imperfect verb (*fil mudari*) preceded by the particle of negation *lan*, in his view, may indicate an event that is occurring or will occur, but not necessarily in the sense of *dawam* (perpetual, without temporal limit). This reading differs from that of most muhaddithin, who generally read *lan* as a strong, comprehensive negation. At the historical level, Syuhudi draws a sharp line between the seventh-century Persian context, with its absolute monarchy, bloody struggles for the throne, and succession crises, and modern political reality, based on constitutional democracy and the selection of competence.

At the sociological-anthropological level, Syuhudi emphasizes that seventh-century Arab and Persian society was strongly patriarchal, with the public sphere almost entirely dominated by men. The appointment of a woman as ruler in this context, according to Syuhudi, was an anomaly that of itself invited a crisis of social legitimacy. At the philosophical level (*falsafi*), Syuhudi draws out the universal principle that, in his view, stands behind the text's particularity: the principle of the leader's competence. The core of the hadith's message, on this reading, is not a prohibition of women per se but a warning against appointing an incompetent leader who, in the seventh-century Persian context, sociologically happened to be a woman, but who, in the modern context, may be anyone lacking the capacity to lead.<sup>33</sup> Such a move reflects a broader contemporary effort to draw out the present-day implications of hadith for modern life.<sup>34</sup>

Based on this four-layered analysis, Syuhudi classifies the hadith of Abu Bakrah as both temporal and local: temporal because it is tied to the seventh-century Persian succession crisis, and local because it is tied to the patriarchal Arab-Persian social structure of the Prophet's era, which differs greatly from contemporary society. The legal implication is that this hadith cannot serve as a universal proof for prohibiting female leadership in the modern context. What must be upheld is the universal ethical principle it embodies: the selection of a competent leader, regardless of sex.<sup>35</sup>

Syuhudi's position has been widely appreciated in Indonesian hadith discourse, particularly among reformist-moderate circles. Aldi and Toriquddin (2025) describe this approach as Syuhudi's most distinctive contribution to the development of hadith studies in Indonesia, while Nasrulloh and Witro (2022) regard it as a productive synthesis between the classical sciences of hadith (*ulum al-hadith*) and modern social science. The approach, however, is not free from internal criticism. Abdurahim and Sa'adah (2025) note that Syuhudi's classificatory framework is often descriptive, without clear operational criteria for determining the category of a given hadith. The basic question is: by what criterion does Syuhudi designate this hadith

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<sup>32</sup> M Aldi and M Toriquddin, "History of Thought Syuhudi Ismail: A Study of Textual and Contextual Analysis of Prophetic Hadiths," *J-CEKI: Jurnal Cendekia Ilmiah* 4, no. 2 (2025): 1723–32, <https://doi.org/10.56799/jceki.v4i2.7141>.

<sup>33</sup> Dliya'ul Fithoroini, "Hadis Nabi yang tekstual dan kontekstual (Analisis pemikiran Muhammad Syuhudi Ismail)," *Nabawi: Journal of Hadith Studies* 2, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.55987/njhs.v2i1.42>.

<sup>34</sup> M H Aulia et al., "The Concept of Useful Knowledge in Hadith and Its Implications for Contemporary Islamic Education," *Waraqat: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 9, no. 2 (2024): 45–61, <https://doi.org/10.51590/waraqat.v9i2.953>.

<sup>35</sup> M Abdurahim and D Sa'adah, "Telaah kritis pemikiran Muhammad Syuhudi Ismail: Perspektif pemahaman tekstual dan kontekstual hadis," *AHKAM* 4, no. 1 (2025): 15–31, <https://doi.org/10.58578/ahkam.v4i1.4581>.

as temporal-local rather than universal? It is precisely this question that the critical review below will explore further.

### Muhammad Syahrur's Reconstructive Reading

Unlike Syuhudi, Muhammad Syahrur does not discuss the hadith of Abu Bakrah explicitly in his major works *al-Kitab wa al-Qur'an: Qira'ah Muasirah, Nahwa Usul Jadidah li al-Fiqh al-Islami: Fiqh al-Mar'ah*, and *al-Sunnah al-Rasuliyah wa al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyah: Ru'yah Jadidah*, which Indonesian scholarship accesses largely through translation.<sup>36</sup> His work on women's *fiqh* focuses primarily on inheritance, the veil, polygamy, and *qiwamah* (guardianship). Still, it does not specifically address the issue of female leadership in light of this hadith of Abu Bakrah. Syahrur's reading of this hadith is therefore a methodological reconstruction, a systematic application of his framework, rather than a citation of direct statements. This limitation must be acknowledged at the outset, and its scientific warrant stated plainly: what the reconstruction tests is the internal consistency of Syahrur's framework when applied to a categorical hadith, not a historical claim about what Syahrur himself would have said. Because his apparatus—anti-synonymity (*adam al-taraduf*), the classification of *sunnah*, and the theory of limits (*nazariyyat al-hudud*)—is systematic and explicitly offered as generalizable, applying it to this hadith is a legitimate stress-test of the method itself.

The first reconstruction occurs at the linguistic level. Syahrur grounds his methodology in the theory of anti-synonymity (*adam al-taraduf*) that he inherited from Abu Ali al-Farisi through Jafar Dak al-Bab.<sup>37</sup> Every word in the Qur'an and, by extension, in the hadith, for him, has a distinct meaning that cannot be interchanged with another word that superficially appears synonymous. Applied to this hadith, the difference between *lan* and *la* is not a mere stylistic variation but indicates a different kind of negation; the use of the term *amrahum* (their affairs) rather than *ri'asatabum* (their leadership) should likewise carry a distinct semantic implication. This approach, if pursued consistently, may in fact narrow the scope of the prohibition. *Amrahum* could be understood as referring to particular affairs rather than to public leadership in general.

The second reconstruction, and the most substantive, occurs at the level of the classification of *sunnah*. Syahrur introduces a sharp distinction between *al-sunnah al-rasuliyah* and *al-sunnah al-nabawiyah*.<sup>38</sup> The former is the *sunnah* directly related to Muhammad's task as the Messenger who conveys revelation encompassing the explanation of pure acts of worship (*ibadah mabdah*), the verses of *hudud*, and morality (*akhlak*), and binds the entire Muslim community for all time. The latter is the *sunnah* arising from Muhammad's capacity as a human prophet who exercised *ijtihad* within a particular socio-political-economic context encompassing political decisions, military strategy, agricultural and commercial policy, and ad hoc responses to concrete situations. This second category, according to Syahrur, is not absolutely binding after the Prophet's death.

Applied to the hadith of Abu Bakrah, this framework would categorize it as *al-sunnah al-nabawiyah*. The argument runs as follows: this hadith is not an explanation of *ibadah mabdah*, not a verse of *hudud*, and not a formulation of universal *akhlak*; it is the Prophet's specific response to a political event in seventh-century Persia. Therefore, in Syahrur's logic, this

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<sup>36</sup> Muhammad Syahrur, *Prinsip dan dasar hermeneutika al-Qur'an kontemporer* (eLSAQ Press, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> Muhammad Yusuf, "Bacaan kontemporer: Hermeneutika al-Qur'an Muhammad Syahrur," *Jurnal Diskursus Islam* 2, no. 1 (2014): 52–72.

<sup>38</sup> Muhammad Anshori, "Sunnah dan kedudukan Muhammad dalam pandangan Muhammad Syahrur," *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Ushuluddin* 17, no. 2 (2019): 99–116, <https://doi.org/10.18592/jiu.v17i2.2239>.

hadith falls under the category of Muhammad's historical *ijtihad* as a human prophet responding to the context of his age. Its authoritative consequence is that Muslims are not bound to its form of application; they may draw the wisdom or principle it contains, but need not follow its literal prohibition.<sup>39</sup> This relocation of binding authority echoes a wider contemporary debate over the plurality and reliability of hadith in a globalized setting.<sup>40</sup>

The third reconstruction proceeds through the theory of limits (*naẓariyyat al-hudud*). Syahrur's theory views the provisions of the *shari'a* as parameters with an upper limit (*al-hadd al-ala*) and a lower limit (*al-hadd al-adna*), between which lies a wide space for *ijtihad*.<sup>41</sup> If forcibly applied to the hadith of Abu Bakrah, the hadith could at most be regarded as the *al-hadd al-ala*, the maximal limit on restricting female leadership, which holds in certain contexts (for example, the patriarchal social structure of the seventh century) but may be set aside in other contexts without violating the bounds of the *shari'a*. This reading effectively neutralizes the hadith as a binding source of prohibition.

The practical implications of these three reconstructions resemble Syuhudi's conclusion that female leadership is possible in the modern context. Still, they follow a very different and far more radical epistemological route. Whereas Syuhudi reaches it through a multilayered temporal-local classification that still acknowledges the authority of the sound hadith, Syahrur reaches it through a total deconstruction of the hadith's authority as a non-binding *sunnah nabawiyyah*.<sup>42</sup>

### Female Leadership in Feminist Hermeneutics: A Third Paradigm

Alongside Syuhudi and Syahrur, a third paradigm reads this hadith through feminist hermeneutics. Its most influential exponent in the Indonesian reception is Amina Wadud, whose method—grounded in the principle of gender justice as the Qur'an's overarching ethical horizon—relativizes texts that appear to subordinate women, treating them as expressions of a patriarchal milieu rather than timeless norms. In Indonesia, this trajectory is institutionally visible in the Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) and the Mubadalah approach to gender-biased texts.<sup>43</sup>

From a Gadamerian vantage, the feminist reading is subject to the same critical question pressed against Syuhudi and Syahrur, and against the classical reading itself: from which horizon does it read, and is that horizon tested against *die Sache selbst* or imposed upon it? Where the reading elevates a contemporary principle of gender justice to the status of a hermeneutical master-key that overrides the text's own signification, it risks the Hineininterpretation diagnosed below. This is the line Mudin et al. (2021) take against Wadud's reading of the leadership verse, which the present article extends from Qur'anic exegesis to the hadith of Abu Bakrah. The point is not to dismiss the moral seriousness of

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<sup>39</sup> M Alwi Khoiri, "Rekonseptualisasi ijtihad Muhammad (Telaah hermeneutis pemikiran Syahrur tentang as-sunnah)," *Universum: Jurnal Studi Islam* 16, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>40</sup> Umi Nadhiroh, Abu Muslim, and H M Jannah, "Understanding Plurality of Hadith in Jonathan A. C. Brown Thought: Challenges in the Globalization Era," *Waraqat: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 10, no. 1 (2025): 118–34, <https://doi.org/10.51590/waraqat.v10i1.1006>.

<sup>41</sup> Muhammad Wahid Syafi, "Sunnah dalam pandangan Muhammad Syahrur dan fungsinya dalam menafsirkan al-Qur'an: Studi analisis tentang poligami," *Jurnal Manthiq* 5, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.29300/mtq.v5i2.4388>.

<sup>42</sup> Muhammad Najmil Husna, "Kritik matan hadis Muhammad Syahrur," *Iktibar: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan* 3, no. 2 (2016): 113–35.

<sup>43</sup> Arsal, Busyro, and Imran, "Kepemimpinan perempuan: Penerapan metode tafsir hermeneutika feminisme Amina Wadud."

the feminist concern—which the constructive synthesis addresses by affirming women's leadership across most public domains—but to subject its hermeneutical procedure to the same standard applied to every other reading.

### **A Gadamerian Critical Review of the Readings**

This section is the argumentative core of the article. Having mapped the positions of Syuhudi and Syahrur, we now place both before Gadamer's critical framework to test the hermeneutical and epistemological consistency of each.

#### ***A Critique of Syahrur's Reading***

Syahrur's reading presents three serious hermeneutical problems. First, the linguistic foundation of anti-synonymity that serves as the pillar of his methodology is not, in fact, fully supported by the classical Arabic linguistic tradition. Ibn Faris, in *al-Sahibi fi Fiqh al-Lughah*, and al-Thaalibi, in *Fiqh al-Lughah*, explicitly acknowledge the existence of *al-taraduf* (synonymity) in Arabic, albeit with certain qualifications. Modern scholars such as Subhi al-Salih and Ramadan Abd al-Tawwab likewise maintain synonymity as a genuine linguistic phenomenon.<sup>44</sup> This is not merely a technical problem; it weakens Syahrur's claim that every distinction of terms always indicates a substantive distinction of meaning. If synonymity exists even to a limited degree, then conceptual distinctions such as *al-sunnah al-rasuliyah* versus *al-sunnah al-nabawiyah*, or *al-risalah* versus *al-nubumwah*, lose their absolute linguistic support.

Second, and more fundamental in Gadamerian idiom, Syahrur performs what Gadamer calls a prejudice against prejudice. Syahrur declares himself free from the burden of classical exegesis, from the authority of the *muhaddithin*, and from the chain of hadith commentary that forms the text's *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Yet this claim to freedom is itself a prejudice, a modernist prejudice that the rationality of contemporary science and twentieth-century structuralist linguistics provides purer access to the text. This is precisely what Gadamer criticizes in Part II of *Wahrheit und Methode*: the Enlightenment claims to free thought from prejudice, but at the same time conceals its own prejudice, a prejudice against tradition, a prejudice for the autonomous subject, a prejudice that mathematical-empirical rationality provides the benchmark of truth.<sup>45</sup> Syahrur is not a more objective reader; he is a reader whose horizon is closed to the horizon of the hadith and its commentarial tradition.

Third, the category of *al-sunnah al-nabawiyah* as a product of the Prophet's historical *ijtihad* contains a serious performative contradiction. Syahrur uses this category to sort which hadiths are binding and which are not, but the very process of sorting requires a stable criterion. On what basis does Syahrur decide that the explanation of how to perform the prayer belongs to *al-sunnah al-rasuliyah*? In contrast, does the hadith on political strategy belong to *al-sunnah al-nabawiyah*? Syahrur answers that the former relates to *ibadah mahdah* and the hudud verses. At the same time, the latter does not presuppose that the categories of "*ibadah mahdah*" and "*hudud*" are objectively available. But these categories are themselves

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<sup>44</sup> On the acknowledgment of *al-taraduf* in the classical Arabic tradition, see Ibn Faris, *al-Sahibi fi Fiqh al-Lughah*; al-Tha'alibi, *Fiqh al-Lughah wa Sirr al-'Arabiyya*; Subhi al-Salih, *Dirasat fi Fiqh al-Lughah*; and Ramadan 'Abd al-Tawwab, *Fusul fi Fiqh al-'Arabiyya*.

<sup>45</sup> Anshori, "Sunnah dan kedudukan Muhammad dalam pandangan Muhammad Syahrur."

<sup>46</sup> Mudin, Fikri, and Shobirin, "Hermeneutika Hans-Georg Gadamer: Studi analisis kritis penafsiran Amina Wadud tentang ayat kepemimpinan."

products of the very *Wirkungsgeschichte* from which Syahrur claims to free himself. The contradiction is that Syahrur depends on the tradition he rejects.<sup>47</sup>

### ***A Critique of Syuhudi's Reading***

Syuhudi's reading, although far more moderate than Syahrur's, is not free from similar hermeneutical problems, albeit to a different degree. First, the categorization of hadith into universal, temporal, and local is its most distinctive contribution, but it lacks operational criteria that can be tested. How is a hadith determined to belong to the "temporal" rather than the "universal" category? Syuhudi answers with a series of indicators (grammatical, historical, sociological, and philosophical). Still, when applied to the hadith of Abu Bakrah, these indicators ultimately depend on the reader's decision about which aspects are considered "essential" and which "accidental." A reader who regards the Persian context as accidental will read the hadith as universal; a reader who regards it as essential will read it as temporal. Without independent criteria, this classification risks becoming a rationalization of a decision that has in fact been made before the analysis begins.<sup>48</sup>

Second, in Gadamerian terms, Syuhudi ignores the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the commentarial tradition, which, in fact, understands this hadith as universally applicable. Not one of the classical commentators referenced in the preceding section, al-Khattabi, Ibn Hajar, al-Ayni, al-Mawardi, al-Shawkani, al-Sanani, understood this hadith as temporal-local in Syuhudi's sense. They all situate it as a general proof (*dalil umum*) of universal applicability, with internal distinction only as to scope (*wilayah uzma* versus other public roles). To ignore this consensus is not a purer reading; it is a reading that cuts itself off from the history of the text's effects. Gadamer calls this condition the "naivety of the neutral observer" (*Naivität des Betrachters*), a blindness to the historical condition that makes understanding possible.<sup>49</sup>

Third, Syuhudi's claim that the "universal principle of competence" is the core message of the hadith is a form of substitution of meaning. What Syuhudi does here is not the extraction (*Auslegung*) of meaning present in the text, but what the Gadamerian tradition calls *Hineininterpretation*: reading the horizon of modernity (which places competence above sex) into a text whose horizon is different. The hadith of Abu Bakrah, in the reading of the majority of the *muhaddithin*, does not speak of competence versus incompetence; it speaks of a structural prohibition against women's *wilayah uzma*, with a particular cause (*illah*) that is not reducible to competence. Syuhudi's substitution may be ethically attractive to the modern reader, but, hermeneutically, it is an imposition of horizons rather than a genuine fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*).

### ***A Reflexive Critique of the Classical Reading***

Intellectual honesty requires turning the same scalpel on the classical reading defended here. The classical reading is not a view from nowhere; it too operates from a horizon of prejudice. Its commentators worked within a pre-modern political imaginary in which supreme authority was undivided and personal, and within social structures that assigned the public sphere largely to men. A critic could therefore argue that the classical general signification is partly an artifact of that horizon rather than of the text alone. The Gadamerian response is

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<sup>47</sup> Ardiansyah Ardiansyah, "Konsep sunnah dalam perspektif Muhammad Syahrur: Suatu pembacaan baru dalam kritik hadis," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 33, no. 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v33i1.160>.

<sup>48</sup> Abdurahim and Sa'adah, "Telaah kritis pemikiran Muhammad Syuhudi Ismail: Perspektif pemahaman tekstual dan kontekstual hadis."

<sup>49</sup> Kurniawan, "Pengaplikasian teori hermeneutika Hans-Georg Gadamer terhadap hadis Nabi Muhammad."

not to deny this prejudice but to ask whether it is productive. Three features distinguish the classical reading's prejudice from the modernist one. First, it is tested against *die Sache selbst*: the commentators argue from the wording (*nakirah* in *siyaq nafi*), from an established *usuli* rule (*al-ibrah bi-umum al-lafz*), and from cross-textual harmonization, not from an a priori value imported from outside. Second, it is verified through independent chains: the convergence of al-Khattabi, al-Mawardi, Ibn Hajar, al-Ayni, al-Shawkani, and al-San'ani across schools and centuries is the mark of earned, not asserted, authority. Third, it remains internally self-correcting, preserving minority views (the Maliki acknowledgment of women's *qada*) and an internal distinction (*wilayah uzma* versus other roles) that keeps the reading open to new application. The claim of this article is therefore deliberately modest: not that the classical reading is prejudice-free, but that its prejudice is the productive kind Gadamer rehabilitates, whereas the modernist readings conceal their prejudice behind a claim of neutral rationality. This is a defeasible claim, open to revision by anyone who could show that the classical convergence rests on an unexamined extra-textual prejudice.

### ***A Constructive Synthesis: The Classical Position as the More Hermeneutical One***

Having shown the limits of both readings, we can formulate a more defensible alternative position, both hermeneutically (Gadamer) and in accordance with the *manhaj al-muhaddithin*. Three pillars constitute this position.

The first pillar is the uncompromising recognition of the authority of the sound hadith. The hadith of Abu Bakrah meets all the criteria of authenticity: the continuity of the chain (*ittisal al-sanad*), the integrity and precision of the narrators (*adalah* and *dabt*), and freedom from anomaly (*shudhudh*) and hidden defect (*illah*). It is narrated by al-Bukhari with two numbers (4425 and 7099) and corroborated by al-Tirmidhi and al-Albani. The rejection of this hadith, whether directly, as performed by some modernist readers, or indirectly, by categorizing it as the "Prophet's historical *ijtihad*," as in Syahrur, lacks sufficient basis in the *manhaj al-muhaddithin*.<sup>50</sup> In Gadamer's idiom, the authority of this hadith is an authority earned through centuries of scholars' rational verification, not a dogma imposed.

The second pillar is the affirmation of general signification (*dalalah umum*) based on the *usuli* rule. The terms *qawm* and *imra'ah* in this hadith are both indefinite (*nakirah*) within a context of negation (*siyaq nafi*) and are therefore general. The rule *al-ibrah bi-umum al-lafz la bi-khusus al-sabab* establishes that the hadith's connection with the case of Buran does not restrict the applicability of its wording. This means that Syuhudi's objection, which limits the hadith to the seventh-century Persian context, conflicts with an established *usuli* rule. This rule is not a dogma; it is a rational principle that can be defended on semantic and logical grounds.

The third pillar, and the most important for the contemporary debate, is the classical distinction between *al-wilayah al-uzma* and other public roles for women. As al-Sanani affirms in *al-Tabbir*, the prohibition in this hadith applies to *al-umur al-a'zam*—the major affairs of state—which include the caliphate (*kbilafah*), the *wizarah*, *qada* (in its general function), and general *imarah* (*imarah ammah*). This prohibition does not extend to other public roles for women. Women may still lead companies, manage endowments (*waqf*), lead professional organizations, teach, manage educational institutions, and hold public positions not classified as *wilayah ammah* in the classical sense. This is the position of the *jumhur* across schools, reaffirmed by contemporary authorities, including the Permanent Committee of Saudi

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<sup>50</sup> Eka Hafid and Mahmuddin Mahmuddin, "Criticism of Hadith Authenticity on Contemporary Islamic Thinkers," *Journal of Islam and Science* 9, no. 2 (2022): 119–26, <https://doi.org/10.24252/jis.v9i2.31696>.

Arabia (Lajnah Da'imah) and Ibn Baz; it safeguards the authority of the hadith while remaining responsive to modern realities.<sup>5152</sup>

In Gadamerian analysis, this position is, in fact, more consistent with the structure of a genuine fusion of horizons. It acknowledges the text's centuries-old commentarial tradition as a horizon that cannot be bypassed; at the same time, it engages the contemporary horizon through an internal distinction already provided by the tradition itself. This differs fundamentally from Syuhudi's reading, which replaces the text's horizon with the contemporary horizon (substitution), and from Syahrur's, which declares the text's horizon irrelevant (erasure). A genuine fusion of horizons, as Gadamer stresses, does not erase one horizon for the sake of the other; it brings them together in a dialogue that preserves the productive tension between them.<sup>53</sup>

At the practical-applicative level, this position carries implications more nuanced than they may at first appear. First, it does not turn a blind eye to the complexity of modern politics, which differs from the classical structure of the caliphate. The concept of *wilayah uzma* in the classical tradition refers to a supreme political authority that is undivided and uncontrolled by constitutional institutions, a concept not fully comparable to, for example, the office of the president in a constitutional democracy with separation of powers and checks and balances. A more refined reading may need to consider whether the head of government in a modern constitutional structure is functionally equivalent to *al-imamah al-kubra* in the classical sense, or closer to the limited leadership roles not classified as *wilayah uzma*. Second, this position continues to affirm women's capacity in other domains: economic, academic, organizational, and professional leadership as a sphere wholly untouched by the hadith of Abu Bakrah. This is what distinguishes the position of the *jumhur* from an understanding that restricts women comprehensively from the public sphere. This understanding is, in fact, inconsistent with many other texts and with the practice of Aisha, Umm Salamah, and other female Companions. This position, therefore, answers modern reality not by deconstructing the hadith but by re-reading the internal distinction already provided by the commentarial tradition itself, a reading that Gadamer calls genuine "application of the text to our situation" (*Anwendung*), not the replacement of the text with our situation.<sup>54</sup>

### ***The Modern Constitutional Head of State: Taking a Position***

The most pressing practical question—whether the head of government in a modern constitutional democracy is functionally equivalent to *al-imamah al-kubra* in the classical sense—should not be left unresolved. This article takes an explicit position: they are not equivalent, and the modern constitutional head of state falls closer to the limited leadership roles not classified as *wilayah uzma*. The reasoning has three steps. First, the classical *wilayah uzma* denotes a supreme, personal, and undivided authority, concentrating legislative,

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<sup>51</sup> See Fatawa al-Lajnah al-Da'imah lil-Buhuth al-'Ilmiyya wa al-Ifta' (Riyadh: Ri'asat Idarat al-Buhuth al-'Ilmiyya wa al-Ifta') on the general *wilayah*, and 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Baz, *Majmu' Fatawa wa Maqalat Mutanawwi'a*. For a contrasting reading treating the hadith as waqi'at 'ayn, cf. Dar al-Ifta' al-Misriyya, fatwa no. 16675.

<sup>52</sup> Tangngareng, "Kepemimpinan wanita dalam perspektif hadis Nabi SAW (Pemahaman makna tekstual dan kontekstual)."

<sup>53</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

<sup>54</sup> On the public and scholarly roles of female Companions, see al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'* (life of 'Aisha), and al-Zarkashi, *al-Ijaba li-Irad ma Istadrakathu 'Aisha 'ala al-Sahaba*; on Umm Salamah's counsel at al-Hudaybiyya, al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Kitab al-Shurut*; on al-Shifa' bint 'Abdillah and market supervision (*hisbah*), Ibn Hajar, *al-Isaba*.

executive, and judicial functions in a single office accountable to no constitutional institution. Second, the head of state in a constitutional democracy is, by design, none of these: authority is divided across branches, bounded by a constitution, and subject to checks and balances, periodic election, judicial review, and legislative oversight. Third, because the illah the classical jurists attached to the prohibition is bound up with the unchecked, supreme, and personal character of that authority, a modern constitutional office that structurally lacks those features is not the locus the hadith addresses.

This position is defeasible and open to counter-argument—most obviously the objection that a presidency still carries singular symbolic and command functions, such as supreme command of the armed forces. The honest reply is that this is a question of *tahqiq al-manat* (verifying the applicability of the ruling to the case), on which reasonable scholars may differ and which must be settled case by case against the specific constitutional design in question, rather than by either a blanket prohibition or a blanket permission. What the Gadamerian framework contributes is the discipline of resolving it through the tradition's own internal distinction (*Anwendung*) rather than by importing a modern principle that erases the distinction altogether.

## Conclusion

### Findings

This article has placed two contemporary paradigms of hadith hermeneutics, M. Syuhudi Ismail and Muhammad Syahrur, before the critical framework of Hans-Georg Gadamer through a case study of the hadith of Abu Bakrah on the prohibition of female leadership. Three principal findings have been formulated. First, Syahrur performs what Gadamer calls a prejudice against prejudice, a modernist dogmatism that conceals its own prejudice behind claims of objective rationality and linguistics. His category of *al-sunnah al-nabawiyah*, when applied to the hadith of Abu Bakrah, contains a performative contradiction because it depends on the very tradition from which he claims to free himself. Second, Syuhudi's temporal-local classification, although far more moderate, lacks operational criteria to distinguish it from imposing a contemporary horizon on the text. The substitution of the hadith's core meaning with a "universal principle of competence" is *Hineininterpretation* rather than a legitimate extraction of meaning. Third, a more defensible alternative position, both Gadamerian and in accordance with the *manhaj al-muhaddithin*, preserves the authority of the sound hadith, affirms its general signification based on the *usuli* rule, and draws on the classical distinction between *al-wilayah al-uzma*, which is prohibited to women, and other public roles that remain open.

The methodological contribution of this article lies in demonstrating that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, when used selectively and instrumentally, can serve as a productive critical scalpel against modernist readers of hadith. Precisely because Gadamer is a philosopher who rehabilitates authority and tradition against the Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudice," his framework is well suited to testing the rational pretensions of modernist readings. This aligns with the strategy of Mudin et al. regarding Amina Wadud, but differs in the object of critique (hadith rather than a Qur'anic verse) and in the alternative construction offered.

### Limitations

Several limitations of the study should be noted. First, Syahrur's reading of the hadith of Abu Bakrah is reconstructive because Syahrur does not discuss this hadith explicitly. Although his framework is well-established enough to be applied, the possibility that Syahrur

himself would read this hadith with a different nuance cannot be eliminated. Second, this article focuses on a single hadith and does not explore how the same framework would apply to other thematic hadiths, such as those on the veil, polygamy, or qiwamah, which may serve as a basis for further research. Third, Gadamer's use here is selective and does not resolve the fundamental theological problem of the wholesale compatibility between Western philosophical hermeneutics and the ontology of Islamic texts. This question requires broader discussion at the level of *kalam* and the philosophy of religion.

### Implications and Recommendations

The recommendation for the future development of Indonesian hadith hermeneutics is to return to the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the commentarial tradition as the medium of understanding, rather than treating it as a burden to be surpassed. The commentarial tradition is not a cage; it is authority that is earned, which in fact makes understanding the hadith possible. A valid contextual reading does not replace the horizon of the text with the horizon of the reader, but one that brings the two together in a productive dialogue, a fusion of horizons in the strict Gadamerian sense. As a methodological recommendation rather than a normative-theological verdict, this study suggests that contextual readings of hadith are strengthened when they are calibrated against the framework of the *manhaj al-muhaddithin*; conversely, the classical framework must not be preserved as a closed dogma impervious to reality, but as a living tradition that opens space for new application (*Anwendung*) without sacrificing its authority. Further studies exploring other thematic gender hadiths, such as the veil, polygamy, qiwamah, and testimony, through the same Gadamerian framework could enrich the map of contemporary Indonesian hadith hermeneutics. Likewise, critical dialogue with other modernist readers such as Khaled Abou El Fadl, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd could broaden this hermeneutical field of discussion. What matters is not to reject modernity, but to place it in its proper position: as the horizon of the reader that must dialogue with, rather than replace, the horizon of the text and its tradition.

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