

The Concept of Islamic Film by Naim Ahmad: A Detailed Analysis Through the Concept of *Taklif* by Affandi Hassan

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Abstract

The concept of *taklif*, which forms the foundation of Mohd Affandi Hassan's *Persuratan Baru* framework, was articulated early on in *Pendidikan Estetika daripada Pendekatan Tauhid* (1992). *Taklif* refers to the principle of human responsibility to obey the commands of Allah SWT and, within the *Persuratan Baru* paradigm, it establishes the moral trust and ethical discipline that must be upheld by writers and creative practitioners. This responsibility includes producing works grounded in sound Islamic creed (*akidah*), compliant with Islamic law (*syariah*), and oriented towards the cultivation of virtuous character (*akhlak*), in line with the objectives of Islamic literature. This conceptual orientation intersects meaningfully with the discourse on Islamic cinema advanced by Naim Ahmad in *Filem Islam: Satu Pembicaraan* (2011). His definition of Islamic film demonstrates a strong alignment with the principle of *taklif*, particularly in emphasising the responsibility of filmmakers to utilise film as a medium for disseminating knowledge, fostering moral awareness, and promoting divine values. Accordingly, this conceptual paper adopts a qualitative approach through content analysis, with *Filem Islam: Satu Pembicaraan* serving as the primary data source, analysed using descriptive and critical methods. The analysis indicates that Naim Ahmad's approach is consistent with Mohd Affandi Hassan's intellectual framework and reflects a strong commitment to intellectual accountability and the educative function of creative works. Overall, the study affirms *taklif* as a relevant and applicable framework for understanding and developing contemporary Islamic creative practices, including film.

Keywords: Islamic film, Naim Ahmad, taklif, Mohd Affandi Hassan

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Introduction

This paper discusses a work produced by a distinguished figure in the field of filmmaking, Naim Ahmad. His work, entitled *Filem Islam Satu Pembicaraan*, was published in 2011 by Uni-N Productions Sdn. Bhd., a publishing company based in Shah Alam. Upon closer examination, this book can be regarded as a highly comprehensive work that discusses Islamic film and the characteristics associated with it. Fundamentally, the book, which consists of nearly 200 pages, is divided into five main sections. The introductory section discusses the meaning of Islam, Islamic communication, and Islamic film. The second section examines the nature of Islamic films through aspects such as characteristics, functions, the effects of film, halal products, and good intentions. The third section is discussed in greater detail and covers ethical codes related to both the production process and content. In this section, Naim Ahmad elaborates extensively on ethical guidelines encompassing pre-production, production, post-production, distribution, screening, viewing, content, and the essential elements that should be incorporated into a film. The fourth section discusses the objectives of Islamic films, including the dissemination of dakwah, the inculcation of moral values, and the role of Islamic films for non-Muslim audiences, while the final section serves as the conclusion (Naim Ahmad, 2011).

In discussing Naim Ahmad, he was born in 1947 and is a native of Johor Bahru. He obtained his Bachelor's degree from Universiti Malaya in 1971, followed by a Master of Education and a Doctor of Education from Indiana University Bloomington. Before becoming a lecturer, he first served as a television producer at Radio Televisyen Malaysia from 1970 to 1982. He later served at several public universities, including Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, until 2010. In addition, he produced nearly 370 television programmes of various genres, including dramas, documentaries, entertainment programmes, religious programmes, magazines, and many others. He also authored nearly 280 academic writings across various academic genres (Naim Ahmad, 2011).

Within the context of this paper, the limited scope of discussion focuses on Naim Ahmad's ideas presented in a subtopic within the first section of his work, *Filem Islam Satu Pembicaraan*. As mentioned earlier, this subtopic centres on an in-depth discussion concerning the definition and conceptualisation of Islamic film. However, the focus of this paper is directed solely toward analysing the definition and interpretation of Islamic film, as well as examining the relationship of this discussion with the concept of *taklif*, which is employed as the analytical framework in this paper. The concept of *taklif* is one of the fundamental principles within the Persuratan Baru framework introduced by Mohd Affandi Hassan, a prominent Malaysian literary scholar and critic. In essence, the concept of *taklif* reflects the ethics and responsibilities of human beings towards Allah SWT, as well as their obligations in fulfilling responsibilities within the relationship between humans and Allah SWT and among fellow human beings. The subsequent discussion will further examine the concept of *taklif* in detail, followed by a brief analysis of Naim Ahmad's ideas in his work through the lens of the *taklif* concept formulated by Mohd Affandi Hassan.

The Concept of *Taklif* in the Persuratan Baru Framework Formulated by Mohd Affandi Hassan

In discussing the element or idea of *taklif* within the Persuratan Baru framework, it is important to note that this was not an entirely new concept introduced by Mohd Affandi Hassan. In fact, the idea had already been critically discussed during the early publication of

his book, *Pendidikan Estetika Daripada Pendekatan Tauhid*. In the initial stages of discussing the idea of *taklif*, he placed the concept under a broader framework known as the “nature of mankind” (*hakikat insan*). Within this framework, he focused extensively on the essence of humanity by emphasising the philosophy of human creation, which includes the purpose of creation, the challenges faced by humankind, and the threats posed by Satan towards human beings (Mohd Affandi, 2005). From a methodological perspective, he frequently cited verses from the Qur’an as the primary evidence to support his arguments, while also incorporating the views of renowned Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Fazlur Rahman.

The existence of these early ideas concerning *taklif* greatly assisted Affandi in developing and refining the concept for adaptation within Persuratan Baru. As widely acknowledged, Persuratan Baru is a comprehensive Islamic-based literary criticism framework that possesses a more systematic and clearly structured theoretical and practical foundation in literature (Ungku Maimunah, 2015). This is clearly evident in the book *Gagasan Persuratan Baru*, which serves as the primary source detailing Affandi’s ideas regarding Islamic principles in literary criticism. Based on this book, discussions concerning the concept are elaborated extensively across various sections and are repeatedly emphasised, thus facilitating the identification of recurring themes. Similarly, in terms of practical application grounded in methods of criticism, the majority of Affandi’s critiques are directed towards major works within the realm of Malay literature.

In this regard, this approach was also applied specifically to contextualise the concept of *taklif* as the fundamental basis of Persuratan Baru. He provided a lengthy and comprehensive definition of *taklif* from both philosophical perspectives and its relevance within the literary sphere. Affandi’s view can be observed in the following statement:

Taklif refers to the essence of human creation, the role and responsibilities of human beings, the nature of their deeds, and the nature of knowledge that they must understand in order to comprehend their creation, their roles and responsibilities, and how their actions will be judged. *Taklif* determines the relationship between human beings and the Almighty God, relationships among fellow human beings and other creations, and the proper standards by which all human behaviour should be evaluated. When the concept of *taklif* is understood, a person (especially a Muslim) will understand why Muslims are instructed to send blessings upon the Prophet, will recognise the true meaning of enjoining good and forbidding evil, will understand why removing obstacles from pathways is considered a praiseworthy deed and rewarded, will comprehend the meaning of *taqwa* in human life, and will understand why Prof. Fazlur Rahman argued that a good deed is one that benefits society rather than merely oneself. For this reason, Imam Ghazali once stated that a true Sufi is one who lives actively within society, rather than isolating himself in seclusion merely to save himself. By understanding the concept of *taklif*, a person will understand the meaning of sincerity (*ikhlas*), and thereby distinguish Islamic values from general moral values, because although all Islamic values are moral values, not all moral values are necessarily Islamic values. (Mohd Affandi, 2014, pp. 200–201)

Based on the quotation above, Mohd Affandi Hassan clearly elaborates the definition of the concept of *taklif* by referring to the essential duties and responsibilities for which human beings were created by Allah SWT. *Taklif*, which may also be understood as responsibility and the burden of trust (*amanah*), constitutes an important characteristic that dominates the very essence of human creation. Fundamentally, human beings were created by Allah SWT

as administrators or *khalifah* entrusted with the responsibility of prospering the earth through the implementation of His laws and divine commandments. Therefore, according to Affandi, when an individual is imbued with the element of *taklif*, he or she will consequently understand the purpose of creation, the roles and responsibilities that must be fulfilled on earth, and ultimately realise the rewards that await as a result of righteous deeds performed during worldly life. By understanding and applying the concept of *taklif* in worldly existence, a person will be protected from actions that contradict Islamic teachings and will strive to become an individual capable of bringing benefit and goodness to others.

A Brief Analysis of Naim Ahmad's Concept of *Taklif* in Relation to the Definition of Islamic Film and the Discussion of Values and Ethics in His Work *Filem Islam Satu Pembicaraan* (2011)

This section further explores a brief analysis of the concept of *taklif*, or responsibility, as articulated and proposed by Naim Ahmad in his work *Filem Islam Satu Pembicaraan* (2011). As mentioned previously, the focus of this analysis is confined to the discussion in Part One, which addresses the definition of Islamic film. Nevertheless, the discussion will also briefly touch upon the ethical codes concerning process and content, as there exists a close relationship between the two — namely between the core idea and the manner in which it is implemented. The analysis will subsequently focus in greater detail on the pre-production process, followed by discussions on the production and post-production processes. This analytical division according to smaller subtopics is intended to facilitate reading comprehension and to remain consistent with the original structure of the work itself.

Definition of Islamic Film and Analysis of Its Relationship With the Pre-production Process

This discussion was initiated by Naim Ahmad on page 13 of his work, comprising a concise yet significant explanation concerning the definition of Islamic film. According to Naim Ahmad, Islamic film is:

A work of art, in the form of a 'halal product', produced beginning in the name of Allah and with good intentions through the processes of pre-production, production, post-production and distribution, with content and presentation grounded in ethical codes and Islamic values, extending to the processes of circulation, screening, and audience viewing, with the aim of instilling moral values, disseminating Islamic dakwah, and upholding the principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil. (2011, p. 13)

Generally, the discussion within this subsection focuses on the explanation of the pre-production process carried out before a film is produced. Usually, the process begins with an idea conceived by an individual, which subsequently develops into scriptwriting. At the scriptwriting stage, Naim Ahmad (2011) explains that the script functions as a blueprint or master plan that guides the director in comprehensively preparing all necessary arrangements prior to the filming process. This includes obtaining filming permits before production can commence. Furthermore, producers must also consider the individuals involved in the production process, including actors, filming locations, cinematographers, makeup artists, editors, art directors, assistant directors, technical crew members, and numerous other personnel responsible for ensuring a smooth production process. In short, the production of a high-quality film requires a production team that is highly competent, knowledgeable, and

experienced. However, to produce a film that truly conforms to Islamic principles and adheres to the prescribed ethical guidelines requires careful scrutiny and commitment, which in reality is not easy to achieve, though certainly not impossible if all parties are genuinely united and serious in realising such aspirations.

In the context of Naim Ahmad's discussion concerning values and ethics within this subsection, he explicitly states as follows:

At this stage, a writer must be conscious of his responsibilities and role as the individual who initiates the earliest idea. He must possess high discipline and adhere to the ethics of authorship, such as refraining from plagiarising the works or ideas of others, taking another person's work and claiming it as his own, withholding proper credit from sources used in writing, presenting writings that are unfounded in facts, misleading, or unsupported by research, and producing work with dishonest or insincere intentions. In essence, at this initial stage, ethics, intentions, and methods of production must be grounded in Islamic values. Otherwise, this initial flaw will bring negative implications and deprive the resulting film of blessings. As the elders say, begin with a good first step. A first step taken with sincere intentions will end with good results and a favourable conclusion. (Naim Ahmad, 2011, p. 150)

Based on the discussion above, it is evident that Naim Ahmad is extremely meticulous and deeply concerned with the pre-production stage, which constitutes the earliest phase in film production. Typically, this stage involves the conception and development of ideas regarding the intended title or story before progressing into the scriptwriting process. From the quotation above, five major principles are emphasised by Naim Ahmad: first, refraining from plagiarising creative works; second, avoiding the appropriation of others' works and falsely claiming ownership; third, ensuring proper acknowledgment of source materials; fourth, avoiding the presentation of writings that are not factually grounded or supported by research; and finally, producing work with sincere and honest intentions.

When examined closely, all five principles represent some of the greatest challenges confronting the contemporary film industry, and it is by no means easy to remain entirely "pure and clean" during this initial stage. Nevertheless, Naim Ahmad establishes a very clear parameter regarding the production of Islamic films: these five principles must be thoroughly observed and practised by those involved in filmmaking, particularly scriptwriters during the pre-production stage.

Most importantly, the fifth principle emphasises that ideas must be conceived and inspired with sincere and honest intentions. In reality, this principle may be the most difficult to achieve because it is closely tied to ethics and human conduct. Sincerity is inherently abstract and cannot easily be measured, as it ultimately remains a secret between an individual and Allah SWT alone. Viewed through the concept of *taklif* within the Persuratan Baru framework, this can be interpreted as the process of human responsibility and complete dependence upon Allah SWT. When an individual is entrusted by Allah SWT with the responsibility of being a *khalifah* on earth, he or she will fulfil that trust earnestly and without betrayal.

Applied within the context of pre-production, the original idea creator or scriptwriter should conceive ideas that ultimately draw people closer to Allah SWT and cultivate a sense of servitude towards the Creator. It should not instead be driven by worldly rewards or material

wealth. Hence, Naim Ahmad's profound emphasis on the pre-production stage, particularly in relation to values and ethics, is both highly appropriate and commendable. The fifth principle he highlights represents the highest level of achievement in any human endeavour on earth, not merely in generating ideas for film production. Rather, the greater objective lies in ensuring that the ideas conveyed nurture sincerity in artistic expression and ultimately guide humanity back towards Allah SWT.

Analysis of the Relationship With the Production and Post-production Processes

In the section discussing production and post-production processes, only four pages are devoted to the discussion in *Filem Islam Satu Pembicaraan*, specifically from pages 48 to 51. Overall, there are two principal messages emphasised by Naim Ahmad as the author. The first concerns the ethics of interpersonal interaction, while the second concerns one's relationship with Allah SWT throughout the filmmaking process.

Regarding the first point, the author presents numerous quotations in his work, though only several are discussed here for the purpose of analysis. Among them are the following:

During filming, there will inevitably be extensive interaction among individuals. These interactions are not limited merely to work-related responsibilities and physical interaction, but also extend to thoughts and emotions. Such interaction is not confined solely to relationships among artists, performers, and crew members, but also usually involves interaction with the public and, at the very least, with the surrounding environment. Therefore, manners, ethics of interaction, and social mixing, especially between men and women, must be grounded upon principles permitted by Islam.

In the filming process, which may sometimes continue for weeks, responsibilities towards fellow human beings and responsibilities towards Allah SWT must be fulfilled as best as possible. The ethics of social interaction must be safeguarded. The filming or production process, which often extends over several weeks, especially in isolated locations, may invite various immoral acts. Such acts often become 'secrets' known only to those directly involved in the process. Allah knows best. Remember that Allah is All-Knowing and All-Seeing; nothing is hidden from His sight and knowledge, even things subtler than the smallest particle. Many Qur'anic verses conclude with such reminders, including Surah al-Baqarah (2): verses 96, 110, 223, 237, and 265; Ali 'Imran (3): verses 15, 20, 156, and 163; and al-Ma'idah (5): verse 71. (Naim Ahmad, 2011, pp. 48–51)

The quotations above clearly demonstrate Naim Ahmad's seriousness in elaborating upon the importance of maintaining proper *ikhtilat* (interaction between unrelated men and women), particularly during the production and filming processes. It is generally understood that film production usually requires lengthy periods of time, sometimes extending over several months. Consequently, the possibility of immoral acts such as adultery, illicit seclusion (*khalwat*), and similar misconduct can easily arise if individuals lack spiritual restraint and faith. This principle is clearly stated by Allah SWT in Surah al-Isra', verse 32, concerning the obligation to avoid all elements and causes that may lead to adultery.

Returning to the concept of *taklif*, which serves as the core principle within Persuratan Baru, an individual's understanding of responsibility in worldly life will guide him or her away from sinful and forbidden acts. This is precisely what Naim Ahmad attempts to emphasise by

providing detailed discussion concerning ethics and social interaction between individuals, particularly between different genders, within the filmmaking process. If a person truly understands and applies the concept of *taklif*, he or she will not willingly engage in actions that may ultimately lead to personal destruction. In a more positive sense, such an individual would strive to guide and advise others to safeguard themselves, strengthen their faith, and increase their consciousness of Allah SWT regardless of time or place.

The second message emphasised by Naim Ahmad concerns one's responsibilities towards Allah SWT during the production and post-production processes. As he states:

It cannot be denied that the demands and commitments involved in post-production sometimes cause film practitioners to forget their own 'world', such as forgetting meal times, neglecting their spouses and children, and losing awareness of the passage of time. All they remember is completing their artistic work, as though they have truly become 'slaves of art'. Do not become 'slaves of art' who entirely sever remembrance and connection with the Most Beautiful Creator. Instead, become true 'servants of art' who remain servants of the Most Artistic Creator without severing ties with Him. If that relationship and remembrance are entirely lost, then one is not truly a 'servant of art', but rather merely a 'servant of this world', concerned only with worldly matters. A true servant of art is one who attains both worldly success and success in the Hereafter.

These are among the manners and ethics that must be observed, especially by Islamic film practitioners. One's relationship with Allah (*habl min Allah*) must always be strengthened regardless of circumstance. Never neglect responsibilities towards Allah. Remember that Allah does not accept prayers from a heedless heart (Hadith of the Prophet SAW). Strive to attain both forms of goodness — goodness in this world and goodness in the Hereafter. (Naim Ahmad, 2011, pp. 100–101)

The two quotations above encapsulate the second major message emphasised by Naim Ahmad: responsibility towards Allah SWT during the filmmaking process. Although film production is undeniably demanding, exhausting, and requires immense patience, one must never neglect obligations towards Allah SWT, such as performing the five daily prayers and fasting during Ramadan should filming occur during that month. Regardless of circumstances, the obligation to worship Allah SWT remains compulsory, even for those who are ill. This demonstrates that acts of worship such as prayer carry no exemption except for those who are mentally incapacitated or have not yet reached the age of discernment (*mumayyiz*).

Being occupied with filming activities does not justify negligence in fulfilling religious obligations unless one trivialises those obligations themselves. Worshipping Allah SWT, particularly through prayer, symbolises the relationship between the servant and the Creator, and it reflects a profound sense of responsibility when carried out sincerely and wholeheartedly.

Conclusion

In general, Naim Ahmad's work entitled *Filem Islam Satu Pembicaraan* can be regarded as one of the most comprehensive and detailed texts in discussing every aspect related to the process of producing Islamic films. Nevertheless, due to the limited nature of this paper, the

discussion and analysis are unable to comprehensively address every issue presented in the work and are therefore confined only to several aspects considered significant and relevant for discussion. However, based on the two subtopics that were analysed with moderate depth namely the discussion of values and ethics in the pre-production and production processes it may be concluded that the views presented by Naim Ahmadare highly convincing, precise, and intellectually profound. This is clearly evident in his discussion within the first subtopic, where he outlines five principal foundations in the formulation of ideas for film production. Meanwhile, in the second subtopic, he highlights two major messages that he seeks to convey: firstly, the ethics and manners of social interaction, and secondly, the relationship between human beings and Allah SWT. All these aspects, both in their outward and intrinsic meanings, demonstrate a very strong connection with the concept of *taklif*, which serves as the principal foundation within the Persuratan Baru framework formulated by Mohd Affandi Hassan. This concept emphasises the ethics and responsibilities of human beings as *khalifah* on earth. Within the context of filmmaking, individuals who truly internalise and embody the concept of *taklif* will possess a heightened sense of awareness and responsibility in producing films that are not only aligned with Islamic principles and values, but are also capable of integrating profound intellectual and philosophical narratives into cinematic works. Ultimately, such films may serve as important instruments in cultivating knowledge, intellectual refinement, and moral consciousness within the Muslim community.

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The author declares that Grammarly and ChatGPT, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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