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**CYCLIC PROCESS APPROACH FOR DISPOSING ISLAMIC
LITERATURE MATERIAL IN MALAYSIA: A STUDY**

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Abstract

Despite the vast production of Islamic literature printings every year, little is known about the reality of its disposal process. Is it properly managed? Would it harm the environment? And is there any method other than the burning process? According to the latest statement of Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM), Jabatan Agama Islam (JAIS) and Jabatan Agama Wilayah Persekutuan (JAWI), they are not able to accept any unused, published Islamic literature materials for disposal for the time being due to the large volume at the collection center. This study involves a serious look at the root causes of the problem and we perceived that the present fatwa and guidelines in Malaysia restricting the disposal method to only burning and disseminating the ashes into the sea as the main reason behind the insufficient space issue at the collection center. Moreover, the protection of environment is a serious concern in Islam. Preservation of environment is not merely an empty word or spoken issue among people. It has to be followed through with actions. This study is an attempt to review the present *fatwa* and guidelines throughout Malaysia related to the disposing of Islamic literature materials. Concurrently, this study also aims to identify other sustainable means of disposing Islamic literature materials instead of restricting to burning and throwing them into the sea. Last but not least, it aims to propose a new comprehensive guideline for disposing Islamic literature materials.

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Keywords: *Fatwa*, method, guidelines, environment.



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1. Introduction

For the past centuries, the world has been transformed rapidly by the advancement of technology. Paper, once considered a rare commodity, has been produced in abundance nowadays, allowing paper-based publications to grow and become affordable. Meanwhile, the development of printing industry technology reduces overall printing time, making publications accessible to many. What previously took around four months to reproduce a whole text, has now been reduced. It was described by Deroche (2013) that the introduction of paper in the tenth century probably boosted the spread of Qur'anic copies, but it was not until the introduction of the technology of printing that the book became widely available (Myrvold, 2014).

In Islam, the Quran and all kinds of Islamic literature materials need to be disposed properly when they are worn out (al-Suyuthi, 2014). Scholars in Islam have set out a proper guideline on how to manage these old materials. But nowadays, new problems have come to light with the conventional method for the disposal of Islamic literature materials. Before we go further into the discussions, we will first define the term "Islamic literature materials" that will be the heart of this research work.

The term "Islamic Literature" given by Syed Qutb, "A beautiful way of expressing the world, life, man. It is an art where beauty meets truth in a perfect manner. And beauty is the truth of existence while the truth is the apex of beauty. That is why they come together in a story where all the truths of existence meet" (As cited in Kubarek, 2016).

Barighish (2013) explained that Najib al-Kilani (1931–1995) was the first to use the term "Islamic character" (*Al-Islamiyah*) in the context of literature in his dissertation *Al-Islamiyah wa-al-Mazahib al-Adabiyah* (The Islamic Character and Literary Schools) (as cited in Kubarek, n.d). Al-Kilani defines Islamic literature as a responsibility and obligation that flows from the heart and convictions of a believer and is based on the Divine Book revealed in the clear language of the Arabs (as cited in Kubarek, n.d).

In *Madkhal ila Nazariyat al-Adab al-Islami* (Introduction to the Theory of Islamic Literature), Khalil defines the functions that al-adab al-islami should fulfil. The most important and superior is the doctrinal function, followed by the political, social, psychological, historical, methodological and educational function (Kubarek, 2016, n.p). For Khalil, Islamic literature is not only determined by the Muslim perspective and philosophy but also by aesthetics referring to Quranic models (Kubarek, 2016).

The term "material" has wide meanings. According to Oxford Dictionary (2017), materials can be defined into a few things. Firstly, it is the elements, constituents, or substances of which something is composed or can be made. Secondly, it is the matter that has qualities which give it individuality and by which it may be categorized for example sticky material and explosive material. Third, it is something (as data) that may be worked into a more finished form material for a biography or it is something used for or made the object of study.

According to the Malaysia Printing Quranic Texts Act 1986, the term "document" refers to any matter expressed, described, or howsoever described, is any substance, material, goods or articles, including any matter embodied in a disc, tape, film, sound track or whatever any other device, by means of (a) letters, numbers, signs, symbols, gestures, symbols, or whatever form of expression, description, or

representation; (b) any visual recording (whether still or moving images); (c) any sound recording, or anything else electronic, magnetic fields, mechanical or other recording whatsoever and howsoever made, or any sounds, electronic impulses, or whatever other data; (d) a recording, or transmission, over a distance of any matter by any, or any combination, of the means mentioned in paragraph (a), (b) or (c).

These descriptions clearly included under previous definition.

Therefore the phrase “Islamic literature materials” can be understood as anything related to the sacredness and beauty of Islamic works, especially in a physical form such as books, journals, sculptures, craft and so on.

During the 3rd Caliph Uthman Ibn Affan’s reign, the quantities of paper-based Islamic literature materials were still a scarcity. Therefore, the ethical burning of mushaf was considered acceptable. Over time, the technological advances in the printing media has led to the remarkable growth of paper-based publications. Correspondingly, the demand to provide a means of disposing unused published materials has also increased. There was a recent case in the Terengganu state where 1,800 kilograms ashes of the Quran were disseminated into the sea due to the abundance of the damaged Quran in the aftermath of the flood caused by monsoon-seasons in that area. This same problem is likely to resurface in the future due to heavy rainfall during the monsoon period that will ultimately lead to severe flood in the state. It is reported in Harian Metro Ghazali Taib (2016) said that *Jabatan Hal Ehwal Agama Terengganu* (JHEAT) aims about 163.8 metric tons of Quranic materials will be burned every year which will produce about 23.4 metric tons of ashes. In other words, an enormous amount of ashes will be disseminated into the sea which can ultimately harm the environment. Therefore, the traditional method of disposal has to be reviewed in order to overcome this problem (Malaysia Ministry of Home Affairs, 2017).

“Cyclic process” means process that was repeated many times and always happening in the same order (Oxford Dictionary, 2017, “cyclic”). While according to explanation based on physics terminology; in a cyclic process, the system starts in a particular state and returns to that state after undergoing a few different processes. In Oxford Dictionary (2017), ‘recycle’ is defined as return (material) to a previous stage in a cyclic process. These definitions show these terms can be used interchangeably. Thus, cyclic process in this study is a process of recycling Islamic literature materials.

Hence, more research is needed to look into the effectiveness of this theory of the cyclic process approach for disposing Islamic literature materials in Malaysia.

2. Problem Statement

During the era of Prophet’s Companions especially the 3rd Caliph Uthman Ibn Affan’s reign, the quantity of paper-based Islamic literature materials were still scarce (Al-Suyuti, 2014, p.36). Therefore, the ethical burning of Mushaf (Quran) was an acceptable disposal method at that time. This event was narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari, where Caliph Uthman Ibn Affan ordered the compilation of Quranic verses (Barighish, 2013). The first copy was kept, and the rest were ordered to be burned. Mus'ab bin Sa'd said: "I have found many people who witnessed the events which Uthman commanded the burning of other mushaf. The action is a surprise for them but not one among them denies it" (Abu Daud, 2013, p.178).

The advancement of the technology in printing media has led to the growth of paper-based publishing Islamic literature materials. Eventually, the demand to provide a means of disposing unused, published materials has also increased. In Malaysia alone, according to the latest statement of JAKIM, JAIS and JAWI, they are not able to accept any unused, published Islamic literature materials for disposal for the time being due to the large volume at the collection centre. Based on our early research, we perceive that the present fatwa and guidelines in Malaysia which restrict the disposal method to only burning and disseminating the ashes into the sea as the main reason behind the bottleneck problem at the collection centre (Salleh, 2015).

On top of that, given the substantial amount of material to be disposed, we believe that this method is not environmentally friendly. Statistics have shown that the burning of any material which occurs globally has worsened the Air Quality Index (AQI). Malaysia also witness environmental degradation due to worsening AQI, a problem mutually faced by the developing and also underdeveloped countries of the world. As explained by Mohammad et al. (2013), pollution forms from the solid wastes due to the poor civic sense, inadequate facilities and inefficient management systems. Islamic ethics dictates that environment should be preserved, hence, a more sustainable disposal method for the Islamic literature material should be identified and explored.

3. Research Questions

Can other means of disposing Islamic literature material be used to replace the classical disposing method?

4. Purpose of the Study

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To review the present *fatwa* and guidelines throughout Malaysia related to the disposing of Islamic literature materials.
- ii. To propose a new comprehensive guideline for disposing Islamic literature materials.

To identify other sustainable means for disposing Islamic literature materials as alternatives to burning and throwing into the sea.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Analytical Method

The study will begin with analytical method to explore the existing fatwa and guidelines available throughout Malaysia in order to rectify their loopholes, especially with regards to inculcating sustainable and efficient method of disposing Islamic literature material.

5.2. Inductive Method

The researchers will sort out all related Qur'anic verses, Prophetic hadith and *athar* of the Companions and Successors related to this issue by embracing inductive method This will be followed by understanding and comprehending the selected interpretations of Quranic verses from classical and modern Muslims exegetes as well as the most authoritative commentaries on the hadith and *athar*.

5.3. Deductive Method

Deductive method is used in proposing a new comprehensive guideline and identifying other sustainable means for disposing Islamic literature materials.

6. Findings

At the beginning of this study, the researcher has discussed about what is actually the factors that triggered this research. Matters concerning insufficient space at collection centre, floods occurring every year that caused huge damage to the *Mushaf*, tons of ashes that were disseminated into the sea every year, and water pollutions problems in Malaysia are all the problems that lead to this research. Then, more elaborations are given regarding the condition of Islamic material disposal in Malaysia. This includes problems and challenges, recent issues of pollution and finally, solutions and *fatawa* imposed by Fatwa Committee, National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia are reviewed.

6.1. Decision of the 30th Dialogue of Fatwa Committee, National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia in 1992.

- i. The defective, torn, illegible, non-Uthmani script of the Quran must be disposed.
- ii. The burning and burying methods must be carried out in a controlled environment.
- iii. Work on the disposal shall be entrusted to the Secretariat or the Council and the Islamic Department of the States. The process needs to be done in a hidden way in order to avoid misunderstandings of the public.

6.2. Decision of the 6th Dialogue of Fatwa Committee, National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia in 2005 (Disposal Law of Islamic Education Textbook Recycle).

- i. Work on the recycling of textbooks for Islamic education preferably carried out by a company owned by Muslims.
- ii. Employees involved in the recycling process shall consist of Muslims.
- iii. Paper and Islamic Education textbooks recycled shall not be used to make materials that are inappropriate, such as toilet paper and so on.
- iv. The chemicals used in the recycling process shall not contain impurities.

Yet this fatwa was seen still cannot support the whole actions and procedures of disposing Islamic literature materials especially the *Mushaf*. It only restricted to the disposal of Islamic Education Textbook. This can be seen by massive burning of *Mushaf* and dissemination of ashes into the sea every year (Salleh, 2015, n.p.).

Later on, by embracing inductive method the researcher have sorted out all related Quranic verses, Prophetic *hadith* and *athar* of the Companions (*ashab*) and Successors (*tabi'in*) related to the disposal of *Mushaf*. The researcher also explained the Islamic literature materials under the light of *al-masalih al-mursalah*. According to Al-Ghazali (2012), the essential application of public interests issue is divided into two aspects; positive and negative. The first one deals with the seeking or acquiring of a certain benefit, goodness, utility or beneficence, while the second concerns the removal of evil, harm, or injuries

from the life of the individual and ultimately the public. In legal discussion, the question does not stop there; it goes a step further, embracing the preservation of the five principles according to *Maqasid As Shariah* (Ibnu Taimiyah, 2014), namely religion, life, reason, lineage and property (Al-Ghazali, 2012).

Here, we can say that Islamic literature disposal can be categorized into *al-masalih al-mursalah* as it fulfils the principle and needs of human beings. During the reign Uthman Ibn Affan, the burning is carried out to avoid disunity among Muslims (Saqar, 2012). So the main concern at that time is religion, while the main need or objectives (*maqasid*) we are focusing now is life and property. At the end of the discussion, it can be concluded that the recycle of Islamic literature materials could be seen as a possible solution to this problem.

Last but not least, the researcher has proposed a new comprehensive guidelines. Other sustainable means for disposing Islamic literature materials is also identified i.e. recycling. Based on the understanding of the Quranic verses, *hadith and athar* of companions, together with the reviewed *fatawa* and discussion under *al-masalih al-mursalah*, new guidelines have been restructured as well.

6.2.1. Steps for Recycle

These steps include mushaf and all kinds of Islamic literature materials such as prophetic traditions, books of tafsir, and any materials containing Quranic verses or Allah's name. Steps for recycle are as follows:

- i. One should identify the company or collection centre that provides the service of recycling Islamic literature materials including mushaf.
- ii. The process of recycling the mushaf must be done separately from the recycling of Islamic literature materials.
- iii. Work on the recycling of mushaf and Islamic literature materials preferably carried out by a company owned by Muslims.
- iv. Employees involved in the recycling process shall consist of Muslims.
- v. Islamic literature materials recycled shall not be used to make other materials that are inappropriate, such as toilet paper, newspaper and so on.

The chemicals used in the recycling process shall not contain impurities.

7. Conclusion

Islamic literature material disposal is a global discourse that should not be taken lightly. It revolves around the act of dealing with the sacred scriptures in Islam. As Malaysia consists of majority Muslims, it means that we deal with much more religious literature materials than any other religions. As time goes by, the demands and needs will continue to increase, hence Islamic literature material's publication and the disposal process must be on the same pace.

Moreover, the environment is in dire need of human's care. Protection of the environment should not just become an environmental rhetoric, but rather it has to be manifested. The balance between human activity and environment must be established for the healthy future.

Islam is a progressive religion that fits human needs throughout the time. Even if Islam is made up of fixed principles and notions, somehow it is still flexible and complement human's life. This can be

seen along the growth and development of Muslim's society in Malaysia and throughout the world. Islamic literature materials disposal is one of the subject matter in this evolution. Method and procedure to dispose Islamic literature material may be varied by time yet the essence of this action is still the same - to respect the *Mushaf* and at the same time to preserve the nature.

The foregoing discussions lead us to hold that the cyclic process approach or the recycle process for disposing Islamic literature materials in Malaysia is a reliable method of interpreting the *Shari'ah*. Therefore, this method could assist people, especially Muslims to overcome difficulty and inconvenience regarding disposal matter.

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