



Pressed to the Narrowest Path: A Source-Critical and Contextual Reading of the Hadith on Greeting Jews and Christians as a Counter-Narrative to Extremism

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Abstract: This article examines a hadith narrated by Muslim that forbids initiating greetings to Jews and Christians and orders pressing them to the narrowest part of the road, a text that extremist groups in Indonesia have mobilized to legitimize hostility toward non-Muslims. The study employs a qualitative library method, treats al-Kutub al-Tis'ah as its primary corpus, and adopts Yusuf al-Qaradhawi's method of understanding the Sunnah as its interpretive frame. Bringing classical takhrij into dialogue with the source-critical isnad-cum-matn approach, the analysis demonstrates that all transmission lines revolve around Suhayl b. Abī Shālih as the common link. The four corroborating students and the distribution of textual variants render the tradition reliably datable to Suhayl and insulate it from the forgery thesis associated with Juynboll's common-link theory. The hadith arose within a martial setting against treaty-breaking Jewish groups in post-Khaybar Medina, and this occasion is what converts the ruling from a general norm into a situational provision. In peacetime, kindness and equity toward Jews and Christians remain commanded, consistent with Q 60:8. The contextual reading offered here functions as a direct counter-narrative to literalist extremist interpretation, and it models how traditional fiqh al-hadīth and Western source criticism can jointly disarm a weaponized text.

Keywords: *asbāb al-wurūd*; extremism; hadith; isnad-cum-matn analysis; al-Qaradhawi; greeting.

Abstrak: Artikel ini mengkaji hadis riwayat Muslim yang melarang memulai salam kepada Yahudi dan Nasrani serta memerintahkan mendesak mereka ke jalan sempit, sebuah teks yang dimobilisasi kelompok ekstrem di Indonesia untuk melegitimasi permusuhan terhadap non-Muslim. Penelitian kualitatif berbasis kepastakaan ini menempatkan al-Kutub al-Tis'ah sebagai korpus primer dan metode pemahaman Sunnah Yusuf al-Qaradhawi sebagai kerangka tafsir. Dengan mempertemukan takhrij klasik dan pendekatan kritis-sumber isnad-cum-matan, analisis menunjukkan bahwa seluruh jalur periwayatan berporos pada Suhail bin Abī Shālih sebagai common link. Empat penguat dan sebaran variasi redaksi menjadikan riwayat ini dapat ditanggalkan secara meyakinkan kepada Suhail dan terlindung dari

tesis pemalsuan yang dilekatkan pada teori common link Juynboll. Hadis ini muncul dalam latar peperangan terhadap kelompok Yahudi pelanggar perjanjian di Madinah pasca-Khaibar, dan latar inilah yang mengubah hukum teks dari norma umum menjadi ketentuan situasional. Dalam kondisi damai, berbuat baik dan adil kepada Yahudi dan Nasrani tetap diperintahkan sejalan dengan QS. al-Mumtahanah ayat 8. Pembacaan kontekstual ini berfungsi sebagai kontra-narasi langsung terhadap tafsir ekstremis literal.

Kata kunci: *asbāb al-wurūd*; ekstremisme; hadis; analisis isnad-cum-matan; al-Qaradhawi; salam.

1. Introduction

Religiously framed radicalism remains one of the most corrosive challenges to plural societies, and Indonesia offers a sobering case. Acts of persecution against fellow citizens, committed in the name of religion, recur in the public sphere and erode the fragile fabric of interreligious coexistence. Extremist actors do not operate without textual cover. They anchor their narratives of enmity in scripture, and the Prophetic hadith furnishes an especially potent reservoir because its imperative form lends itself to literal extraction once severed from history, society, and the higher objectives of the law (*maqāshid al-sharī'ah*).

One tradition has proven particularly amenable to such extraction. Narrated by Muslim from Abū Hurayrah, it forbids Muslims to initiate the greeting of peace toward Jews and Christians and instructs them, upon meeting such persons on a road, to press them to its narrowest part (Ibn al-Hajjāj, 2003, no. 2167; the same report appears as no. 4030 in the digital numbering of the Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah edition). Read literally and ahistorically, the text appears to license a structural hostility toward entire religious communities irrespective of their actual conduct toward Muslims. The interpretive stakes are therefore practical and not merely philological, since the reading one adopts feeds directly into the moral economy of either coexistence or aggression.

The mechanism of this weaponization is social as much as textual. Short imperative reports travel easily through sermons and digital da'wah, shorn of the commentarial scaffolding that once disciplined their reading, and they reach audiences with neither the training nor the inclination to recover their

conditions. Arromadloni (2021) has shown how movements from the Muslim Brotherhood to more militant formations rebuild the meaning of jihad and loyalty traditions by severing them from the circumstances of their utterance. A tradition that pairs a refusal of greeting with a command of physical domination suits this circuit well, since it converts a wartime instruction into a portable rule of daily contempt. The labor of restoring its conditions is therefore a form of public scholarship, and it is in that register that the present study intends its intervention.

This article advances a single thesis. A method that triangulates source-critical examination of transmission, lexical and variant analysis of the text, and reconstruction of the occasion of utterance, all organized through al-Qaradhawi's hermeneutic, shows that the tradition is reliably transmissible yet bound to a condition of war, and that this binding yields a robust counter-narrative to its extremist deployment. The argument unfolds in three contributions.

The first contribution is methodology. Indonesian scholarship on hadith and radicalism has affirmed the authenticity of enmity traditions and called for contextualization, while it has rarely engaged the source-critical apparatus through which Western Islamicists adjudicate authenticity. This study brings the *isnad-cum-matn* analysis associated with Motzki, Schoeler, and Görke into conversation with the classical *takhrij* of the *muhaddithūn*, applied to a tradition whose *isnad* structure (a single common link feeding several students) is precisely the configuration that Juynboll treated with suspicion (Juynboll, 1983; Motzki, 2005). The second contribution is exegetical. Prior contextual readings of this hadith have neglected the collation of textual variants (*ikhṭilaf al-alfāz*) and an authoritative reconstruction of the occasion of utterance (*asbāb al-wurūd*), both of which this study recovers. The third contribution is public and ethical, situating the result within Indonesia's counter-extremism discourse and demonstrating how a *wasatiyyah* hermeneutic disarms a weaponized text.

The originality of the study lies in this convergence. No prior treatment of the tradition has read its chain through the *isnad-cum-matn* method, collated its variant wordings as evidence for dating, and reconstructed its occasion under one hermeneutic, and none has drawn the counter-extremist consequence from that combined apparatus. The novelty is procedural and

consequential at once, since the method is new for this text and the ethical yield issues from the method instead of preceding it.

The discussion proceeds as follows. It first maps the state of the field across Indonesian and international scholarship. It then states the method and presents the text, its transmission bundle, and the authenticity question. It analyzes the textual variants and the literal interpretive tradition that extremists co-opt. It reconstructs the contextual reading through al-Qaradhawi's eight steps. It closes by drawing out the counter-narrative implications, the limitations of the inquiry, and avenues for further research.

Two bodies of scholarship bear on this inquiry, and they have largely developed in isolation from each other. The first is Indonesian research on the misuse of hadith in extremist narratives. The second is the international debate over the authenticity and dating of Prophetic traditions.

Within the Indonesian literature, four studies are representative. Nasruloh (2016) examined the authenticity of the chains and the contextuality of the texts of enmity traditions against non-Muslims and concluded that such reports are sound and admissible while their legal scope is confined to non-Muslims who wage war against the community. Farhanah (2021) proposed a contextual reinterpretation of the war-command hadith and located its addressee among those who fight and oppress believers. Arromadloni (2021) mapped how radical movements construct their understanding of traditions on the caliphate, jihad, and the end times by detaching texts from their conditions of utterance. Mohtarom, Hadi, and Ma'ruf (2023) identified the Prophet's preventive and corrective responses to the phenomenon of radicalism.

These four studies share two moves. They affirm the transmitted soundness of enmity traditions, and they advocate a generic contextualization. Their analytic horizon stops at broad thematic clusters such as enmity, war, and jihad, and it does not descend to a single contested text that fuses a prohibition of greeting with a command to press on the road. Their notion of authenticity, moreover, remains internal to the tradition, since it rests on the verdicts of the classical critics without testing those verdicts against the source-critical methods that have reshaped the field internationally. The gap this study occupies is therefore not a difference of objects. It is the absence of an integrated procedure that re-examines the chain independently, collates the

textual variants, and reconstructs the occasion of utterance, all funneled through a single replicable hermeneutic.

These studies belong to a wider Indonesian project of articulating a moderate Islam against the appeal of militancy, a project in which the language of *wasatiyyah* has become the dominant idiom of state and civil-society response. The project has been strong on normative advocacy and thinner on the granular textual work that would deny extremists their proof-texts on their own ground. A counter-narrative that asserts moderation without dismantling the specific reading a militant cites leaves the proof-text standing. The present study addresses that lacuna by contesting one such text at the level of transmission, wording, and occasion, which is the level at which the militant claim is made.

The international debate supplies the missing apparatus. Schacht (1950) argued that legal traditions projected onto the Prophet were largely the product of later juristic activity, and that *isnads* grew backward over time. Juynboll (1983, 2007) refined the skeptical program through the analytics of the common link and the single strand. In his account, the common link is the transmitter at whom a tradition's lines of diffusion converge, and he frequently treated that figure as the person who first put the report into circulation, with attributions above the common link, often surviving only as a single strand, regarded as historically insecure. Motzki (2002, 2005) mounted the principal rehabilitation. By correlating the *isnad* bundle with the wording of the *matn* across its branches, the *isnad-cum-matn* analysis tests whether a common link genuinely received and transmitted a report or fabricated it, and in a series of cases it has pushed reliable dating back to the common link and sometimes earlier. Schoeler and Görke extended the method to *sira* and legal-historical material and tempered its claims with explicit caution about what the evidence can and cannot establish (Görke, 2000; Görke & Schoeler, 2008).

Two scholarly factions thus face each other. The skeptical school, descending from Schacht through Juynboll, reads the common-link structure as a sign of late origination. The sanguine school of Motzki, Schoeler, and Görke reads the same structure, when corroborated by *matn* correlation, as evidence of genuine early transmission. Anglophone surveys by Brown (2007, 2009) and the *rijaʿ*-focused work of Lucas (2004) have since translated this debate for a wider readership and clarified what classical hadith criticism did

and did not claim. The tradition under study here exhibits exactly the structure over which the two factions divide, and that coincidence is the analytic opportunity this article exploits.

The middle ground of the debate is the most instructive for the present case. Cook (1981) argued that isnads could be deliberately spread, with a tradition's ascription multiplied across several students to manufacture the appearance of corroboration, so that a bundle resembling genuine diffusion might be an artifact of later competition over religious authority. Calder (1993) pressed a comparably late dating of the formative legal texts. The force of these objections is that the bare geometry of a bundle cannot settle its history, since a fabricated spread and a genuine diffusion can look alike on a diagram. Berg (2000) surveyed the resulting impasse and showed that the field had reached a methodological crux over this very question. The *isnad-cum-matn* procedure was devised to break the impasse, and the test it applies is the one this article applies to the bundle below.

A third conversation, internal to modern Muslim scholarship, supplies the hermeneutic this study operationalizes. The mid-twentieth century turn toward contextual and purposive reading of the Sunnah, advanced by Muhammad al-Ghazālī in his polemic on the place of fiqh in hadith reception (al-Ghazālī, 1989) and systematized in al-Qaradhawi's eight criteria, answered the same literalism that fuels extremist exegesis. Critics within the discipline charged this turn with subordinating transmitted texts to reason and to consideration of benefit, and that charge marks the fault line between a maqāshidī reading and a strictly transmission-bound one. Suryadi (2008) mapped the methods of al-Ghazālī and al-Qaradhawi for the Indonesian academy and drew out their shared insistence on occasion and purpose. This study adopts al-Qaradhawi's framework as its instrument while holding it accountable to the source-critical findings, so that the contextual reading rests on the transmission evidence and does not float free of it.

This is a qualitative study based on library research. Its primary corpus is Sahīh Muslim together with the remaining collections of al-Kutub al-Tis'ah, and its interpretive frame is al-Qaradhawi's *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma'a al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyah* (al-Qaradhawi, 1990). Data analysis proceeds through six linked stages.

The first stage is takhrij. A preliminary search through the Ensiklopedi Hadits application and the hadits.tazkia.ac.id portal located the reports, and the results were then cross-validated against authoritative print references, namely the concordance numbering of Wensinck's al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li Alfāzh al-Hadīth al-Nabawī and the atraf compilation Tuhfat al-Ashrāf bi Ma'rifat al-Athrāf of al-Mizzī (Wensinck, 1969; al-Mizzī, 1983). This triangulation closes the risk of *tashif*, the digital corruption of text that attends reliance on search engines without recourse to the manuscript tradition. The second stage maps the chains through *i'tibār al-thuruq* to locate the pivot of transmission (*madār*) and any corroboration in the form of *mutāba'āt* and *shawāhid*. This classical operation coincides, in its logic, with the construction of an isnad bundle in the source-critical method, and the study reads the two together.

The reading of the bundle follows explicit criteria. A transmitter counts as a partial common link when two or more independent students transmit from him and his own onward transmission is itself attested through more than one line. Corroboration is judged genuine when the partial common links preserve systematic differences in wording that trace to the shared source, and it is judged suspect when their wordings are uniform in a manner that a single late source would predict. The pivot of the bundle is the lowest transmitter at whom the independent lines converge. These criteria let the analysis separate a true diffusion from an artificially spread chain, and they render the verdict reproducible instead of impressionistic.

The third stage tests for hidden defects (*'illah*), following Ibn al-Salāh's principle that the apparent soundness of a chain does not guarantee its freedom from irregularity (*shudhūdh*) or defect (Ibn al-Salāh, 1986). The fourth stage collates the textual variants (ikhtilaf al-alfāzh) across the transmitters, in keeping with Ibn Qutaybah's insistence in *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth* that all wordings be gathered before interpretation begins (Ibn Qutaybah, 1999). The fifth stage reconstructs the occasion of utterance (*asbāb al-wurūd*) on al-Suyūṭī's premise that the sense of a saying cannot be fixed without knowledge of the micro-context in which it was spoken (al-Suyūṭī, 1984). The sixth stage analyzes the content through al-Qaradhawi's eight steps. Throughout, classical *fiqh al-hadīth* supplies the governing frame and the modern socio-historical apparatus serves as a complement to it.

This design carries a methodological commitment worth stating plainly. The study does not arbitrate the philosophical quarrel between the skeptical and sanguine schools in the abstract. It reads their tools together on one bundle and reports where they converge and where they part. The library method imposes a limit, since it works from the surviving textual record and cannot recover oral circulation that left no trace. The reflexive choice to hold a *maqāshidī* hermeneutic accountable to transmission evidence guards against the familiar hazard of contextual reading, in which a desired ethical outcome quietly dictates the historical reconstruction. The order of operations matters for that reason, since the transmission and the occasion are settled before the ethical conclusion is drawn.

A note on conventions is in order. Transliteration follows a consistent scheme for Arabic terms and names, and diacritics are retained for the technical vocabulary on which the argument turns. Citations of the canonical collections give the print numbering as the primary reference and the digital index as a secondary aid, while editions of the classical works are identified by editor and publisher so that a reader can retrace each citation to a fixed text. These conventions are not cosmetic, since the argument rests at several points on the exact wording of a report, and a floating citation would leave that wording unverifiable.

2. Results and Discussion

The Hadith and Its Transmission

The object of study is the report of Muslim received from Abū Hurayrah:

حَدَّثَنَا قُتَيْبَةُ بْنُ سَعِيدٍ حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الْعَزِيزِ يَعْنِي الدَّرَاوَرْدِيَّ عَنْ سُهَيْلٍ عَنْ أَبِيهِ عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ لَا تَبْدُءُوا الْيَهُودَ وَلَا النَّصَارَى بِالسَّلَامِ فَإِذَا لَقِيتُمْ أَحَدَهُمْ فِي طَرِيقٍ فَاضْطَرُّوهُ إِلَى أَضْيَقِهِ وَحَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ الْمُثَنَّى حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ جَعْفَرٍ حَدَّثَنَا شُعْبَةُ ح وَحَدَّثَنَا أَبُو بَكْرِ بْنُ أَبِي شَيْبَةَ وَأَبُو كُرَيْبٍ قَالَا حَدَّثَنَا وَكَيْعٌ عَنْ سُفْيَانَ ح وَحَدَّثَنِي زُهَيْرُ بْنُ حَرْبٍ حَدَّثَنَا جَرِيرٌ كُلُّهُمُ عَنْ سُهَيْلٍ يَهْدَا الْإِسْنَادَ وَفِي حَدِيثِ وَكَيْعٍ إِذَا لَقِيتُمْ الْيَهُودَ وَفِي حَدِيثِ ابْنِ جَعْفَرٍ عَنْ شُعْبَةَ قَالَ فِي أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَفِي حَدِيثِ جَرِيرٍ إِذَا لَقِيتُمُوهُمْ وَلَمْ يُسَمِّ أَحَدًا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

“Qutaybah b. Sa’īd related to us; ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, that is al-Darāwardī, related to us, from Suhayl, from his father, from Abū Hurayrah, that the Messenger of God said: Do not initiate the greeting to the Jews and the Christians. When you meet one of them on a road, press him to its narrowest part. ... In Wakī’r’s report the wording is ‘when you meet the Jews’; in Ibn Ja’far’s report from Shu’bah it is ‘concerning the People of the Book’; and in Jarīr’s report it is ‘when you meet them,’ naming none of the polytheists” (Ibn al-Hajjāj, 2003, no. 2167).

Takhrij and the Isnad Bundle

Tracing the term *fa-dththarrūhu* through the digital index and verifying it against the print numbering yields the distribution below. The quality column records the grading attached by each collector or conventionally assigned to the report.

Table 1. Takhrij Results and Transmission Lines

No.	Companion	Collector	Hadith no.	Grading
1	Abū Hurayrah	Muslim b. al-Hajjāj	2167 / 4030	Sahīh
2	Abū Hurayrah	Abū Dāwūd	5205 / 4529	Sahīh
3	Abū Hurayrah	al-Tirmidhī	2700 / 1528	Hasan sahīh
4	Abū Hurayrah	Ahmad b. Hanbal	7251	Sahīh
5	Abū Hurayrah	Ahmad b. Hanbal	7299	Sahīh
6	Abū Hurayrah	Ahmad b. Hanbal	8205	Sahīh
7	Abū Hurayrah	Ahmad b. Hanbal	9349	Sahīh
8	Abū Hurayrah	Ahmad b. Hanbal	9539	Sahīh

Note. The figure before the slash follows the print numbering of ‘Abd al-Bāqī and al-Mizzī; the figure after it follows the digital index. The dual numbering requires verification of each report against the printed text.

The dual numbering is not a clerical curiosity. The ‘Abd al-Bāqī numeration of Sahīh Muslim, anchored to a fixed print edition, is the lingua

franca of international scholarship, while the digital indices that proliferate in Indonesian pedagogy follow the Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah sequence. Citing a report by its digital number alone obstructs verification and invites the silent substitution of one wording for another. Re-anchoring each report to the concordance of Wensinck and the atraf of al-Mizzī restores the chain of custody between the digital citation and the manuscript tradition.

The Common Link and the Authenticity Question

Mapping the chains (*syajarat al-sanad*) reveals a convergent structure. Every line originates with a single Companion, Abū Hurayrah, descends through Abū Shālih Dhakwān al-Sammān, and converges on Suhayl b. Abī Shālih. Suhayl occupies the pivot (*madār*) of the entire bundle. From Suhayl the report branches to four students who function as full parallel corroborations (*mutāba’āt tāmmah*), namely ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Darāwardi on Muslim’s line, Sufyān al-Thawrī through Wakī’, Shu’bah through Muhammad b. Ja’far, and Jarīr b. ‘Abd al-Hamīd through Zuhayr b. Harb.

In the vocabulary of the source-critical method, Suhayl is the common link and the four students are partial common links, while the strand connecting Suhayl upward through Abū Shālih to Abū Hurayrah is a single strand. This is the configuration Juynboll read against the grain. On his analysis the proliferation of a tradition from one transmitter, combined with a single strand above him, warrants dating the report no earlier than that transmitter and treating the Prophetic attribution as insecure (Juynboll, 1983, 2007). Applied here, the skeptical verdict would date the tradition to Suhayl, who died around 138 AH in Medina, and would withhold confidence in its ascent to Abū Hurayrah and the Prophet.

The identity of the Companion sharpens the suspicion. Abū Hurayrah, the most prolific narrator in the canon, drew scrutiny in the skeptical literature, where the sheer volume of his transmission was read as a symptom of later attribution (Juynboll, 1983). A bundle resting on him alone sits at the center of the controversy and not at its margin, which raises the evidentiary bar that the correlation of chain and text must be clear.

The *isnad-cum-matn* analysis subjects that verdict to a test the skeptical method does not perform. Muslim preserves systematic differences in wording across the partial common links. Wakī’, transmitting al-Thawrī’s version, gives “when you meet the Jews.” Shu’bah, through Ibn Ja’far, gives “concerning the

People of the Book.” Jarīr gives the bare pronoun “when you meet them.” These are not random scribal slips, since they cluster by branch and persist as the signature of each student’s line. A tradition forged wholesale and diffused late would tend to circulate in a uniform wording. The branch-specific lexical divergence here fits the profile of genuine transmission from a shared teacher whose students rendered his teaching in slightly different terms (Motzki, 2005; Görke & Schoeler, 2008). The correlation of bundle and text therefore supports dating the tradition securely to Suhayl in early second-century Medina, and it removes the principal ground for the forgery thesis.

Two qualifications preserve the honesty of the result. The *isnad-cum-matn* method establishes the existence and wording of a tradition at the level of the common link, and it cannot by itself prove utterance by the Prophet, a limit that its own practitioners stress (Görke, 2000). The single strand above Suhayl remains the point at which the skeptic withholds assent, and nothing in the *matn* correlation forecloses that reservation. The classical assessment runs parallel to the source-critical one without collapsing into it. Suhayl was graded *sadūq*, with some critics noting a decline in his memory in later life, and his reports were elevated to soundness when corroborated, which is exactly the corroboration the four *mutāba’āt* supply, and which led Muslim to admit his narration (Lucas, 2004; al-Mizzī, 1983).

The inference at issue itself has been contested. Juynboll’s treatment of the common link as originator rests on an argument from silence, since the absence of corroborating chains in the surviving collections need not mean that such transmission never occurred (Motzki, 2005). The *isnad-cum-matn* procedure meets the silence with positive evidence drawn from the wording of the text, and that is why its verdict on a bundle of this shape carries more weight than a tally of strands. The shape of an *isnad* underdetermines its history, and only the joint reading of chain and text can adjudicate between fabrication and transmission.

The same evidence answers the stronger objection that a bundle may be spread to feign corroboration. A spread chain copies one wording onto several fabricated lines, so it predicts uniformity of text across the branches. The bundle here predicts the opposite and delivers it, since Wakī’, Shu’bah, and Jarīr each carry a distinct rendering that survives as the mark of a separate line of teaching. Manufactured corroboration does not generate branch-specific

lexical signatures of this kind. The matn variation that a skeptic might first read as instability shows itself, on closer view, as the fingerprint of authentic plural transmission from Suhayl.

Following Ibn al-Salāh, an independent comparison of the lines (*i'tibār al-thuruq*) was carried out to probe for concealed defect. No contradiction by a more reliable transmitter (*mukhālafat al-awthaq*) emerged to signal irregularity (*shudhūdh*), and no detractive defect (*'illah qādihah*) appeared in chain or text. The decisive point for the argument that follows is independent of where one stands between the two factions. Whether the tradition is dated to Suhayl with the skeptics or carried back to the Prophet with the traditionists, its meaning is governed by the martial occasion reconstructed below, and the ethical conclusion holds on either dating.

The Matn: Variant Wordings and the Lexicon of Compulsion

Ibn Qutaybah held that an interpreter must gather every recorded wording before venturing a reading, since the neglect of one variant can distort the whole (Ibn Qutaybah, 1999). The three variants Muslim himself records repay that discipline. The wording “the Jews” names a specific community. The wording “the People of the Book” widens the referent to include Christians and any scriptuary. The bare pronoun “them” detaches the command from any named group and ties it to the party encountered. The variation does not merely ornament the report. It signals that the object of the command was fixed by the situation of meeting and not by an immutable category of creed.

The decisive lexeme is *fa-dththarrūhu ilā adyaqih*. The root of *idthtirār* carries the sense of compulsion and constraint, an action native to confrontation and incongruous with the ordinary traffic of a peaceful street. Read against the variant that generalizes to “the People of the Book” and the variant that points only to “them,” the verb describes conduct toward an encountered adversary rather than a posture toward the adherents of two religions as such. The collation thus strengthens the situational reading from within the text, before any external history is brought to bear.

A second lexical observation reinforces the point. The prohibition governs the verb *bada'a*, to initiate, and not the act of response. The commentarial tradition drew the juristic consequence that a Muslim greeted first by a non-Muslim may answer, and al-Nawawī records the permissibility of a measured reply (al-Nawawī, 2008). The text therefore regulates the opening gesture in a

charged encounter and leaves reciprocity intact. A command so narrowly framed around initiation in a setting of hostility resists the extremist reading that would convert it into a blanket refusal of civility, since the tradition itself preserves the channel of response.

The other collections reinforce the same picture. Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī transmit the report through the Suhayl pivot, and Ahmad records several of its lines, so the bundle outside Muslim introduces neither a rival Companion nor a divergent core wording. The stability of the core, set beside the variation at the margins, is the distribution that the *isnad-cum-matn* method treats as a signature of genuine transmission. The lexical field of the command confirms its martial register, since the imagery of forcing an adversary into a constricted path belongs to the vocabulary of confrontation and not to the etiquette of the marketplace.

A frequent move in literalist argument invokes a tension between this prohibition and the Prophet's command to spread the greeting universally. That command belongs to al-Bukhārī and not to the same collection, and the apparent conflict is one of two sound texts rather than of variant readings within one. Its resolution belongs to the harmonization discussed under al-Qaradhawī's second and third steps below.

The Literalist Inheritance and Its Extremist Uptake

The classical commentators read the report within a juristic frame of communal hierarchy. Al-Nawawī understood the command to press as a refusal to let the dhimmī walk along the main part of the road when Muslims used it, while he permitted yielding space to them out of mercy (al-Nawawī, 2008). Al-Shan'ānī held that to honor Jews and Christians by initiating the greeting is forbidden and that one who is greeted first need only answer "and upon you" (al-Shan'ānī, 2014). Al-Qurthubī dissented from the harsher constructions and judged the deliberate crowding of non-Muslims into rubble an unwarranted harm that the law forbids, while al-Manāwī defended the constriction as a corollary of the prohibition on honoring unbelief, which the Shāfi'ī school deemed unlawful (al-Manāwī, 1972).

The classical disagreement is itself instructive. Al-Qurthubī's objection that gratuitous harassment is forbidden invokes a principle, the prohibition of harm without cause, that the tradition shares and that constrains the harsher readings from within. The commentators did not hand down one literal

mandate. They handed down a contested field in which the duty to avoid wrongdoing toward the protected non-Muslim coexisted with the refusal to ritually honor unbelief. Extremist appropriation flattens this field into a single imperative, and the flattening is the very error that historical reading corrects.

The record of Muslim governance complicates the literal reading further. The covenants extended to protected non-Muslim communities, from the compact of Medina to the later *dhimma* agreements, institutionalized a settled coexistence in which the daily humiliation that the literal reading projects would have been unintelligible. A wartime instruction about a chance encounter on a road cannot bear the weight of a standing social order that the sources themselves describe in opposite terms. Literal reading survives only by ignoring the practice that surrounds the text, and the recovery of that practice is part of the historical correction the argument performs.

In the contemporary period the literal reading is represented in print by Ibn al-‘Uthaymīn’s commentary on Riyādh al-Shālihīn. He tied the command to a condition of Muslim strength and dominance, and he held that a believer should walk as usual so that those met must pass single file, since yielding the road would amount to honoring and elevating them (Ibn al-‘Uthaymīn, 2004). Citing this printed commentary directly replaces the reliance on popular da’wah websites that cannot bear the evidentiary weight a scholarly argument requires.

This inheritance furnishes extremist discourse with its raw material. Stripped of the strength-condition that even Ibn al-‘Uthaymīn imposed, and stripped of the martial occasion recovered below, the imperative becomes a timeless license for domination. The literal reading is not, on its own terms, an extremist reading, and the commentators hedged it with conditions. The extremist operation consists in removing those conditions and projecting the command onto every encounter with a non-Muslim. The corrective therefore lies in restoring precisely the conditions the tradition itself supplies.

Contextual Reinterpretation through al-Qaradhawi’s Method

Al-Qaradhawi prescribes eight operations for understanding a hadith, namely reading it in light of the Qur’an, gathering thematically related reports, weighing contradictory ones, grasping the report against its background and purpose, distinguishing variable means from fixed ends, distinguishing the literal from the figurative, distinguishing the unseen from the observable, and

ascertaining the meaning of words (al-Qaradhawi, 1990). The first operation places the report beside Q 60:8:

لَا يَنْهَيْكُمْ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِّنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ
وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ

“God does not forbid you from being kind and just toward those who have not fought you in religion nor driven you from your homes. Indeed, God loves the just” (Q 60:8).

Al-Thabarī read the verse as a standing permission to deal kindly and equitably with non-Muslims who neither fight nor expel the believers (al-Thabarī, 2000). Ibn Kathīr preserved the occasion of revelation, the visit of Qutaylah bint ‘Abd al-‘Uzzā to her daughter Asmā’ bint Abī Bakr bearing gifts, after which the verse permitted Asmā’ to maintain ties with her still-pagan mother (Ibn Kathīr, 1999). On the principle that sound hadith does not contradict the Qur’an, the Jews and Christians whom the report excludes from the greeting are those who fight and expel the believers on account of faith, and not the adherents of the two religions without qualification.

The second and third operations gather and weigh the related reports. Al-Bukhārī records from ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr that spreading the greeting to that one knows and those one does not know is among the best expressions of Islam:

حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ يُوسُفَ حَدَّثَنَا اللَّيْثُ قَالَ حَدَّثَنِي يَزِيدُ عَنْ أَبِي الْخَيْرِ عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ
عَمْرٍو أَنَّ رَجُلًا سَأَلَ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَيُّ الْإِسْلَامِ خَيْرٌ قَالَ تُطْعِمُ الطَّعَامَ وَتَقْرَأُ السَّلَامَ
عَلَى مَنْ عَرَفْتَ وَعَلَى مَنْ لَمْ تَعْرِفْ

“A man asked the Prophet, ‘Which Islam is best?’ He answered, ‘That you feed others and offer the greeting to those you know and those you do not know’” (al-Bukhārī, no. 5767).

Ahmad records from ‘Ā’ishah the Prophet’s measured response when a Jewish visitor twisted the greeting into a curse:

حَدَّثَنَا عَلِيُّ بْنُ عَاصِمٍ ، عَنْ حُصَيْنِ بْنِ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ ، عَنْ عُمَرَ بْنِ قَيْسٍ ، عَنْ
مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ الْأَشْعَثِ ، عَنْ عَائِشَةَ ، قَالَتْ : بَيْنَا أَنَا عِنْدَ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ ، إِذْ
اسْتَأْذَنَ رَجُلٌ مِنَ الْيَهُودِ ، فَأَذِنَ لَهُ ، فَقَالَ : السَّامُ عَلَيْكَ ، فَقَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ

وَعَلَيْكَ قَالَتْ : فَهَمَمْتُ أَنْ أَتَكَلَّمَ ، قَالَتْ : ثُمَّ دَخَلَ الثَّانِيَةَ ، فَقَالَ مِثْلَ ذَلِكَ ، فَقَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ : وَعَلَيْكَ قَالَتْ : ثُمَّ دَخَلَ الثَّلَاثَةَ ، فَقَالَ : السَّامُ عَلَيْكَ ، قَالَتْ : فَقُلْتُ : بَلِ السَّامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَغَضِبَ اللَّهُ إِخْوَانَ الْقِرْدَةِ وَالْحَنَازِيرِ ، أَتَحْيُونَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ بِمَا لَمْ يُحْيِهِ بِهِ اللَّهُ ؟ قَالَتْ : فَنَظَرَ إِلَيَّ ، فَقَالَ : مَهْ ، إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفُحْشَ وَلَا التَّفَحُّشَ ، قَالُوا قَوْلًا ، فَرَدَدْنَاهُ عَلَيْهِمْ ، فَلَمْ يَضُرْنَا شَيْءٌ ، وَلَزِمَهُمْ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ، إِنَّهُمْ لَا يَحْسُدُونَا عَلَى شَيْءٍ كَمَا يَحْسُدُونَا عَلَى يَوْمِ الْجُمُعَةِ الَّتِي هَدَانَا اللَّهُ لَهَا وَضَلُّوا عَنْهَا ، وَعَلَى الْقِبْلَةِ الَّتِي هَدَانَا اللَّهُ لَهَا وَضَلُّوا عَنْهَا ، وَعَلَى قَوْلِنَا خَلْفَ الْإِمَامِ : آمِينَ.

“Ā’ishah said: a Jew sought entry and said, ‘al-Sām ‘alayk’ (death upon you). The Prophet replied, ‘And upon you.’ ... He then admonished me, ‘God does not love coarseness or obscenity. They said something, and we returned it to them, and it did us no harm’” (Ibn Hanbal, 1997, no. 25029).

The supporting reports stand at the same level of soundness as the prohibition, so a preference by chain cannot be drawn between them. The resolution lies in harmonization (al-jam’u wa al-tawfīq). The prohibition of Muslim governs a particular condition of hostility, the universal greeting of al-Bukhārī governs the general case, and their point of contact is the disposition to act well toward all, with an exception for parties known to wage war and expulsion. The Prophet’s restrained “and upon you” to Ā’ishah’s visitor confirms that the tradition refuses disproportionate retaliation even under provocation.

The fourth and fifth operations recover the background and separate means from ends, and here the reconstruction of the occasion becomes decisive. Al-Suyūtī insisted that meaning cannot be secured without the micro-context of utterance (al-Suyūtī, 1984). The strongest indicator for this report appears in al-Bukhārī’s al-Adab al-Mufrad, where the Prophet, setting out for battle, instructed that the Jews are not greeted first (al-Bukhārī, 1989). In the posture of imminent war, the greeting of peace loses its occasion, and the command of the road becomes an assertion of dominance over a prospective enemy.

The chain itself disciplines reconstruction. Abū Hurayrah, the sole Companion in the bundle, embraced Islam in the phase after Khaybar around the seventh year of the Hijrah. The martial setting that frames his transmission therefore belongs to the later Medinan confrontations with treaty-breaking

Jewish groups, and not to the affair of Banū Qurayzah in the fifth year, which preceded his conversion. This chronological care forecloses the anachronism of pinning the occasion on an event the narrator could not have witnessed.

The display of strength and the intimidation of an adversary recur as a fixed end across the Prophet's war-related instructions, as in the counsel to dye graying hair so that an army appears young and formidable to the enemy (Ibn al-Hajjāj, 2003, no. 2102). The refusal to greet first and the command to press on the road belong to the variable means that serve that fixed end in conditions of war. Scholars including Ibn 'Abbās, al-Thabarī, Sufyān b. 'Uyaynah, Ibn Abī Shaybah, Mālik, and Abū Hanīfah did not forbid initiating the greeting to non-Muslims in conditions of peace (Hosen, 2016). The balance of socio-historical apparatus with classical *fiqh al-hadīth* keeps the reading anchored to its authoritative roots.

The distinction of means from ends carries a jurisprudential weight that the literal reading misses. A fixed end may be pursued through means that the passage of conditions renders obsolete or harmful, and a ruling tied to such a means lapses when the means no longer serves the end. The intimidation of an enemy on the march served the end of communal survival under arms. Transposed to a society at peace, the same gesture serves no such end and inflicts the gratuitous harm that al-Qurthubī already condemned. The contextual reading therefore follows a recognized principle of the law and does not improvise an escape from an awkward text.

The sixth through eighth operations, which separate the literal from the figurative, the unseen from the observable, and ascertain the sense of words, confirm the foregoing. The report is understood literally, with no indication directing it toward figurative sense. The lexical observation that salam denotes peace reinforces the martial setting, since a battlefield offers no peace to convey, which renders the greeting situationally void. The absence of the *basmalah* at the head of Sūrat al-Tawbah furnishes a structural analogue, since that chapter's martial register sits uneasily with the divine mercy the *basmalah* invokes.

A Counter-Narrative and Its Limits

The convergence of the three operations carries a public payoff. Extremist discourse depends on a text that appears to mandate hostility toward whole communities. The analysis dissolves that appearance at its source. The

transmission is reliably anchored to Suhayl and survives the skeptical challenge, so the extremist cannot be answered by denying the report. The variant wordings tie the command to the party encountered, and the occasion ties it to war, so the literalist projection onto every non-Muslim collapse under the tradition's own evidence. A *wasatiyyah* hermeneutic of the kind al-Qaradhawi modeled thus furnishes Indonesian counter-extremism with an argument internal to the sources, which is the only register in which the extremist can be met.

A dialectical objection deserves a direct answer. A reader persuaded by the skeptical school might grant the contextual reading yet deny that a tradition datable only to Suhayl binds the modern conscience at all. The reply concedes the premise and resists the conclusion. The ethical norm at issue does not rest on this single report. It rests on the Qur'anic command of equity in Q 60:8 and on the corroborating Prophetic material on universal greeting, for which the present hadith serves as a limiting case rather than a foundation. The contextual reading removes a counterfeit license for aggression, and it does so whether the report is the Prophet's word or an early Medinan teaching, because in either case its scope is martial and its general norm is benevolence.

A second objection runs from the opposite direction. A traditionalist might resist the source-critical idiom as alien to the discipline. The study's procedure answers that the operations of *i'tibār al-thuruq*, the search for *mutāba'āt* and *shawāhid*, and the detection of 'illah already perform, in classical terms, the work the *isnad-cum-matn* method formalizes. The two vocabularies converge on the same bundle and the same conclusion and reading them together strengthens rather than dilutes the traditional verdict.

The result speaks to a comparative question about scriptural reasoning. Communities that hold a closed canon face the recurring problem of texts whose plain sense, lifted out of time, offends the very ends the canon proclaims. The procedure modeled here, which authenticates a text and then binds its scope to its occasion, is a general technique for that problem and not a special pleading for an inconvenient report. Its discipline lies in refusing the extremist's literal projection and the apologist's denial alike, and in letting the sources mark the boundary of the ruling for themselves.

For Indonesian religious education the model has a practical shape. A curriculum that trains students to authenticate a contested report, to gather

its wordings, and to recover its occasion equips them to meet a militant proof-text with the tradition's own instruments. The *wasatiyyah* it produces is then an earned conclusion and not a slogan, since it issues from the same critical labor the militant claims to perform and performs poorly. The transferability of the procedure to the wider cluster of enmity and loyalty traditions is its chief contribution to the counter-narrative effort.

3. Conclusion

The hadith forbidding the initiation of greetings to Jews and Christians and commanding their constriction on the road is transmitted by Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, and Ahmad, all converging on Abū Hurayrah. An independent examination through *i'tibār al-thuruq*, read alongside the *isnad-cum-matn* method, establishes that the bundle pivots on Suhayl b. Abī Shālih, that four corroborating students and a branch-specific pattern of variants render the tradition reliably datable to him, and that it carries no irregularity or detractive defect, which neutralizes the forgery thesis of the common-link school.

Funneled through al-Qaradhawi's eight steps and supplemented by the collation of variants and the reconstruction of the occasion, the analysis yields a tradition that is situational and bound to a condition of war against treaty-breaking Jewish groups in post-Khaybar Medina. The variant wordings of "the Jews," "the People of the Book," and the bare pronoun confirm that the command's object is conduct of hostility and not a category of creed. In conditions of peace, kindness and equity toward Jews and Christians remain commanded in accordance with Q 60:8, and the reading therefore operates as a direct counter-narrative to literalist extremist interpretation.

The contribution is threefold. The study integrates the source-critical *isnad-cum-matn* method with classical *takhrij* on a single contested tradition, and it shows the two idioms converging on one verdict. It recovers the variant wordings and the occasion of utterance that prior contextual readings of this hadith had set aside, and it makes them carry the argument. It converts the result into a counter-narrative usable in the Indonesian public sphere, where the proof-text and not the slogan is the unit of contestation.

The inquiry has limits. No explicit and rigorously authenticated occasion attaches to this report, so the reconstruction rests on corroborating reports

and on principle rather than on a single decisive narration. The result rests, further, on a single Companion, which the skeptical school will continue to treat as a point of reservation. Future work should pursue lines outside *al-Kutub al-Tis'ah* in search of Companion-level corroboration, extend the *isnad-cum-matn* analysis to the cluster of enmity traditions as a set, and test the wasatiyyah hermeneutic against the reception of these texts in Indonesian extremist media.

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