Preserving Traditional Islamic Thought and Practice: The Codified SūrahYāsīn and Taḥlīl Texts in Indonesia

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Abstract
This paper tries to construct the role of the codified SūrahYāsīn and Taḥlīl texts in Indonesia. The present paper also attempts to investigate the sequential aspects of the transmission of sūrahYāsīn from the single sūrah until it is compiled with taḥlīl texts and become widely used among traditionalist Muslims in Indonesia. The paper provides the faḍūl al-ʿamāl based on some muslim scholars. Some important questions will be dealt here, namely: why does sūrah Yāsīn has a special position? How was sūrahYāsīn and taḥlīl texts compiled in Indonesia? In this paper, I argue that the sūrahYāsīn compiled with taḥlīl texts is sort of textual forms which preserve the traditional Islamic thought and practices in Indonesia.

Key words: SūrahYāsīn and Taḥlīl

Introduction
Reciting the Qur’ān for Muslims is believed as one of the important religious activities which cannot be neglected in their daily lives. Pursuing the rewards from God, Muslims consider that reciting Qur’ān will give them advantages in this world and Hereafter as well. One of the prominent sūrah in the Holly Qur’ān frequently recited in any religious occasions and probably becomes the most popular sūrah among Muslims is sūrahYāsīn. Revealed in Mecca during the struggle of the Prophet Muhammad to preaching Islam, the sūrah gains more attention compared to other sūrah. To treat its privilege and honor, Muslims scholars have tried to separate sūrah Yāsīn from the Quran by rewriting and commenting it independently.
In Indonesian context, sūrah Yāsīn is usually recited in tahlilan ceremony, a religious ceremony in the archipelago in which sūrah Yāsīn, the last three sūrahs in the last chapter of the Qurʾān, some verses of Qurʾān including tahlīl texts are combined and recited together lead by a kyai (Muslim scholar). Unlike the so-called modernist Muslims who oppose the tahlilan ceremony which they consider as the bidʿah (heresy or innovation in religious practice), Muslim traditionalists on the other hand preserve the tahlilan ceremony by performing it in various religious occasions. In this sense, the tradition of tahlilan I assume has greatly contributed to the emergence of the codified Yāsīn and Tahlīl texts into a small book.

**Yāsīn Text and Ḥadīths of Faḍāʾil al-Aʿmāl on Sūrah Yāsīn**

Sūrah Yāsīn is the 36th sūrah of the Qurʾān based on ‘Uthmānic mushaf and the 41st based on chronological order. Revealed in Meccan period after sūrah al-Jinn and before sūrah al-Furqān, sūrah Yāsīn consists of 83 verses. Similar to sūrah Tāhā, the name of sūrah Yāsīn is derived from two Arabic alphabets in the beginning of the sūrah, Yā and Sīn. Citing Abdullah Mahmud Shahātah however, Baidan stated that actually sūrah Yāsīn has another name namely Ḥabīb al-Najjār but the later name is not as popular as Yāsīn. Even, the later name is extremely not recognized among Muslims community.

In addition, like the alphabet letters which start the 29 sūrahs in the Muslim’s holy book, the alphabet of Yā and Sīn in the beginning of the sūrah is categorized as fawātiḥ al-suwar, the opening letters of the sūrah which make the first verse of sūrah Yāsīn hesitant to be interpreted and understood by Muslim scholars. Muslim scholars who believe that all of the opening letters in 29 sūrahs in the Qurʾān cannot be construed, categorize the first verse of sūrah Yāsīn as al-Mutashābih āt verses (verses which cannot apparently be interpreted). This understanding leads them to render the meaning of the first verse in the beginning of 29 sūrahs only to the God.

On the other hand, some Muslim scholars such as Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Baiḍāwī, Ibn Taimiyah, and al-Mizzī proposed the meaning of alphabets starting 29 sūrahs of the Qurʾān as the prove of the inimitability of the Qurʾān(ijāz al-Qurʾān) showing that although the Qurʾān was revealed in Arab but the verses in the holy book cannot be imitated even by Arabian linguists. In the case of two alphabets proceeding sūrah Yāsīn, there are at least five meanings coined by Muslim scholars as stated in al-Māwardī’s exegesis. First, as proposed by Qatādah, it means one of the names of the
Qur’ān. The second, Yāsīn means one of the names of Allah who He himself gave pledge on it. This argument is proposed by Ibn ‘Abbās. The next was proposed by Mujāhid stating that Yāsīn are alphabets which open Allah’s word. The fourth, basing his argument on a ḥadīth stating that Allah gave seven names to prophet Muhammad namely Muhammad, Ahmad, Ṭāhā, Yāsīn, al-Muzzammil, al-Muddaththir, and ‘Abdillah, Ibn al-Ḥanīfiyyah argued that Yāsīn means a convocation to prophet Muhammad. The last argument on the meaning of Yāsīn is from al-Ḥasan who said that Yāsīn means “o human”. ⁹

Of course the most important thing in this regards is the abundant versions on the commentary of the whole body of the sūrah. All of the commentaries however strengthen the important role of Yāsīn as a great reading among Muslims since in general it deals with the fundament of Islamic tenets. According to Yusuf Ali for example, sūrahYāsīn consists of verses which relate to the central figure in the teaching of Islam, the central doctrine of revelation, and the Hereafter. ¹⁰In addition, since some verses concern with some of Hereafter’s events, sūrahYāsīn is appropriately read in somber ceremonies after death. ¹¹ This kind of understanding perhaps initiated the bounding of sūrahYāsīn with taḥlīl texts. Considering to the glorious meaning inside sūrahYāsīn, it is obvious if it can attract so many commentators to work on exegetical research in order to interpret and discover the hidden meanings of sūrahYāsīn by operating their backgrounds of knowledge, expertise, and experience.

However, an instrumental factor which accelerates sūrahYāsīn to be believed as an important sūrah in the Qur’ān and eventually recited by Muslims as one of devotional religious practices is ḥadīths on sūrahYāsīn. As the second source of Islamic law, indeed ḥadīth plays a significant factor as a catalyst in disseminating and explaining the Islamic concepts and teachings which are not clearly elucidated in the holy book. In the case of sūrahYāsīn, there are numbers of ḥadīths which describe Fadā’il al-A‘māl (the excellences to practice certain rituals) of the sūrah to be recited by Muslims. The ḥadīths of Fadā’il al-A‘māl which encourage Muslims to recite sūrahYāsīn in certain time and places usually concern with some futuristic motivations such as rewards in the Hereafter to sincerity and healing.

The logic behind the practice of recitingsūrahYāsīn among Muslims is certainly based on the understanding that ḥadīths is the prophet’s attitudes and practices which should be followed by a devout Muslim. Through the ḥadīths which describe some excellences of sūrahYāsīn,
Muslims imitate the prophet traditions hoping that it will guide them to obtain benefits in the world and Hereafter.

One of prominent hadiths which legitimate surahYāsīn to function among Muslims is hadith transmitted by Qatādah narrating that the prophet said “Indeed every creature has heart and the heath of the Qur‘ān is Yā Sīn (surahYāsīn). For those who recite Yāsīn, Allah will record their rewards as if they recited the Qur‘ānten times”. The hadith has been used by commentators in their commentaries to encourage Muslims to recite surahYāsīn by considering the rewards provided for those who recite surahYāsīn. Respectively, instead of reciting the entire of the Qur‘ān which consists of 114 surahs, Muslims would prefer to recite surahYāsīn which only consists of 83 verses with multiple rewards available. In this sense, it is unavoidable if surahYāsīn is chosen by Muslims to be recited more often rather than other surahs. In spite of abundant rewards provided for those who recite it, the hadith also shows the pivotal position of surahYāsīn in the Qur‘ān as the core of Muslim’s holy book.

In Indonesia, most of commentaries, exegesis, or the printed of surahYāsīn always include this kind of hadith in the first page before starting the texts or in the page right after the last verse of surahYāsīn. To describe hadiths of Faḍā’il al-A‘māl surah Yāsīn, the following table will show some hadiths narrations from two commentaries books of surah Yāsīn used among Indonesian Muslims.

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<th>No.</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Redactions</th>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>-Tafrīj Qulūb al-Mu‘minīn fī Taṣfīr Kalimāt Sūrah Yāsīn written by Ahmad Sanūsī Ibn Ḥāj ‘Abd al-Raḥīm</td>
<td>Surah Yāsīn as the heart of the Qur‘ān and multiple rewards</td>
<td>Indeed every object consists of heart and the heath of the heart is Yāsīn. For those who recite Yāsīn, Allah will record their rewards as if they recite the Quran ten times.</td>
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<td>God’s forgiveness</td>
<td>For those who recite Yāsīn in the night only for Allah intention, his</td>
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<td>Benefits of reciting Yāsīn</td>
<td>sins will be forgiven in that night.</td>
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<td>Yāsīn was stated in the Torah as surah Mu‘immah and for those who recite it, he will obtain the righteousness in the World and Hereafter, be prevented from the misery in the world and Hereafter, realize his dreams, gain twenty times rewards of going pilgrimage. For those who listen to Yāsīn will acquire rewards as if he give charity of a thousand dinār (Arabic currency), for those who write and drink Sūrah Yāsīn he just like intakes into his stomach a thousand of medicine, light, beliefs, barakah (blessing), and it will reduce thousands of his disease.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Sūrah Yāsīn in the heath of Ummah</th>
<th>Sūrah Yāsīn is in my ummah's heart.</th>
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<td>Death as a martyr</td>
<td>Whoever regularly recites Sūrah Yāsīn every night, he will pass away as a martyr.</td>
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<td>Reciting Sūrah Yāsīn besides the corpse</td>
<td>If someone passed away in which Sūrah Yāsīn is being recited, Allah will decrease his sins and the grave punishment.</td>
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<td>Reciting Sūrah</td>
<td>Whoever visits his parents’ shrines or one</td>
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<td><strong>Yāsīn in the shrines</strong></td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td><strong>-Tafsīr Sūrah Yāsīn written by al-Syaikh Ḥamāmī Zādah</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Sūrah Yāsīn as the heart of the Qurʾān and multiple rewards</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Sūrah Yāsīn before the creature of universe</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Sūrah Yāsīn as language of paradise</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Reciting Sūrah Yāsīn to the dying</strong></td>
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<td><strong>The particularity of Sūrah Yāsīn</strong></td>
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recite sincerely Sūrah Yāsīn, Allah will make him full with its excellence, Allah will omit his fear, if it is recited by the have not, Allah will free him from debt, if it is recited based on certain purposes, Allah will actualize the reader’s purposes, Allah also will give security and so forth.

The above hadīths in the two commentaries on Sūrah Yāsīn have been taught by Muslim’s scholars in the pesantren (traditional Islamic boarding school). This would obviously encourage Muslims to recite Sūrah Yāsīn since pesantren is one of agents of religious dissemination in Indonesia.

Although the study of the transmission of hadīth texts to Indonesian Muslims has never been investigated profoundly since the main concern still in the transmission of Islam in the archipelago and the exegetical work of local ‘ulamā’in fact the effect of hadīths especially demonstrating the excellences of Sūrah Yāsīn is quite significant among Indonesian Muslims. Furthermore, I assume that the presence of hadīths above are coincided with the arrival of ṣūfī orders who brought Islamic mysticism and disseminated Ḥadīths of Faḍā’il al-Aʿmāl to new Muslims in the archipelago.

Tahlīl Texts in the Archipelago

The main factor which conveys the uniqueness of Islam in the archipelago is the ability of Islamic teachings to adopt and adapt local cultures in order to accelerate number of followers. This has constructed Islamic tradition in the archipelago to possess its own uniqueness compared to the core of Islam in the Middle East. One of examples of religious uniqueness is tahlīlānteremony in which its meaning to some extent is similar to slametan (ritual meals). The underlying idea of tahlīlān ceremony is actually to conduct dhikr (religious activity and formula in order to approach Allah by reciting lā ilāha illā ‘llāh as the first component in Islamic profession of faith, shahādah).
The ritual of conducting *dhikr* collectively was prominently introduced by *ṣūfī* orders which rapidly developed during the gradual conversion in the archipelago. Qādiriyah-Naqsabandiyah *ṣūfī* order which developed between 16-17 century and as one of prominent *ṣūfī* orders for example introduced model of *dhikr* *ālāha illā 'llāh with certain movements which should be recited chronologically. In the further gradual development however, the shift of the *dhikr* was taken place from which formerly used by *ṣūfī* orders as the religious media to remember Allah to the religious activity which the *dhikr* formula of *lā ilāha illā 'llāh was combined by certain verses in order to send prayers and blessing to the death souls making the term of *tahlilan* arose. In the later development, various texts were imbued to the *tahlilan* texts including *ṣūrah* Yāsīn. From then on, the collective *dhikr* activity is not only conducted by *ṣūfī* order’s members but also by every Muslim who want to deliver prayers to their parent’s and family’s soul.

In addition, the material of *tahlīl* is various which depends on the leader of the *tahlilan* ceremony in terms of his the Islamic education background and religious experiences. However, the standard text of *tahlīl* is as followed:

1. Reciting *ṣūrah* Yāsīn
2. Praying for Allah by presenting prayer to the spirit of the prophet Muhammad, his Companions, and his family by sending al-*Fātihah*.
3. Reciting *ṣūrah* al-*Ikhlās, al-*Falaq*, and al-*Nās* interspersed with *lā ilāha illā 'llāh wallahu akbar* in each *ṣūrah*.
4. Reciting *ṣalawat* to the prophet Muhammad 33 times.
5. Reciting prayer to prophet Muhammad, all previous prophets, angels, devout Muslims, to Abī Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, ‘Alī and all of his Companions, to al-*Tābi‘īn*.
6. Praising Allah by reciting some of His glorious names such as al-*Ḥayyū* and al-*Qayyūm*.
7. Reciting *dhikr* *ālāha illā 'llāh*100 times.
8. Reciting *ṣalawāt* to the prophet
9. Reciting *tasbīh subhānallah wa bihamdih*33 times.
10. Reciting another *tasbīh*Allahumma *ṣallī ‘alā ḥabībika sayyidīnā Muhammad wa ‘alā ‘ālihi wa ṣāḥbihi wa sallim* 2 times.
11. Reciting Allahumma *ṣallī ‘alā ḥabībika sayyidīnā Muḥammad wa ‘alā ‘ālihi wa ṣāḥbihi wa bārik wa sallim agma‘īn.
12. Closed by reciting al-*Fātihah*.
The different forms of tahlilan texts are usually related to the number formula of ّلا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا ّلَهٰ ِّلَهْ ّلَهُ loudly recited during the ceremony which is started from thirty three, hundreds, until thousands times or the verses from the Qur’ān included. In Tahlīl text form written by Bīsrī Mustafā published by Menara Kudus for example, it contains the first five verses and the last three verses of surah al-Baqarah including verse kursī (the 255th verse of Al-Baqarah).

The Role of Printing

Although the emergence of codification of printed surah Yāsīn and Tahlīl texts cannot precisely be determined since the publishers of several books of the codified surah Yāsīn and Tahlīl found did not include the exact dating of the text, I would assume that the codification of surah Yāsīn and Tahlīl texts into printed form was produced in the early twentieth century. During this period, the wave of Islamic reformism began to establish in the archipelago campaigning the teachings of prominent Islamic reformist thinkers from Egypt and articulating the Islamic doctrines in the light of the modern spirit of progress through print media to purify the Muslim religious practices and thought. In the flip side of this modernization process, the debate on Islamic thought between traditionalist and modernist Muslims contested and disputed ranging from the case of ijtihād (legal reasoning), the attributes of God, taqlīd (the blind obedience to Islamic schools of thought), talqīn (the instruction to the dead), and ziyārah (visiting the graveyard).

During this period also, number of modern Islamic movements and organizations were established creating the sense of threat among traditional Muslims in performing their traditional religious practices and ceremony. Those factors in my opinion finally lead the traditionalist Muslims to initiate printing the codification of surah Yāsīn and Tahlīl. The production of the codification of surah Yāsīn and Tahlīl in one simple and modern book printed by several printing publishers in several cities in the archipelago could be seen as the solution in order to preserve the traditional thought and practices which have been handed down from the early generation of Indonesian Muslims. The practice of reciting surah Yāsīn and Tahlīl furthermore creates the identity maker of traditional Muslims in Indonesia since the texts has been used as a media to conduct religious ceremony that in the view of modernists is categorized as illicit.
Conclusion

The emergence of printed sūrah Yāsīn and Ṭaḥlīl texts bound together into one small single book spread among Indonesian Muslims emerges through three historical phases. The first phase is the emergence of the various interpretations on sūrah Yāsīn and the rise of several hadīths describing some of Fadā’il al-A’māl (the hadīths which describe the excellence of rituals) of reciting sūrah Yāsīn. The second is the arrival of Islam to the archipelago brought by šūfī orders which conveyed the mystical interpretations and customs and finally promoted tahlīl texts. The third is the impact of the heated tension between traditionalist and modernist Islam in Indonesia in the beginning of 20th century which initiated the traditionalists to create the printed sūrah Yāsīn and Ṭaḥlīl texts. These historical phases might influence Muslims community in the archipelago to position the codified sūrah Yāsīn and Ṭaḥlīl texts play the role as it is.

Although recent development shows that the separation and polarity between Islam traditionalist and Islam modernist in Indonesia is more blur especially in terms of education system of the former which has been improved, the tension on reciting sūrah Yāsīn and Ṭaḥlīl text in fact is still exist. Many books have been written by modernist Muslims describing the “guilty” of Muslims who practice reciting sūrah Yāsīn and Ṭaḥlīl text during slametan, tahlilan, or syukuran by describing some weaknesses of Islamic foundations used as the theological basis to conduct tahlilan ceremony. However, tahlilan in which sūrah Yāsīn and Ṭaḥlīl recited is preserved as a cultural heritage of traditionalist Muslims.

Endnotes:

1 The term traditionalist refers to syncretic belief system which combines the Islamic tenets with indigenous beliefs and practices which has been handed down before Islam came to the archipelago. Meanwhile, modernist refers to those who voice of the need to back to the Qur’ān and Sunna.
2 Lecturer at IAIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten. He can be contacted at albantanirohman81@gmail.com
3 Zoeber Djamaluddin, Surah Yāsīn dan Tafsirnya; Menurut Sejarah dan Irama Bahasanya, Jakarta, Yayasan Lembaga al Ghazali dan Pustaka Madrasah, 1959, p. 16.
4 According to Satori Ismail however, there was one sect in Islam which believed that the 12th verse of sūrah Yāsīn was revealed in Medina. See, Hidayat Nur Wahid, Sentuhan kalbu Al Quran; Tadabbur Sūrah Yāsīn untuk Pencerahan Ruhiyah, Jakarta, Pustaka Ikadi, 2004, p.4. This argument also correlates to Baidan who cited al-Shaukan and al-Qurtubī that the
12th verse of sura Yāsīn was revealed in Medina. Meanwhile, according to Ibn ‘Abbās and Qatādah the 47th verse of sura Yāsīn also was revealed in Medina. See, Nashruddin Baidan, Taṣīr Kontemporer Surat Yāsīn, Solo, Tiga Serangkai, 2009, p.3. It means that the 83 verses of theṣūrah is not entirely revealed in Mecca.

6 There are fourteen alphabets operated infawāth al-suwar compiled by Muslim scholars in one sentence namely Nas karīm qāthi‘u lahu sir meaning the precise honor texts which have secret. See, M. Quraish Shihab, Tafsir al-Misbah, Pesan, Kesam, dan Keserasian Al-Quran, Lentera Hati, Jakarta, 2002, p. 504. See also the discussion of Thefawāthh al-suwar in James A. Bellamy, The Mysterious Letters of the Qur’ān: Old Abbreviations of the Basmalah, in Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 93, No. 3 (Jul.-Sep., 1973), p. 267-270. In this article, Bellamy discussed thefawāth al-suwar also known as akhwāfīl-muqaffa‘ah (the disconnected letters) which became one of the sources of debate in Qur’ānic studies among Muslim scholars and western orientalists. The debate deals with the meaning of letters starting 29 sūrah in the Quran which are various. Bellamy argued that the first century of Muslim scholars did not know the real meaning of thefawāth al-suwar and therefore the interpretations proposed by Muslim scholars in the first century of Islam are all guesses. On the other side, Western scholars such as T. Nöldeke and H. Hirschfeld believed that the letters proceeding the 29 sūrah in the Quran possess meaning which could be interpreted as the owner of the texts in sort of abbreviation such as Tā Ḥā stands for Ṭalīhah, ḤaMimNn stands for ‘Abd al-Rahmān.


11 Ibid., Reciting sūrah Yāsīn in the grave yards, shrines, or in sadness occasions are not only practiced by Indonesian Muslims but also by Turkish. See, Julie Marcus, A World of Difference; Islam and Gender Hierarchy in Turkey, Victoria, London and New Jersey, 1992.

12 There are actually some hadīths discussing the excellence of reciting a particular sūrah such as reciting sūrah al-Wāqī‘ah, al-Kahf, al-Mulk and al-‘Ikhlās but those are less familiar than reciting sūrah Yāsīn.

13 Although in the view of modernist Muslims all hadīthsin the column are categorized as non sāhiḥhadīth in certain degrees such as du‘ā‘ī (weak hadīth) or maudū‘ (unoriginal hadīth), traditionalists on the other hand classify thehadīths discussing the faḍāil ‘amal on sūrah Yāsīn could become the basis to do worship because of ictiyāt (the principle of alertness to practice hadīthtexts classified as da‘īf (weak hadīth)). To see some hadīths categorized as da‘īf (weak hadīth) or maudū‘ (unoriginal hadīth) on sūrah Yāsīn, see three examples from Muhammad Nāshir al-Dīn al-‘Albānī in the first chapter of Sīlah al-Hadīth al-Da‘īfah wa al-Maudū‘ah, Beirut, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1977, p. 66-7, 202-4, 358-9. See also, Wawan Sofwan Shalehuddin, Faḍilah Yāsīn; Telaah Kritis Atas Hadis-Hadis, Bandung, Penerbit Humaniora, 2004.

14 The exegesis of sūrah Yāsīn was written in Sundanese language and inspired by three exegesis books entitled Durru al-Mantsūr of al-Imām Jalāluddīn Sayūṭī, Lubāb al-Ta‘wīl
I would like to thank Prof. J.J. Witkam who suggested me to read this exegesis. Both names are used interchangeably especially the mortuary ceremony such as the commemorating the 3rd, 7th, 40th, 1000th days of the death, the visiting of grave, and so forth. Another religious ritual is *syukuran*. Unlike *tahlilan* and *slametan* which are usually related to sorrow commemorations, *syukuran* usually deals with happiness occasions such as to celebrate the blessing for the new house, fourth or seventh month of pregnancy, or newborn children. However, the reciting texts during those commemorations are the same with *Sūrah Yāsīn* and *Tahlīl* texts recited together.


This religious tradition moreover is identical to cultural symbol of the largest traditionalist Muslim organization in Indonesia, *Nahdatul 'ulamā*'. See, Zainuddin Fanani and Atiqa Sabardila, *Sumber Konflik Masyarakat Muslim Muhammadiyah-NU; Perspektif Kebijakan* *Tablīl*, Surakarta, Muhammadiyah University Press, 2000, p. 18.

Ibid., p.34.

I quote the form of the *tahlīl* text from Ja'far Ṣabrān, *Tahlīl wa Talaqīn*, Banjarmasin, Toko Buku Hasanu,


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