



## Understanding Plurality of Hadith in Jonathan AC Brown thought (Challenges in the Globalization Era)

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### Abstract

This article aims to analyze Jonathan AC Brown's perspective on plurality in understanding hadith and the challenges that arise in the context of globalization. The main focus is on how interpretation of hadith can accommodate diversity of views without sacrificing the integrity of the text. This study uses a qualitative approach with text analysis. Data were collected from Jonathan AC Brown's main works, especially on the plurality of understanding hadith and its impact on contemporary Islamic studies. The analysis method was carried out by comparing Brown's views with traditional and modern approaches in hadith science. The results of the study show that according to Jonathan AC Brown, plurality in understanding hadith is an unavoidable aspect in the era of globalization, where a more flexible and inclusive interpretation is needed to answer social and cultural challenges. Brown argues for the importance of a more open approach to differences of opinion in understanding hadith. This article concludes that interpretation of hadith can accommodate diversity of views without sacrificing the integrity of the text by understanding that plurality is part of the Islamic scientific tradition. Jonathan AC Brown emphasizes that differences of opinion among scholars reflect the intellectual wealth of Islam, not a form of deviation. In the era of globalization, a contextual approach to hadith allows for an understanding that is relevant to today's socio-cultural challenges, without changing the substance of its teachings. The integrity of the text is maintained through the methodology of critical sanad and matan, while diversity of views is the key to maintaining the relevance of Islam in a pluralistic society.

**Keywords:** Jonathan AC Brown; plurality; understanding of hadith; globalization; interpretation; inclusivity

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## Introduction

In the contemporary Islamic intellectual treasury, the interpretation of hadith continues to be an active and relevant space for discourse.<sup>1</sup> Hadith, as the main source of Islamic teachings besides the Qur'an, has experienced various approaches to interpretation since the early days of Islam.<sup>2</sup> Scholars from various schools of thought have developed their own methodologies in understanding the meaning and legal implications of hadith. This diversity is not a form of division, but rather reflects the richness of the Islamic scientific tradition that is adaptive and open to the dynamics of the times. However, entering the era of globalization marked by the acceleration of social change, cross-border cultural exchange, and increasing interfaith interaction, new challenges have emerged in understanding hadith. One of the crucial questions that arises is how to interpret hadith texts in a pluralistic manner, without losing the authenticity of their meaning, and how this understanding can be relevant and responsive to the complexity of a global society that is increasingly diverse in culture and thought.

Jonathan AC Brown is one of the leading scholars in the field of Islamic studies in the West who offers a distinctive and insightful approach to plurality in understanding the hadith.<sup>3</sup> In his various scientific works, Brown emphasizes that the diversity of interpretations of the hadith is not a new phenomenon in Islam, but rather an integral part of the Islamic scientific tradition since classical times.<sup>4</sup> He shows that the differences of opinion among scholars reflect the dynamics and flexibility of Islamic intellectuals in responding to the context of the times and the needs of the people. Brown views this plurality as an asset that actually enriches religious understanding, not as a threat to religious authority. In the midst of the current of globalization that brings social complexity, cultural mixing, and new moral challenges, Brown encourages the need for a more open and contextual approach to understanding the hadith<sup>5</sup>. However, according to him, openness to plurality must remain based on a strong methodological framework, such as criticism of sanad and matan, so that the integrity of the text is maintained. He criticized the tendency of some classical and modern studies that focus too much on the technical aspects of authenticity, but do not sufficiently examine how plurality of interpretations can be interpreted legitimately in the context of science and religion that continues to develop, especially in the current global era.

This study aims to fill the gap in previous studies that generally separate textual criticism of hadith from the socio-cultural context in which the hadith is practiced. So far, many studies have placed too much emphasis on technical aspects such as the authenticity of sanad and matan,<sup>6</sup> but pays little attention to how the hadith is understood and applied in an increasingly plural and dynamic society. The main problem that this study seeks to answer is how to maintain a balance between respect for the authority of the hadith text and the need

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<sup>1</sup> Ria Candra Widayaningsih and Muhammad Irfan Helmy, "The Fiqh Al-Hadith of Digital Media: The Method of Understanding Hadith on the Website Bincangsyariah.Com and Its Contribution to Moderate Islamic Discourse," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 29, no. 2 (December 31, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Moh Misbakhul Khoir, "THE LOCALITY OF HADITH; ADAPTATION OF HADITH IN A UNIVERSAL SPACE," tt

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan AC Brown, "The Canonization of Al-Bukhārī and Muslims: The Formation and Function of the Sunni Hadith Canon" (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Arif Budiman and Sri Handayana, "A Study of Racial Equality in Islam and Blackness by Jonathan AC Brown (Hadith Approach)," *Religia* 27, no. 2 (October 30, 2024).

<sup>5</sup> Nur Hamidah Pulungan, "AN ORIENTALIST TODAY: Jonathan AC Brown's Thoughts on Hadith," *Ulumuna* 27, no. 2 (December 1, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Salahuddin ibn Ahmad Al-Adlabi, *Manhaj Naqd Al-Matan Inda Ulama Al-Hadis* (Beirut: Dar al- Afaq al-Jadidah, 1983).

for a more flexible interpretation, in order to remain relevant in the face of modern social and cultural complexities. Jonathan AC Brown's thinking is an important foundation in bridging this tension.<sup>7</sup> He offers an approach that not only maintains the integrity of the text, but also opens up space for dialogue regarding the context of the times, thus producing a more inclusive, contextual understanding of the hadith, and remains based on a valid scientific framework.<sup>8</sup>

The purpose of this study is to analyze Jonathan AC Brown's views on plurality in understanding hadith, especially in relation to the challenges arising from globalization. This study will examine Brown's main arguments and compare them with traditional and modern approaches in the science of hadith. Through this analysis, this study aims to show that diversity in the interpretation of hadith is not a weakness, but rather a strength that can enrich and deepen the understanding of Islamic teachings. By understanding this plurality correctly, Muslims can face the challenges of the times with a more flexible and open attitude, without sacrificing the integrity of the hadith text. The results of the study are expected to provide an important contribution to the development of contemporary Islamic studies, especially in building an inclusive and dialogical approach to hadith interpretation, so that it is relevant to the reality of an increasingly plural and complex society.

The research method used in this article is a qualitative approach with library research. This study will review relevant literature, in the form of books, journal articles, and other scientific works that discuss plurality in understanding hadith, especially those written by Jonathan AC Brown. The main focus of this study is an analysis of the concept of plurality in hadith and how this approach can be applied in diverse social, cultural, and religious contexts, especially in Indonesia. The first step in this study is to conduct a review of the literature<sup>9</sup> which examines Jonathan AC Brown's theory and approach related to the plurality of understanding of hadith, as well as literature on globalization and religious pluralism. Furthermore, this article will analyze the challenges faced in adapting a pluralistic approach to hadith in the context of Indonesia which has social and cultural diversity. This study will also discuss the opportunities that arise from the application of this pluralistic approach in enriching interreligious and intercultural dialogue. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the study of hadith, as well as provide practical guidance for academics and religious practitioners in adapting the understanding of hadith in the midst of the era of globalization.

## **Result and Discussion**

### *Plurality as an Inherent Characteristic of Hadith Science*

Jonathan AC Brown, a leading scholar of hadith studies, delivers a sharp critique of the literal or scripturalist approach that is widely adopted in contemporary religious understanding. According to him, an approach that only focuses on the textual and literal aspects of hadith tends to ignore the historical, social, and cultural dimensions that accompany the birth of the text. This results in a rigid and non-contextual reading,<sup>10</sup> so that it is less able to answer the challenges and complexities of modern life. This kind of scripturalist approach often closes off the space for dialogue and rejects the plurality of interpretations that are actually part of

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<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Brown, "A Pre-Modern Defense of the Hadiths on Sodomy An Annotated Translation and Analysis of al-Suyuti's Attaining the Expected-for in Service of the Messenger," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 34, no. 3 (10 April 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Nur Kholis, "A Critique of Matan Jonathan AC Brown's Critique," *Tajdid* 20, no. 1 (2021).

<sup>9</sup> Lexy J. Moleong, *Qualitative Research Methodology* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan AC Brown, "did the prophet say it or not? the literal, historical, and effective truth of hadiths in early sunnism," *journal of the american oriental society*, no. 2 (2009).

the Islamic scientific heritage. Brown believes that this perspective can give rise to exclusive, intolerant attitudes, and even open up opportunities for justifying extreme actions in the name of religion.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, he called for the importance of a more open, contextual, and responsible approach in understanding the hadith.

In a historical perspective, Jonathan AC Brown emphasizes that the plurality of interpretations is an important element in the Islamic scientific tradition that has existed since the early days. He shows that great scholars such as Imam al-Shafi'i, Abu Hanifah, and Malik bin Anas not only acknowledged but also justified the existence of differences in understanding the hadith. These differences arose from awareness of the local context, community customs ('amal), and the objectives of the Shari'a (maqāṣid al-sharī'ah) which are different<sup>12</sup>. Brown believes that this diversity is not a weakness, but rather a strength that reflects the breadth of methods and flexibility in Islamic law. Therefore, a literal approach that rejects differences is considered a narrowing of the intellectual wealth of Islam. According to Brown, reviving the culture of dissent and critical discussion is an important step in maintaining the authenticity and vitality of Islamic scientific heritage amidst the challenges of the modern era.<sup>13</sup>

Jonathan AC Brown expressed concern about the use of a literal approach in understanding the hadith which, in some cases, is used as a tool to support certain political and ideological interests. He noted that the hadith are often selectively chosen and quoted without considering their historical or social context, then used as justification for exclusive, rigid, and even violent religious views. According to Brown, this phenomenon is very dangerous, because it distances the hadith from the true moral and ethical goals of Islam. Therefore, he called for the importance of caution in using the hadith as a basis for legitimizing certain actions or ideologies. Brown emphasized that understanding the hadith must be based on valid scientific methodology, such as criticism of the sanad and matan, so that the resulting interpretation can be academically accounted for. He also emphasized the need to distinguish between scientific authority and personal opinion that is not based on scientific discipline.

In facing the era of globalization marked by the diversity of values, cultures, and the emergence of new moral challenges, Jonathan AC Brown emphasizes the importance of a contextual approach in understanding the hadith. He argues that contemporary issues such as gender equality, human rights, religious freedom, and cross-cultural interaction require religious responses that are not only textually normative, but also relevant to social reality.<sup>14</sup> According to Brown, a literal approach that only relies on the literal meaning of the text is not enough to answer the complexity of modern-day problems. Instead, he encourages integration between the classical textual approach and contextual reading that takes into account the objectives of the sharia (maqāṣid al-sharī'ah). With this orientation, understanding of the hadith can be more adaptive, dynamic, and still maintain the basic

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<sup>11</sup> Jonathan AC Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenges and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy* (North America: Oneworld, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan A.C. Brown.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan AC Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 2nd ed (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan AC Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenges and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy*.

values of Islam. Brown sees this as an important step to maintain the relevance of Islamic teachings in an increasingly plural and changing world.<sup>15</sup>

Jonathan AC Brown's main contribution to thought lies in his attempt to bridge the gap between respect for the authority of the hadith texts and the need for flexibility in interpretation, especially in the context of an increasingly pluralistic and dynamic world. Brown sees the plurality of interpretations not as an aberration or weakness, but as a manifestation of the vastness of Islam's grace and the richness of the scholarly tradition that has developed over centuries. In his view, the diversity of interpretations enriches understanding and enables Islam to remain relevant in various cultural and social contexts.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Brown emphasizes the importance of an inclusive, contextual, and scientific approach in understanding the hadith so that Islamic teachings are not only maintained textually, but are also able to respond to the challenges of the times in a fair, wise, and applicable manner.<sup>17</sup> This kind of approach is key to maintaining the vitality and relevance of Islam in a changing global society.

#### *Understanding Plurality in Hadith*

Jonathan AC Brown's approach to the plurality of understanding of hadith provides a fresh perspective in understanding Islamic religious texts, especially hadith. In his work, Brown emphasizes the importance of accommodating the diversity of interpretations in understanding hadith without reducing the essence and integrity of Islamic teachings themselves.<sup>18</sup> His view invites Muslims to be more open to various ways of interpreting hadith that are in accordance with the ever-evolving social and cultural changes. Brown highlights that the understanding of hadith does not only depend on the text itself, but also on the social and cultural context in which the text is interpreted. Therefore, he proposes a more inclusive approach, which recognizes that there are various legitimate ways of understanding hadith, which can be adapted to the needs of the times and the challenges faced by Muslims today. This approach seeks to balance between maintaining the purity of Islamic teachings and responding to the dynamics of an increasingly global and plural world.

In this context, the results of the study show that plurality in understanding hadith can enrich the insight of Muslims into religious texts. One of the important points raised by Brown is that hadith cannot be understood in a vacuum, but must be considered in its social and historical framework.<sup>19</sup> For example, the hadith revealed during the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW had a certain context that was greatly influenced by the social, political, and cultural circumstances of the time. However, the world has changed now, and Muslims live in a very different context.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the interpretation of hadith that only relies on text alone is often limited and irrelevant to contemporary problems. With this plurality approach, Brown suggests utilizing the diversity of interpretations as a means to find

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<sup>15</sup> Jonathan AC Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 2nd ed.

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan AC Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenges and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy*.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan AC Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 2nd ed.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan A.C. Brown.

<sup>19</sup> Komaruddin Hidayat, *The world's great religions*, tt

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan AC Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenges and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy*.

solutions to the problems faced by Muslims in the modern era, without sacrificing the basic values in Islamic teachings.

However, while Brown's pluralistic approach is highly relevant in the context of globalization and religious and cultural diversity, there are significant challenges in its implementation. One of the biggest challenges is the sharp difference of opinion between conservative groups who prefer textual interpretations and more progressive groups who encourage contextual and flexible interpretations. Brown's pluralistic approach may be considered too lenient by some of the more traditional groups, who believe that religious texts should be understood according to the literal meaning contained in the original Arabic and in accordance with centuries-old practices.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, more progressive groups may feel that this approach still does not provide enough space for the application of Islamic teachings that are more adaptive to the challenges of the times, such as human rights, religious pluralism, and the role of women in society.

Another criticism of the pluralistic approach to understanding hadith is that while it allows for diversity of interpretations, there is no guarantee that these more inclusive interpretations will be widely accepted by the Muslim community. The main challenge faced is building consensus among Muslims regarding the understanding and application of the principles of plurality in hadith. This is especially true with regard to authority in religious interpretation, where Islamic scholars and scholars play a significant role in determining the boundaries of legitimate interpretation. Therefore, while this approach offers an opportunity to enrich the understanding of hadith, its implementation requires open dialogue and collaboration between different groups within the Muslim community, as well as efforts to strengthen in-depth and contextual Islamic education. Thus, while plurality in understanding hadith offers great potential to enrich the religious experience of Muslims, the challenges of its implementation and acceptance remain ones that need to be addressed with caution and wisdom.

In the perspective of the theory put forward by Mahfudz Ridwan, the Qur'an explains that God created humans not only consisting of one group, tribe, skin color, and religion, but God has created humans differently so that they can learn from each other, socialize, get to know each other, and help each other. This is as stated in the Qur'an, that: "If your Lord had willed, He would have made one nation, And (but) they have always been different (Qur'an 11:118); "If Allah had willed, He would have made you one nation" (Qur'an 5: 48). Thus, it is very clear from the signs of the Qur'an that in fact, singleness, unity and similarity in religion and belief are not desired by God. Religious pluralism which is interpreted as plurality is indeed recognized by Islam. This is because in it, various joint commitments can be explored to fight for values that go beyond the interests of their groups and religions.<sup>22</sup> These values and interests include the struggle to uphold justice, humanity, poverty alleviation, and educational progress, both social and economic, as well as security, which must be felt by all humans, regardless of class, race, ethnicity, and religion.

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<sup>21</sup> Budhy Munawar Rachman, *Islamic Arguments for Pluralism* (Jakarta: PT Gramedia Widiasarana Indonesia, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Biyanto, *Religious Pluralism from the Perspective of Muhammadiyah Youth: A Review of the Sociology of Knowledge* (Surabaya: IAIN Sunan Ampel, 2008).

In relation to the understanding of hadith, Jonathan AC Brown provides a very interesting statement contained in the original text which reads: “The cultural context is one of the decisive factors in interpreting the Prophetic Hadith, and this interpretation has been influenced throughout the ages by the cultural and social conditions that prevailed in each period.<sup>23</sup> *By studying historical models, we can observe how these factors affect the understanding and applications of the Prophetic Hadith. This topic reflects how the differences in cultural and social environments have contributed to the diversity of interpretations of the Prophetic Hadith throughout history, whether in the ancient ages of Islam or in the Middle Ages and the modern era.*<sup>24</sup> *Through these models, the influence of the cultural context on the understanding and application of the Prophetic Hadith is clearly evident.*”

In the text, Jonathan AC Brown provides an overview of the project that is expected. He asserts that Cultural context is an important element in the process of interpreting the Prophet's Hadith, which is historically influenced by social and cultural conditions in each particular period.<sup>25</sup> The study of the historical development of hadith interpretation shows that cultural and social factors play a significant role in shaping the understanding and application of hadith texts. Differences in cultural environments and social dynamics contributed to the emergence of diverse variations in interpretation throughout Islamic history, from the early period to the classical and modern eras. By examining these various historical models, it is seen how cultural contexts not only influence the way hadith is interpreted, but also how these teachings are adapted and applied in different societies. This emphasizes the importance of a contextual approach in the study of hadith to understand the diversity of interpretations comprehensively and scientifically.<sup>26</sup>

Likewise, with regard to plurality in the understanding of hadith, he explicitly states that A Very Short Introduction: Jonathan AC Brown emphasizes that the pluralism in Hadith refers to the multiple versions and variations found in the narration of many Hadiths. These differences in wording or content do not undermine the authenticity of the tradition. On the contrary, they reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of Islamic tradition. Hadiths were transmitted by various narrators who lived in different regions and times, leading to differing interpretations and experiences, which resulted in divergent reports. This pluralism is not a flaw but a reflection of the richness and flexibility of the tradition, which adapts and changes over time while maintaining its core principles.<sup>27</sup>

Jonathan AC Brown asserts that plurality in hadith refers to the existence of various versions and variations of hadith narratives that do not reduce the authenticity of the tradition. Differences in the wording or content of hadith reflect the dynamic and adaptive nature of Islamic tradition. This is due to the diversity of narrators who come from various regions and time periods, thus bringing differences in experience and interpretation that result in variations in hadith reports. Brown asserts that this plurality is not a weakness, but rather a

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<sup>23</sup> Liberation and Enlightenment, Tunisian edition, Muhammad Al-Tahir Bin Ashur, Sakhnoon Publishing and Distribution House, Tunis, 1997.

<sup>24</sup> Tamam Hassan, Statement in the Masterpieces of the Quran, a linguistic and stylistic study of the Quranic text (1st edition: Alam Al-Kutub, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan AC Brown, “how we know early hadith critics did not receive criticism and why it's so hard to find,” Islamic law and society 15, no. 2 (2008): 150–53.

<sup>26</sup> Muhammad Al-Tahir Al-Maysawi, A collection of articles and letters of Sheikh Imam Muhammad Al-Tahir Ibn Ashur, collected, read and documented (Dar al-Nafayes: Amman-Jordan, 1436).

<sup>27</sup> Brown, Jonathan AC, Hadith: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford University Press, 2009).

manifestation of the intellectual richness and flexibility of Islamic tradition that is able to adapt to changing times. Thus, the hadith tradition maintains its fundamental principles while opening up space for a diversity of constructive understandings.

Below I have made a simple table that describes Jonathan AC Brown's framework of thought on the plurality of hadith in a concise and systematic manner:

Aspect	Explanation
The Concept of Plurality of Hadith	The Hadith has many versions and variations, which do not detract from the authenticity of the tradition.
Causative factor	Different narrators from different regions and times; different experiences and interpretations.
The Impact of Plurality	Islamic tradition is dynamic and evolving; demonstrating intellectual richness and flexibility.
Basic Principles	The core principle of the hadith remains intact; plurality is seen as a strength, not a weakness.

### *Globalization Challenges in Understanding Hadith*

In the midst of society, it can be seen and read that the reality is now very concerning. That in upholding the rights of democracy and humanity, not all religious adherents are aware and act intelligently towards it. There are still exclusive attitudes in religious groups, ethnic organizations, claims of truth, political frictions that are justified through patterns of manipulation of religious doctrine, revenge, and greed for power.<sup>28</sup> For religions pluralism is a challenge, finding a common ground between religions is very important to do. The importance of finding a convergence of religions as a frame of reference through several considerations.

Globalization has created space for increasingly deep intercultural relations, which have significant consequences for the understanding of religion, especially in the context of understanding the hadith. In this increasingly diverse society, various views on religious texts, including the hadith, have emerged and developed in various ways. The greatest challenge facing Muslims is how to balance traditional textual analysis with a more contextual modern approach, which often confronts the diversity of social, cultural and religious views.<sup>29</sup> On the one hand, the traditional approach to understanding hadith often focuses on the text and ignores the social and cultural context behind the hadith. On the other hand, a more contextual modern approach demands more adaptive and flexible knowledge of the ever-evolving global dynamics. Therefore, the big challenge is how to find a middle ground between the two that not only respects the authenticity of religious teachings, but is also responsive to changing times.

In this study, the main challenge identified is how Muslim society can maintain the solid principles of Islamic teachings while accepting the diversity of interpretations that arise due to globalization. The more conservative side believes that the understanding of hadith must adhere to the classical texts that cannot be changed because they are considered final

<sup>28</sup> M. Faqih, "Upholding Religious Rights amidst Pluralism," Constitution 8, no. 4 (2011).

<sup>29</sup> Sumbullah, U, Religious Pluralism; Meaning and Locality of Patterns of Inter-Religious Harmony (Maliki Press, 2003).

teachings and cannot be adjusted to the modern context. They argue that authentic hadiths must be understood as they are without being influenced by changing social conditions. In contrast, the more progressive group argues that the understanding of hadith needs to develop over time, taking into account the current social and political context. Therefore, they want a broader and more dynamic interpretation so that it can be applied to contemporary situations that are full of challenges, such as religious pluralism, human rights, and gender equality. These two perspectives often conflict and create tension in the increasingly diverse Muslim society.<sup>30</sup>

It is important to note that this diversity of views is not limited to differences between conservative and progressive groups, but also includes geographical, cultural, and historical differences. For example, the understanding of hadith in the Arab world may be greatly influenced by different political and cultural contexts compared to the understanding of hadith in Western countries, where the influence of religious pluralism and freedom of thought is more dominant.<sup>31</sup> Globalization has accelerated the spread of these views, resulting in increasingly frequent intercultural interactions. This enriches the discourse on understanding the hadith, but also challenges Muslims in maintaining the integrity of religious teachings amidst the diversity of thought. Globalization not only brings positive impacts by introducing new perspectives, but also presents challenges in managing differences that often lead to polarization in Muslim societies.

To address these challenges, a more inclusive and contextual approach to understanding hadith is needed. This approach does not mean ignoring the text, but rather understanding the text in a broader context, encompassing the social, political, and cultural aspects that influence such understanding. In this regard, it is important for Islamic scholars and intellectuals to collaborate in formulating an approach that can respect both sides – the text and the context. One method that can be applied is to develop an interpretation technique that not only pays attention to linguistic and fiqh aspects, but also considers changes in the times and the needs of society. This will enable Muslims to apply the teachings of hadith more relevantly in facing the challenges of globalization. Thus, although the challenges of globalization that introduce diverse views can trigger tensions, this also opens up opportunities for innovation in understanding and applying hadith that is more contextual and responsive to the needs of Muslims in this increasingly diverse world.<sup>32</sup>

Globalization has opened up space for the exchange of ideas and practices between Islamic and non-Islamic traditions, thus presenting new challenges in the study of hadith. This cultural convergence brings critical perspectives, especially from Western studies in the fields of history and social sciences, which use secular and analytical approaches. These approaches often question the traditional theological and methodological foundations that have been the basis for the authentication of hadith. This puts pressure on hadith studies to conform to modern academic standards without neglecting the principles of classical Islamic scholarship.

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<sup>30</sup> Sahfutra, S. A, “Gus Dur’s Idea of Religious Pluralism for Equality and Harmony,” *Religion Journal of Religious Studies* 10, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>31</sup> Ahmad Satria, “Islam and the Phenomenon of Globalization: Analysis of the Verses of the Qur’an Using the Maudhui Interpretation Method,” *Gunung Djati Conference Series* 25 (2023).

<sup>32</sup> Y, Pradipta, K, Arifin, and A. Fadhil, “Effectiveness of Interpersonal Communication of Religious Communities in Bekasi Housing. *Journal of Al-Qur’an Studies*,” *Journal of Al-Qur’an Studies; Building a Tradition of Qur’anic Thinking* 10, no. 2 (2014): 109–18.

Therefore, a methodological framework is needed that is able to balance between maintaining the integrity of traditional classification and accommodating contemporary criticism and methods. This approach is important so that hadith studies remain credible and relevant in a pluralistic intellectual context that is influenced by globalization, while also being able to respond to the ever-evolving social and cultural dynamics. Opportunities for Applying a Pluralistic Approach.<sup>33</sup>

In Indonesia, religious pluralism plays an important role in building a complete and harmonious social unity. Religious diversity in Indonesia is not only a social fact, but also a foundation for creating strong national cohesion. Awareness of the importance of this plurality supports efforts to realize the goals of the proclamation of independence while maintaining it within the framework of the constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. Religious plurality functions as a strategic force that allows the Indonesian nation to stand independently and equally in the international arena. In the socio-political context, this diversity teaches the values of tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and respect for differences as part of the nation's identity. Thus, religious pluralism is not only a challenge, but also a vital resource that strengthens national unity and integration, while advancing democratic life and social development in Indonesia.<sup>34</sup>

The opportunity for religious pluralism in Indonesia is not based on an overly simplistic approach, such as right or wrong, with the view that the wrong will go to hell and the right will go to heaven. Instead, this approach seeks to delve into the essence of the teachings of each religion and apply them in everyday life in order to achieve inner peace. Furthermore, with a perspective that is more than just temporary, we can see that all these teachings come from the same source, namely absolute truth. From this perspective, we will see a common thread that connects all religions with essential substance, although in different formats. As a diverse country, we must not ignore differences in religious practice and must respect them.<sup>35</sup> We give respect and belief wholeheartedly to the religion we believe in, but without setting aside and especially degrading the beliefs of others. In this way, the harmony and peace expected by religious teachings can be realized.

Although the pluralistic approach to hadith holds great potential, major challenges remain in its realization. One obstacle is the rejection from groups that adhere to the conventional and textual understanding of hadith. For them, the interpretation of hadith must be based on standard texts and must not be adjusted to the changing times. They argue that hadith is a revelation that must be understood without being influenced by social and cultural developments. On the other hand, groups that are more accepting of pluralism are of the view that the understanding of hadith must take into account the changing times and the various contexts that emerge in society. The tension between these two perspectives can

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<sup>33</sup> Rahman, "Transforming Islamic Values in Malaysia: The Role of Al-Faruqi," *Revelation and Science* 5 (January 2015): 27–33.

<sup>34</sup> M. Syam, "Dilemma of Plurality: Obstacle or Strengthening of Indonesian Democracy," *Legal Science* 14, no. 2 (2011): 256–75.

<sup>35</sup> Y. Ali, *Sufism and Pluralism: Understanding the Nature of Religions and the Relations of Religions*. (PT. Alex Media Komputindo, 2012).

hinder the creation of constructive dialogue, as both tend to believe that their view is the most valid.<sup>36</sup>

To address these challenges, it is important to formulate a pluralistic approach that not only respects interpretations, but also remains true to the basic principles of Islamic teachings. One way to achieve this is by facilitating interaction between Islamic scholars and scholars from different backgrounds, who can exchange ideas and build a broader understanding of how the hadith should be understood in today's global context.<sup>37</sup> This approach can utilize the principles of adaptive *ijtihad*, which allows Muslims to provide new interpretations that are more relevant to the development of the times. In this way, plurality in understanding the hadith will not only enrich religious discussions, but also help strengthen interfaith and intercultural bridges that have often been divided by differences in interpretation.

However, the application of this pluralistic approach is not without its consequences. One risk that may arise is the tendency to sacrifice the depth of religious teachings in order to accommodate diversity of views. This could end up decreasing the quality of deep religious understanding, because it prioritizes tolerance of differences rather than steadfastness to the principles of Islamic teachings. Therefore, it is important to maintain a balance between accepting plurality in understanding hadith and maintaining basic principles that are non-negotiable. Thus, a pluralistic approach to hadith must be accompanied by the awareness that diversity of interpretations must remain based on the moral and spiritual principles taught in Islam.<sup>38</sup> This approach can ease tensions between groups with differing views and build a basis for more constructive dialogue at the global level.

Jonathan AC Brown's pluralistic approach offers an important perspective in understanding hadith by considering social, cultural, and religious diversity. This study emphasizes the relevance of this approach in the context of Indonesia, a country with a very high level of plurality. With more than 17,000 islands and hundreds of ethnic groups, Indonesia is a real illustration of the diversity of religious values, beliefs, and practices. In this context, a flexible approach to understanding hadith that allows for variations in interpretation without reducing the core teachings of Islam is very necessary. This pluralistic approach provides space for dynamic and contextual interpretations, which are able to respond to social and cultural changes in Indonesian society. This allows Muslims to harmonize religious teachings with developing local values, thus creating a harmonious integration between religion and culture. Thus, Brown's approach becomes a relevant conceptual framework to face the challenges of pluralism in a pluralistic society like Indonesia.

However, the implementation of this pluralistic approach is not without major challenges. Although Indonesian society is known for its spirit of tolerance and diversity, differences of opinion on religious understanding remain. There are groups that adhere to a strict textual interpretation of the hadith, who may feel that adjustments to the social or cultural context could undermine the integrity of Islamic teachings. For them, the hadith are considered revelations that cannot be questioned or changed, and any new form of interpretation that is

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<sup>36</sup> T. Rambe, "A. Mukti Ali's Thoughts and His Contribution to Interfaith Harmony," *Al-Lubb* 1, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>37</sup> S. Masykur, "Pluralism in the Context of the Study of Religions," *Tolerance: Media for Religious Communication* 8, no. 1 (2016): 61–77.

<sup>38</sup> I. Zulkarnain, "Relations between Religious Communities in Indonesia: Problems and Their Handling," *Jurnal Kajian* 16, no. 4 (2011): 681-705.

not in line with traditional understanding is considered a form of deviation. Therefore, although the pluralistic approach provides an opportunity for a more inclusive understanding, it also risks creating friction within more conservative communities who see differences in interpretation as a threat to the sanctity of religion.<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand, a flexible understanding of hadith can bring great benefits in building social harmony in Indonesia. By accommodating the diversity of views and interpretations in understanding hadith, Muslims can more easily adapt to the development of the times and the increasingly complex challenges of globalization. In Indonesia, where society is exposed to various cultural and religious influences, a pluralistic approach can strengthen a more contextual understanding of hadith, allowing Muslims to be wiser in dealing with differences, both within the Muslim community itself and in interactions with other religious communities. For example, this approach can be used to formulate principles of social ethics that are not only applicable in the context of Islam but are also relevant in the lives of Indonesia's multicultural society, such as the values of tolerance, justice, and equality.<sup>40</sup>

However, it is important to maintain a balance in the application of this plurality. Although flexibility in interpretation is essential, a more contextual understanding of the hadith<sup>41</sup> must remain grounded in the basic principles of Islam that are non-negotiable. An excessively pluralistic approach, if not careful, can reduce the depth and quality of religious understanding. Therefore, there needs to be clear guidance in adapting the interpretation of hadith to social and cultural developments, while maintaining loyalty to authentic religious teachings. One way to achieve this is by conducting open dialogue between scholars, Islamic scholars, and community leaders, so that differences of opinion can be understood and appreciated, without damaging the integrity of Islamic teachings themselves. Thus, a pluralistic approach to hadith can be a bridge connecting religious traditions and the challenges of the times, creating a more holistic and harmonious understanding in the context of a pluralistic Indonesia.<sup>42</sup>

Indonesia, as a pluralistic country rich in religious diversity, provides an example of the potential for coexistence rather than division. To mitigate conflicts arising from religious differences, the theological framework of inclusivism and pluralism is very relevant in navigating the complexity of religious life in Indonesia's religious society. The insights of leading thinkers on inclusivism and pluralism, as well as the perspectives of various Islamic community organizations, can be important references to encourage such approaches.<sup>43</sup> By embracing inclusivism and pluralism, we can overcome conflicts related to competing religious truth claims and encourage peaceful interaction between different religions. Furthermore, an inclusive religious attitude can contribute to the development of civil society and maintain harmonious relations between adherents of different religions.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> T. Rambe, "The Thoughts of A. Mukti Ali and His Contribution to Interfaith Harmony."

<sup>40</sup> Rachman and Budhy Munawar, *Islamic arguments for pluralism* (Jakarta: PT. Grasindo, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> hasan and mochamad ismail, "jonathan brown's canonization of shahih al-bukhari," *living islam: journal of islamic discourse* 2, no. 1 (2019).

<sup>42</sup> fata and ahmad khoiril, "uncovering tolerant exclusive islam," *islamica journal* 6, no. 1 (2011).

<sup>43</sup> Gufron and Amir, "Islamic Inclusivism in Indonesia," *Al-A'raf Journal* 11, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>44</sup> Ahmad Fuadi, "Islamic Studies (Exclusive and Inclusive Islam)," *Wabana Innovation* 7, no. 2 (2018).

Brown's approach that emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical and social context in interpreting Islamic religious texts can help Indonesian society to understand Islamic teachings in a more contextual way and be open to different interpretations. Brown also criticizes narrow and dogmatic ways of interpretation that can lead to polarization or violence in society.

#### *Contribution to Contemporary Hadith Studies*

The dynamics of social, political, cultural, scientific, and information revolutions play an important role in the effort to place religious texts in a relevant context. In this modern era, a 'living' and up-to-date way of reading is needed, in order to be able to overcome all the complexities of problems that arise. Current problems clearly require new methods and concepts, which cannot be overcome only with a collection of classical methods. Developments and changes in the social, cultural, scientific, and civilization fields demand the birth of a new epistemology that is in line with these changes.<sup>45</sup>Based on the author's exploration, there are two aspects of contemporary hadith studies in the American academic tradition, namely:

First, the nuances of locality – in the aspect of the study of figures and literature (al-bahsu 'an al-a'lam wa al-musannafat). The creative research process carried out by Brown was influenced by socio-cultural-academic trends among American students. The theory of canonization is one example of the results of research from Western scholars that were adopted and elaborated, resulting in conclusions regarding the canonization process of *Ṣaḥīḥ*. This synthesis makes a positive contribution to the study of hadith.<sup>46</sup>Contributions in this field can be seen in two points. The first point, Brown discusses the history of *Ṣaḥīḥayn* from a different perspective or point of view. In the second point, he investigates a broader research trail in the study of figures and literature of hadith books, beyond the study of the *manāḥij al-muhaddisin*.

Brown's research on the theme of canonization illustrates how this answers the question of the specialness of *Ṣaḥīḥ* in the eyes of Muslims. This specification in the context of contemporary hadith studies is an interesting thing. To explain the process of recognizing a hadith book, Brown adopts the concept of canonization. Real research on the canonization of the book of *Ṣaḥīḥayn* has enriched the treasury of hadith science, especially in the study of hadith based on figures. This research model has become a new channel in the 'stuff room' of hadith authenticity in the tradition of classical Western hadith studies.<sup>47</sup>

The change in research models in the modern era seems to have shifted from efforts to determine the validity and accuracy of hadith. This research model can be called a new direction in the study of hadith. With the historical approach taken by Brown, it can be proven that the process of legitimizing the hadith of the Prophet SAW in *Ṣaḥīḥ* can be consistently accepted in a certain model. He shows that through the network diagram

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<sup>45</sup> Abdullah, "The Study of Kalam Science at IAIN: Welcoming the Shifting Paradigms of Islamic Science in the Third Millennium Era," *Jurnal Al Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies IAIN SUKA* 65, no. 6 (2000): 90.

<sup>46</sup> A'yun, Zulfikri, and Hakim, "Dynamics of the Relationship between the Prophet SAW and the Jews from the Perspective of Ralf Dahredorf's Conflict Theory," *MASHDAR Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies*, 2022, 65–80.

<sup>47</sup> Bahr Bible, *Government/Rule/Politics/State, Memory, Oral Tradition, Reception, Tradition, Writing*. In *The Brill Dictionary of Religion* (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2006).

(network chart) of Ṣāhiḥ in the span of the fourth century of Hijriah, it is seen that the institutionalization process took quite a long time.<sup>48</sup>

Second, the nuance of glocalization in the aspect of the study of understanding in the interpretation of hadith has undergone adjustments to local cultural values. In the author's perspective, Brown does not state it explicitly, because he prefers to highlight the challenges in interpreting the Prophet's hadith through cases he encountered in the places he visited, as well as how the community or religious leaders in the region interpreted the hadith. The actuality of the study that focuses on understanding hadith is in line with substantial understanding.<sup>49</sup> The themes raised are adjusted to the developing issues. The paradigms presented include participatory-solution criticism with an effort to achieve an applicable meaning search (meaning that applies).

The results of this study provide a significant contribution to contemporary hadith studies by exploring the application of diverse approaches in understanding hadith amidst the challenges of globalization. Globalization, with all its complexities, brings about significant transformations in interactions between cultures, technologies, and social values. Therefore, the method of interpreting hadith that only emphasizes the textual or traditional approach is beginning to be felt to be less efficient in meeting the needs of Muslim communities living in an increasingly interconnected and multicultural world.<sup>50</sup> This study presents a new perspective that not only appreciates the diversity of interpretations in the Islamic tradition, but also accommodates the challenges of the modern era, so that it can make a real contribution to the development of a more contextual understanding of hadith that is relevant to current social dynamics. However, the application of diverse approaches to understanding hadith, although offering great opportunities, also faces great challenges, especially in maintaining a balance between the flexibility of interpretation and the basic principles of Islamic teachings. One of the main challenges is how to ensure that a more contextual interpretation does not sacrifice the core values of Islam. Muslim society is often divided between two poles: one that supports a strict literal or textual interpretation of hadith and another that supports a more dynamic and adaptive interpretation to the development of the times.<sup>51</sup> In this context, the application of various approaches must be done carefully so as not to get caught up in relativism that can endanger religious authority. Therefore, researchers and scholars need to dig deeper into methodologies that can bridge the two poles, creating space for plurality that remains rooted in authentic teachings.

The realities of contemporary religion with its traditional and non-traditional religious movements, secularization and atheism, digitalization and globalization revealed in the study demonstrated that without an effective response to the challenges faced,<sup>52</sup> modern society risks losing balance and mutual understanding between believers and non-believers, between

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<sup>48</sup> Arif Budiman and Sri Handayana, "A Study of Racial Equality in Islam and Blackness by Jonathan AC Brown (Hadith Approach)."

<sup>49</sup> Mala and Fudhaili, "The Relation of Jurisprudence and Hadith in the Practice of Contextual Understanding of Ibn 'Abd al-Barr al-Andalusy," *Diroyah: Journal of Hadith Science Studies* 6, no. 2 (2022).

<sup>50</sup> Suryani, "The Urgency of Hermeneutics as a Method in Understanding Hadith," *AL QUDS: Journal of Quran and Hadith Studies*, 6, no. 2 (2022): 779–800.

<sup>51</sup> Smith, *Scared Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>52</sup> Bekmirzaev, R.B., "Traces of archaic religions in the modern way of life of the peoples of the Ferghana Valley," *The American Journal of Social Science and Education Innovations*, 3, no. 11 (2021): 41–46.

traditional and non-traditional faiths. To make sense of the findings, studies by other authors were considered.<sup>53</sup>

The reality of contemporary religion with traditional and non-traditional religious movements,<sup>54</sup> secularization and atheism, digitalization and globalization revealed in this study show that without an effective response to the challenges faced, modern societies risk losing balance and mutual understanding between religious and non-religious people, between traditional and non-traditional religions.<sup>55</sup> To understand these findings, research by other authors is considered.

## Conclusion

This article shows that the application of a pluralistic approach to the understanding of hadith, as proposed by Jonathan AC Brown, can be a relevant solution in responding to the challenges of globalization and social, cultural, and religious diversity. This approach emphasizes the importance of accommodating diversity of interpretations without reducing the essence of Islamic teachings, providing space for more inclusive interpretations that remain based on the basic principles of religion. This study successfully shows that plurality in the understanding of hadith can enrich Muslims' understanding of religious texts, especially by considering the developing social and cultural context. One of the main problems faced is how to balance traditional, more textual interpretations with modern, more contextual approaches, especially in an increasingly pluralistic society. This can cause tension between groups that prioritize a more conservative textual approach and those who encourage a more flexible and adaptive interpretation to the development of the times. This study provides a solution by showing that plurality in the understanding of hadith, if applied wisely, can be a tool for building constructive dialogue between various groups, as well as creating a more inclusive understanding without damaging the core of religious teachings. As a recommendation, it is important for scholars and religious practitioners to continue to develop methodologies that can accommodate plurality without sacrificing the fundamental principles of Islamic teachings. His research shows that Indonesia, as a country with high social and cultural diversity, has great potential to apply a pluralistic approach in understanding hadith, so that it can enrich religious discourse and strengthen interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Therefore, the development of clear and structured guidelines in interpreting hadith in a pluralistic manner is very necessary so that this interpretation remains in a valid and authentic corridor. On the other hand, it is highly recommended that this more flexible and inclusive understanding of hadith continue to be developed in the form of academic studies that can be a guide for Muslim communities in interacting with a diverse global society. As a concrete step, scholars and academics need to dig deeper into pluralistic methodology in hadith studies, and implement it in religious education to ensure that Muslims can understand religious texts contextually and relevantly to the challenges of the times without reducing the essential meaning of Islamic teachings themselves.

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<sup>53</sup> R. Doszhan, "Multi-vector cultural connections in the conditions of modern globalization," *Interdisciplinary Cultural and Humanities Review* 2, no. 1 (2023): 27–32.

<sup>54</sup> A. Andika, "The existence of religion within technological progress in modern society," *Al'Adalah*, 25, no. 1 (2022): 11–20.

<sup>55</sup> A. Copson, "What is secularism? In: *Secularism: A very short introduction*," Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2019.

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