

## Rediscovering Islamic Values And Elements In P. Ramlee's Film Using Islamic Epistemology-Based Data Analysis

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**Abstract:** Undoubtedly, P. Ramlee's film is the national treasure of, not only the Malay film industry, but also the treasure of Malaysian hearts and minds. All generations of Malay, Chinese and Indian adore P. Ramlee's film though the films were made decades ago with whatever technology available at that time. Intellectuals and scholars such as Afifi al-Akiti and Kazim Elias have categorically contributed P. Ramlee films success to his cunning crafty ideas and aspiration in incorporating Islamic values in film making. In this research, selected scenes from three of Ramlee films, Ali Baba Bujang Lapok (1961), Tiga Abdul (1964) and Ahmad Albab (1968) are qualitatively processed based on pre-defined Islamic values. The Islamic Epistemology Based Data Analysis is then applied in which verses of the Quran is retrieved based on potential keyword. The main focus is to extract potential reference points made in the films as Al-Akiti (2013).

### 1. Introduction

Films and songs are part of Malay proud heritage in the context of Malay tradition and heritage in the 1950s and 1960s. The ever versatile actor, director, singer and composer, the late Tan Sri P. Ramlee, born Teuku Zakaria bin Teuku Nyak Putih in the morning of Eid Fitri 21<sup>st</sup> March 1928. During the course of his 44 years lifetime, he have composed 401 songs and acted, directed and involved in 66 films. Many of his films and songs have greatly influenced generations of Malay, Indian and Chinese not only in Malaysia, but also Indonesia, Singapore and Brunei (Hussain, 1984; Sarji, 1999; Kamal, 2017). P. Ramlee's films such as the Bujang Lapok trilogy (Bujang Lapok, 1957; Pendekar Bujang Lapok, 1959; Ali Baba Bujang Lapok, 1961) are a masterpiece work of art loved by generations of audiences since its was first screened and continues to be adored today. Scholarly research on P. Ramlee films are scarcely available online, a simple search in a number of online databases (ProQuest, Emerald, ScienceDirect, Ebscohost and Google Scholar) returned less than a handful of papers.

With respect of such historical figure, naturally the subject research publication (biography, research, conference papers, etc.) in books, research article and other forms of printed materials can be easily abundantly found. In contrast, the subject publication in the digital and online world is less available because of virtual world interest are more inclined towards contemporary topics. Nevertheless, the availability of sources on the subject is not of our concern. Our focus is to identify and recognize elements and values in three of P. Ramlee films which depict or convey message of Islam. The most prolific P. Ramlee's film depicting hudud or Islamic law is Semerah Padi (1956). Critics have argued that the scene of punishment for adultery was misleading, but anyhow the film had shown many inspiring and memorable scenes which can provoke

thoughts and ideas about Islamic law.

Recently there was a research investigating Islamic law and values in Semerah Padi film, in which it was concluded that P. Ramlee’s use of technology and technique in the film was an excellent work reminiscence those of Indian directors, (Zaki, Mustaffa & Irmawati, 2014). Indeed, P.Ramlee is a very gifted personage with unrivalled flair and wit in film making. Zaki, Mustaffa and Irmawati inferred the techniques used in Semerah Padi as traits that come close to what Sarris (1962) auteur theory. The auteur theory holds that the director, who oversees all audio and visual elements of the motion picture, is more to be considered as the “author” of the movie than is the writer of the screenplay. In other words, such fundamental visual elements as camera placement, blocking, lighting, and scene length, rather than plot line, convey the message of the film. Proponents of the auteur theory further argued that the most cinematically successful films will bear the unmistakable personal stamp of the director, (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2017).

In the context of Malay films conveying or representing Islam, indeed Semerah Padi (1956) is an iconic and evergreen film work portraying the message of Islam. Regardless of that fact, we should ponder how is the conditions and norms of Islam and Malays at the time. The middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century is a very significant moment in Malaysia, it is the historic years when the British leave Malaya and thus given Malaya its long awaited independent. Islam at the time, is not like today, departure of the British leaves many Western lifestyle which at the time was a norm. Women at the time does not properly cover head as most Muslim women today, (Ibrahim, 2014). Reflecting the poor state of Islam at time, to produce Islamic ideas like Semerah Padi is extraordinary and outstanding. That is what have earned P. Ramlee as a one of kind versatile artist.

**2. Arts and Islamic Perspective**

Arts in the Islamic perspective is any activity or creativity resembling worship or act of deeds created by Muslims from any walk of life in their respective countries, (Beg, 1981). Arts is the combination of aesthetic and Islamic ethical values, (Gazalba, 1981). In defining arts in Islam, Al-Faruqi & Ibsen (1981) expressed the importance of balance between superficial shape and intrinsic content imitating the content of the Holy Quran. Arts in Islam must be a harmony between aesthetic (*Al-Jamal*) and the Truth (*Al-Haq*), (Al-Faruqi & Ibsen, 1986). Thus, arts in the Islamic perspective is the embodiment of beauty, aesthetic and magnificence and elements of truth. Nasr (1993) believed arts in Islam should not only expressed in magnitudes of media, but more importantly it must convey the soul and message of Islam. Indeed, Islam outlined few fundamentals relating to arts and film making which one must comply. First and foremost, artistic work must adhere to Tawhid (monotheism) principles. Any form of idolatry, polytheism, supersitision and other deviants form are forbidden and rejected.

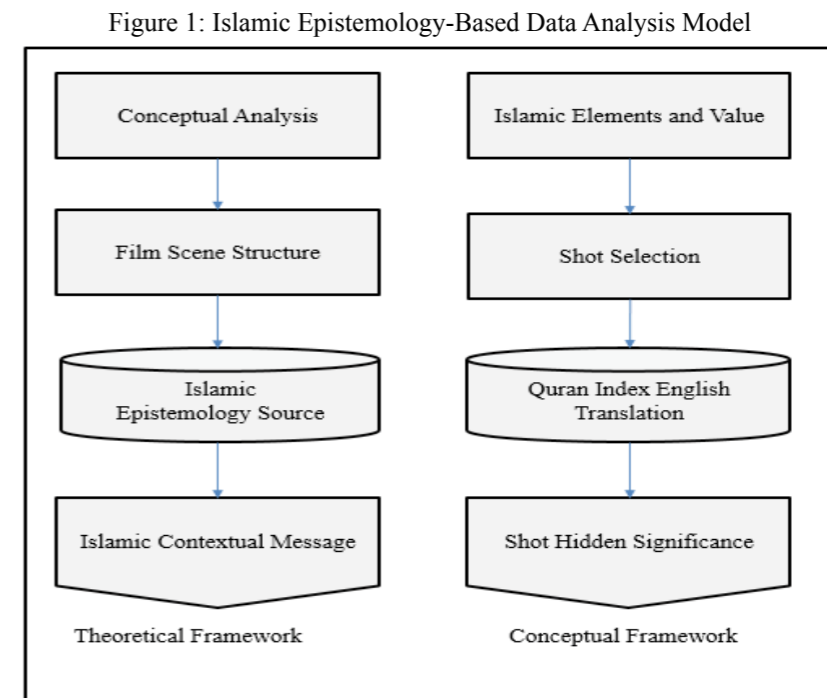
In the context of visual arts, Al-Faruqi and Ibsen (1986) gave three significant points of what arts in Islam should be. Though the context is visual arts, there are significance and similarity that can be applied in art in film making. First of all, Tawhid must be the message that is aesthetically expressed. Al-Faruqi and Ibsen stressed out that Islamic arts are indeed based from words of the Quran. The basis is that without the revelation of the Quran, the culture could not have been generated and there religion could have been neither an Islamic religion, an Islamic state, an Islamic philosophy, an Islamic law, an Islamic society, nor an Islamic economy. The second point is that the Quran as the artistic model. The explanation of such an abstract point is as complicated as the Quran itself. Al-Faruqi and Ibsen described the Quran as a potent source of reference which mean that from 114 surahs (chapter or verse) in the Quran, mountains and volumes of descriptions, lecturers, scientific proof, and research testing can easily come out.

Al-Faruqi and Ibsen described Quran as the inimitable perfection designated as the *i'jaz*, or the power to incapacitate. Nevertheless, the inability to match its eloquence has not kept it from being a model for all the arts. Such is the significance of the Quran that it has shaped cultures in adopting and borrowing inspiration and ideas. The Quran is the core or model that molded the adoption of many magnificence idea and it is a sublime embodiment of the Islamic message of Tawhid. The third point, Al-Faruqi signified the symbolic nature of Islamic art, citing scholars’ claim that, for them the forms, objects, scenes, and even letters and numbers used in Islamic arts have a *batini* (hidden) significance. Just as the phallic pillar of the Hindu Gods hold special religious sigificance or the Christian’s cross representation of the crucifixion scene, so does specific Islamic symbols visually represent a wealth of meaning to be grasped and understood.

**3. Methodology**

This research apply the Islamic Epistemology-Based Data Analysis which seeks to analyse film structure in shots and scenes that potentially conveying elemets of Islam and its value. In referring to Islamic epistemology, the highest importance of reference is the Holy Quran. Thus, the potential elements and value is then search for its approximation in the verses using Marmaduke Pickhtall Quran translation. The reason for choosing Pickhtall’s translation is the fact that he is a true Englishman and of course he is Muslim, could or likely have given justice to its translation the word of Allah in his native language. In this part, the online translation of Pickhtall is used. The last part is the analysis in which literatures

and the Quran verses is qualitatively discussed specific for each selected shots. The shot hidden significance is inspired by Al-Faruqi and Ibsen views of the symbolism of Islamic arts as discussed earlier.



**4. Conceptual Analysis: Islamic Elements and Values in the Film Making Context**

Fundamentally, Islam prioritise good conduct and behaviour as exemplified by Prophet Muhammad. Oxford dictionary defined values as principles or standards of behaviour which one judge as important. Elements is literally the rudiment of subject. In the film making context with specific mind of the Malay at the time which has just earned independence, values of faith and courage are much needed from the people of the country. Elements such as charity, helping the orphan and needy is also an inspiration toward building a better future. These elements are not far off from what Islam has been preaching since the times of Muhammad in Mecca and Madina; i.e. nation building through self reconciliation and obedience to the principles of the Quran.

**5. Film Scene Structure Analysis**

Using Douglass and Harnden (1996) film structure, three of P. Ramlee films, Ali Baba Bujang Lapok, Ahmad Albab and Tiga Abdul is dissected into three parts, beginning, middle and end. Technically, using the dissections scenes can be focus on unit of shot that portray element and values of Islam.

Table 1: Ali Baba Bujang Lapok Islamic scene

Film Structure	Scene
Beginning	Kassim Baba bought a slave, Marjina (actress Sarimah Ahmad)
Middle	Ali Baba (actor Aziz Sattar) went to the jungle looking for woods to sell Found out the thieves hideout at Bukit Kurma Stole only a chest of gold coins and instantly became rich Ali Baba recovered Kassim Baba’s corpse Thieves looking for Ali Baba’s house
End	Ali Baba’s wife, in-law and Marjina killed 40 thieves hiding in barrels with burning oil Marjina bravely stabbed the chief (P. Ramlee) in the back Ali Baba rewarded Marjina with freedom from enslavement

Table 2: Ahmad Albab Islamic scene

Film Structure	Scene
Beginning	Mashood (actor A.R. Tompel) believe happiness and wealth comes from his own effort, not from Allah Mashood married off his daughters, Safura (Mariani) and Suhara (Mimi Loma) to wealthy families, Muharram(Tony Azman) and Safar (Karim Latiff) Mastura (Saloma) is married off to lowly poor goat herder Syawal (P. Ramlee)
Middle	Mastura gave birth, a baby boy who does not stops crying for weeks on end Syawal brings the baby to Mashood, Mashood tapped on the door and instantly the baby stops crying Mashood named the baby Ahmad and since the Arabic word for door is ‘Albab’, hence the name Muharram and Safar robbed their wives jewelry and soon after became desperate and robbed a jewelry store The police nabbed Muharram and Safar, their wives pleaded for bail Muharram and Safar caught red handed when they tried to steal Syawal’s treasure at home
End	At Mashood birthday party, Muharram and Safar present each a tray of precious jewelry which belongs to Syawal Syawal presented model of a mosque which infuriated Mashood, Mashood questions this disbelievingly, Syawal opens his robes to reveal a smart white suit underneath Mashood became repentant because of Shawal’s birthday gift

Table 3: Tiga Abdul Islamic scene

Film Structure	Scene
Beginning	Ismet Ulam Raja a wealthy businessman lives in fictional Isketambola, had three sons Abdul Wahub (P. Ramlee), Abdul Wahab (Hj Mahadi) and Abdul Wahib (S. Kadarisman) Ismet Ulam Raja fell down at his birthday party and passed away soon after Hastily, the elder brothers divided the vast wealth among themselves Sadiq Segaraga (Ahmad Nesfu) ordered his daughters to woo Ismet’s sons
Middle	Abdul Wahab and Abdul Wahib soon became victimized by Segaraga’s devious scheme plotted by Kasim Patalon (Salleh Kamil) Abdul Wahib married Ghasidah in spite and vengeance toward Sadiq Segaraga Sadiq Segaraga became enslaved when Abdul Wahib outplayed Kassim Patalon’s game Abdul Wahib bought the two brothers who became slave to a merchant Also, bought Sadiq Segaraga and his two sister in-law
End	After a tearful speech, Abdul Wahib forgave his brothers and his father in-law, Sadiq Segaraga and share his wealth with them

## 6. Findings

One thing that attracts attention when reading the biography of P.Ramlee and watching his films, one can not hide the feeling of some similarity of some of the scenes portrayed in his film and what actually happen in his life. Thus, it is not such a surprise that many of his acting and directing remain so close in the people’s heart. In addition to his versatility and extraordinary talent, which stood out as of one of a kind iconic and legendary figure is simply unmatched and irreplaceable. In the context the three selected films, the main element which was found is the element of dawah. Dawah according to Oxford Dictionary literal meaning is a call, preaching and invitation to Islamic faith, lifestyle and teaching. In the instance of Ali Baba Bujang Lapok, there are scenes of the danger of riba which can dangerously lead to poverty or worst enslavement.

In this context, the story plot in the Ahmad Albab is much more projected toward those who are weak in faith about the qada’ and qadar (predestination, fate, divine decree). The story plot in Ahmad Albab is very interesting in terms of how P. Ramlee build the story starting from Mashood ego-centric conversation with his friends about how to gather wealth through marrying his daughters to wealthy families. His daughter objection which not only shows faith in Allah in marrying Syawal, but also showed resilience during hard times when Syawal was fired from his job as a shepherd. Such

a storyline laid down a good example of elements of faith.

Tiga Abdul showed a different mix fictionally scenes of Ottoman and Western culture, which historically remind Muslim of how Islam was so noble and mighty once in history. But the most tearful and self sobering scenes is definitely the last scenes of Tiga Abdul when P.Ramlee (Abdul Wahub) gathered all of his brothers, sisters in-law and father in-law whom all were his slaves. He humbly forgave, freed and unconditionally split his wealth with all of them. This specific scene consciously or unconsciously remind audience of the humility, humbleness and modesty of the Prophet Muhammad during the conquest of Mecca. Everyone is forgiven and after entering the Masjidil Haram, Prophet Muhammad said “I speak to you in the same words as Yusuf spoke to his brothers. This day there is no reproof against you; Go your way, for you are free” (Related by Ibn Kathir, recorded by Ibn al-Hajjaj Muslim).

## 7. Conclusion

In 1990 the Malaysian National Laureate (Sasterawan Negara), A. Samad Said once wrote a poem expressing sorrow for the demise of P. Ramlee. In the poem, he uses the word ‘erti yang sakti’ which translates in English as meaning which has supernatural power. And inspired by such a word, Tan Sri Dato’ Seri Ahmad Sarji chosen ‘Erti Yang Sakti’ as the title for his book in 1999 which gathered A to Z facts about P.Ramlee. In this research, the Islamic epistemology-based data analysis was used to identify elements and values in P. Ramlee’s films. Specific scenes from each three films has shown exemplary moral values imitating those of the Prophet Muhammad exemplary behaviour. This research also has subconsciously identify the problem of translations the Islamic terms and subject. Therefore, in the future researchers should conduct more insight into bridging the gap of investigating Islam and its ontological subdivisions.

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