

Images Of Islam's Enemies Portrayed In the Arabic Poem Of Ka'ab Ibn Malik: A Representation-Based Analysis In The Prophetic Biography Context

Received 2025-10-05
Accepted 2026-03-31
Published 2026-04-30

Nurul Iman Mohamad Anuar Kamal¹; Mohamad Zulfazdlee
Abul Hassan Ashari²; Anwar Muttaqin³; Ezad Azraai
Jamsari^{*4}; Md Nor Abdullah⁵; Nursafira Lubis Safian⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5}Research Centre for Arabic Language and Islamic Civilization,
Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, ⁶Department
of Arabic Language and Literature, International Islamic University
Malaysia

nuruliman@ukm.edu.my¹, mozaha@ukm.edu.my²,
anwar86@ukm.edu.my³, ezad@ukm.edu.my & eajsti@gmail.com^{*4},
monab@ukm.edu.my⁵, nursafira@iium.edu.my⁶

To cite this article: Mohamad Anuar Kamal, Nurul Iman., Abul Hassan Ashari, Mohamad Zulfazdlee., Muttaqin, Anwar., Jamsari, Ezad Azraai., Abdullah, Md Nor., Safian, Nursafira Lubis. (2026). Images Of Islam's Enemies Portrayed In the Arabic Poem Of Ka'ab Ibn Malik: A Representation-Based Analysis In The Prophetic Biography Context. Ijaz Arabi: Journal of Arabic Learning, 9 (2), 860-874, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18860 /ijazarabi.V9i2.40121>

Abstract

War poetry in the early Islamic era functioned as a historical record as well as a cultural instrument that helped shape, identity and define morality, while framing the perception of an 'enemy'. However, current research on Ka'ab ibn Malik's poetry had focused largely on textual, stylistic or biographical aspects, with limited attention to how the enemy's images are linguistically constructed and ideologically expressed in his poetry. This gap limits a deeper understanding of how early Islamic poetic discourse participated in the formation of collective memory and social boundaries. This study aimed to identify the various categories of enemy representation in Ka'ab's war poetry, analyse the linguistic and rhetorical strategies used to construct these images, and evaluate their ideological functions in the Prophetic biography based on a socio-historical context. This qualitative study employed a textual analysis guided by Representation Theory and Enemy Image Theory. The findings reveal six dominant patterns, namely betrayal, cowardice, aggression, doctrinal threat, resistance to the prophetic mission, and moral disgrace. These categories interact to create a unified ideological narrative in which the Muslim community is elevated through moral legitimacy, while its opponents are severely limited through strategic othering. This study also revealed that Ka'ab ibn Malik's poetry is a literary expression and a structured discourse that reinforces collective identity, moral cohesion and the early Muslim community's worldview.

Keywords: Ka'ab Ibn Malik; War Poetry; Enemy Image; Representation Theory; Prophetic Biography

INTRODUCTION

War poetry plays a fundamental role in classical Arabic tradition as a medium for documenting the Jahiliyyah era's social, political and military dynamics, as well as the early Muslim community's formative stages. This *genre* is an aesthetic expression that also serves as a cultural archive in the construction of tribal identity, articulates discourse on bravery and delineates symbolic boundaries between the collective *self* and the *other*.

Farrugia (2003) and Borg (2015) emphasised war poetry's central role in shaping the Arab collective narrative, while Hussein (2024) demonstrated how conflicts, such as *harb al-Basus* recorded as a form of poetry, directly reflect the social structures and ideological logic of battle. Poetry also functioned as a rhetorical and ideological instrument in the early Islamic context by supporting the *da'wah* mission, mobilising emerging Muslim communities and constructing images of the enemy, which was an aspect increasingly explored in studies on religious discourse and enemy formation in early Islamic literature (Ali, 2023). Hence, war poetry should be viewed as a passive reflection of reality and an active tool that produces meaning and generates social representations.

Ka'ab ibn Malik occupies a prominent position in the poetic tradition practiced by the Companions of the Prophet SAW, as his poetry documents episodes of warfare, challenges faced by early missions, and interactions between Muslims and their opponents during a critical phase of Islamic development. Academic engagement with his poetry has progressed slowly despite his established position in the *sirah* tradition. Early studies focused primarily on textual and historical aspects, such as the critical edition of his *Diwan* by al-'Ani (1997) and Qur'anic intertextual analysis by Bassa et al. (2018). More recent scholarship has introduced new dimensions, including analyses of realism (Farhan, 2025), studies on the structure of his *Daliyyah* (Isma'il, 2017), narrative reframing based on 'Abd Allah ibn Ka'ab's literary writing (Muhammad, 2023), and examination of heroism found in his war poetry (Nurul Iman & Safian, 2024). Research has also delved into the linguistic strategies and discursive functions of war poetry that existed during the early Islamic period (Hamka & Safian, 2022; Taher, 2022). However, despite these varied investigations, including textual, stylistic, narrative and biographical analyses, the enemy representation theme in Ka'ab ibn Malik's poetry remains underexamined. This gap is significant because the enmity and conflict themes lie at the heart of the Arabic war poetry tradition and play a central role in shaping the collective memory of the early encounters between Islam and its opponents.

Discussions on enemy representation in Arabic literature are scarce and have yet to form a systematic analytical tradition. Classical works by Dayf (1960), Taha Husayn (1958) and al-Tayyib (1956) emphasised the *qasidah*'s rhetorical and structural features, while modern scholarship, such as van Gelder (1988), investigated *hija'* and invective connotations but did not establish a dedicated theoretical framework for understanding enemy meaning-making. Some studies addressed depictions of opponents in pre-Islamic poetry ('Abd Allah, 2019) and examined violence and adversarial identity found in the works of specific poets (al-Sudani & al-Ardawi, 2020), but their scope was too general and did not engage directly with the *corpus* of poetry by the Prophet's Companions, particularly that of Ka'ab ibn Malik. Consequently, the issue of enemy representation in his poetry remains a largely unexplored field.

This present study applied an integrative theoretical approach to address this gap by combining Representation Theory (Hall, 1997), which depicts language as a system for producing social meaning, with Enemy Image Theory (Oppenheimer, 2006; Keen, 1986; Steiner & Önnersfors, 2024), which explains the mechanisms of enemy construction through processes such as othering, stereotyping, demonisation and the creation of psychological threat. This combined framework enabled a detailed examination of how Ka'ab ibn Malik constructed images of the enemy, rationale behind these representations and the ideological functions they serve in the socio-historical context of the Prophetic biography.

This study pursued three main objectives based on this theoretical foundation and the identified research gap: 1) to identify enemy representation categories found in Ka'ab ibn Malik's poetry, 2) to analyse the rhetorical and linguistic strategies through which these images are constructed, and, 3) to explain the ideological functions of these representations in the *sirah* context and the early Muslim community's development of a collective identity. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how discourses on conflict, identity, and struggle in the early Islamic period were articulated through poetic language by applying modern theoretical approaches to a *corpus* of classical Arabic poetry. The analysis reveals the categories of enemy representation and the strategies employed in Ka'ab's poetry as well as positions them in the broader processes of meaning-making and identity construction that shaped the early Muslim community's worldview.

METHOD

This qualitative study adopted a textual analysis guided by Representation Theory (Hall, 1997) and Enemy Image Theory (Oppenheimer, 2006; Keen, 1986; Steiner & Önnersfors, 2024). This approach is well-suited for examining processes involved in constructing meanings about the enemy found in Ka'ab ibn Malik's poetry, which functioned as a form of oral-historical narrative as well as a rhetorical war discourse during the early Islamic period. Qualitative analysis enables a detailed examination of linguistic structures, diction choices, symbols, metaphors and rhetorical strategies employed by the poet for constructing enemy representations, as well as tracing the relationship between language and ideology in a historical context (Hall, 1997; Oppenheimer, 2006; Van Dijk, 2016).

Data were sourced from Ka'ab ibn Malik's *Diwan* (edited by al-'Ani, 1997), which was selected for its philological precision and sound manuscript evaluation. All poems related to warfare, confrontation with polytheists, criticism of adversaries and depictions of threats to the Muslim community were identified and extracted as the *corpus* of research. This *corpus* of data included poems concerning the events at Badr, Uhud, Khandaq and Tabuk, as well as works involving the *hamasah* and *hija'* genre, which served as Ka'ab's primary mediums for constructing representations of the enemy. The analysis employed a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) adapted for classical Arabic texts. The six main stages of analysis are as follows:

1. Initial reading to understand contextual meaning, historical background and literal sense.
2. Generation of initial codes based on words, images, metaphors and terms referring to the enemy.
3. Development of preliminary themes by grouping codes according to semantic categories.
4. Reviewing the themes by re-examining the text to ensure accuracy of reference.
5. Defining the theme according to the Enemy Image Theory (othering, stereotyping, demonisation, threat construction) framework (Hall, 1997; Oppenheimer, 2006; Keen, 1986; Steiner & Önnersfors, 2024).
6. Reporting findings by integrating linguistic, contextual and theoretical analysis.

Representation Theory (Hall, 1997) was used to explain how language and symbols construct group identity and boundaries between the *self* and the *other*. Enemy Image Theory, as defined by Keen (1986) and Oppenheimer (2006), lays the groundwork for

categorising enmity and elucidating the psychological mechanisms that facilitate its formation. This framework informs the development of several analytic codes, such as ‘enemy as a traitor’, ‘aggressor’, ‘coward’, ‘doctrinal threat’ and ‘opponent of the prophetic mission’.

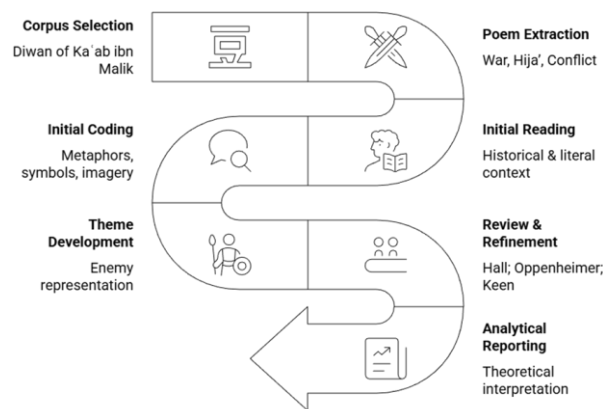
Several procedures strengthen the validity of the analysis, such as:

1. Triangulation of data sources, especially involving *sirah* texts such as *Sirah Ibn Hisham*, to verify historical context (Ibn Hisham, 1990; Muhammad, 2023)
2. Audit trail documentation, recording code revisions, analytic notes, and theme development processes
3. Peer debriefing to reduce interpretative bias
4. Preparation of methodological flowcharts and coding-frame tables to enhance transparency.

The coding and theme development processes, in alignment with the study’s three objectives, focused on classifying categories of enemy representation, identifying rhetorical and linguistic strategies, and interpreting the ideological functions of these representations in the *sirah* context. A methodological flowchart was constructed to illustrate the sequence beginning with the *corpus* selection right up to analytical reporting in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the research workflow. A coding-frame table was also prepared to display the enemy representation’s initial codes and thematic categories based on the theoretical framework. These elements facilitate the integration of theory and data, while reinforcing the study’s methodological clarity.

Figure 1. Methodological Flowchart

Research Process for Analyzing Enemy Representation in
Diwan Ka’ab ibn Malik’s



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis of Ka’ab ibn Malik’s corpus of poems revealed six categories of enemy representation that together formed a coherent discursive structure. These six categories do not function independently in the Representation Theory (Hall, 1997) and Enemy Image Theory (Keen, 1986; Oppenheimer, 2006) frameworks; rather, they reinforce one another when constructing an early Muslim identity narrative grounded in morality, epistemology of revelation and the Arab-Islamic worldview’s value hierarchy. Enemy representation also serves as a cultural strategy in war poetry tradition. It becomes a meaning-making device (Qutbuddin, 2024) in Ka’ab’s poetry by integrating history, morality and theology into a unified discursive system (Hall, 1997; Keen, 1986; Oppenheimer, 2006; Lawrence, 2021).

Enemy as Traitors**Table 1. Enemy Representation's Themes, Codes and Linguistic Elements Found in Ka'ab ibn Malik's Poetry**

Main Theme	Codes / Indicators in the Findings	Examples of Linguistic Elements (from the poetry)	Related Theoretical Concepts
1. Enemy as Traitors	breaking oaths, disloyalty, abandoning allies	فَخَانُوا، تَخَادَلُوا، أَعْطُوا يَدًا	Moral delegitimation; moral threat; character framing (Keen, 1986; Oppenheimer, 2006)
2. Enemy as Cowards	fleeing the battlefield, instability, panic	يُطْرَحُونَ، تَزَقَّى لِقَتَّةِ الْجَبَلِ، كَمَفْحَصِ الدُّبَيْلِ	Stereotyping; psychological weakening; coward narrative (Keen, 1986)
3. Enemy as Aggressors	initiating attack, aggression, physical threat	جَاءُوا يُرِيدُونَ، تَصَوَّتْ سُيُوفُهُمْ، تَلَسَّعْ	Enemy-as-aggressor; threat amplification; violence framing (Oppenheimer, 2006)
4. Enemy as Doctrinal Threat	spreading falsehood, misguidance, distorting religious meaning	قَدْ قُلْتَ بَاطِلَةً، زِدْتَ ضَلَالَةً، غَدَرُوا بِأَمَانَةٍ	Ideological threat; epistemic threat; discourse manipulation (Hall, 1997; Van Dijk, 2016)
5. Enemy as Opponents of the Prophetic Mission / Polytheists	obstructing <i>da'wah</i> , rejecting the message, polytheism	يَنْدُوونَنَا، لِيُطْفِئُوا نُورَنَا، مُشْرِكِ، أَصْنَامِ	Religious othering; identity boundary marking; sacred threat (Hall, 1997; Van Dijk, 2016)
6. Enemy as Morally Disgraced	disgrace, low status, moral corruption	هَجِينِ، حَبِيثِ، اللُّؤْمِ، تَطْيِيفُ بَكَ الْمُنْدِيَاتِ	Demonisation; moral degradation; construction of social dishonour (Keen, 1986)

The analysis of Ka'ab ibn Malik's poetic *corpus* reveals that betrayal is the most frequent and most prominently depicted image of the enemy. Ka'ab portrays the Qurayshi polytheists as a group that consistently fails to honour its commitments in the tribal pact system, as reflected in several incidents of treachery recorded in *sirah* sources during conflicts between Quraysh and the early Muslims (Ibn Hisham, 1990). This portrayal is articulated through verbs such as *فخانو* (*they betrayed*) and *تخادلوا* (*they abandoned one another*).

This evidence is reflected in the following verse:

عَمَدْنَا إِلَى أَهْلِ اللُّؤَاءِ وَمَنْ يَطْرُ
بِذِكْرِ اللُّؤَاءِ فَهَوَ فِي الْحَمْدِ أَسْرَعُ

“We advanced towards the bearers of their banner,
those who boast proudly whenever courage and banners are mentioned”.

فَخَانُوا وَقَدْ أَعْطُوا يَدًا وَتَخَادَلُوا
أَبَى اللَّهُ إِلَّا أَمْرَهُ وَهُوَ أَصْنَعُ

“Yet they betrayed us even after pledging their commitment,
and they abandoned one another; while God decrees His command, and His decree is
always perfect” (al-'Ani, 1997)

The use of two near-rhyming verbs, namely *فخانو* (*they betrayed*) and *تخادلوا* (*they abandoned one another / they withdrew*), creates a strong rhetorical impact. The extended rhythm in *تخادلوا* gives the verse a lengthened sound pattern, almost imitating the act of *falling back* or *slipping away*. The phrase *أعطوا يدا* (*they extended a hand / they pledged*) places this betrayal within the Arab social framework, where honouring agreements and upholding tribal dignity are fundamental ethical values.

Ka'ab constructs a form of moral irony, from a linguistic perspective, since the Quraysh present themselves as أهل اللواء (*the people of the banner or the claimants of bravery and martial honour*), they fail to maintain their own commitments. This contrast shows that the betrayal is directed at the Muslims and occurs in their ranks, which is a sign of internal social weakness among the polytheists (Ilham, 2022).

These findings indicate that Ka'ab intentionally framed the enemy based on a morally flawed identity. Betrayal is depicted not merely as a military act but as a failure of principle that distinguishes the polytheists from the Muslim community. Ka'ab uses culturally resonant symbols, such as اللواء (*battle banner*), اليد (*the hand - symbolising a pledge*), and الوفاء (*loyalty*) to emphasise that the enemy is strategically weak and morally deficient. Therefore, betrayal becomes the clearest evidence of their lack of moral integrity, and this reinforces the ethical superiority of the early Muslim community over the Quraysh polytheists.

Enemy as Cowards

An analysis of Ka'ab ibn Malik's *corpus* of poems portrays the Qurashi polytheists as being weak, unstable and lacking psychological stamina in moments of a crisis. This *coward* image is produced through diction that diminishes their heroic value, including words such as الفشل (*failure*), as well as imagery depicting panic, disorderly movement and the loss of composure. Ka'ab's focus in this passage is on physical defeat as well as the dissipation of honor and bravery, which pertain to qualities that hold the highest significance in Arabic martial tradition. In this stanza, Ka'ab also alluded to a historical event in which the polytheist forces fled in haste upon hearing that the Prophet SAW and his Companions were approaching. Their excessive fear drove them to abandon their supplies and belongings along the road to hasten their escape. This incident forms the historical frame that reinforces the poem's connotation, namely that the enemy retreated while losing honor, self-control and judgment (Ibn Hisham, 1990).

The following excerpt illustrates the construction of this *cowardly* image:

تَلَهَّفُ أُمُّ الْمُسِيحِينَ عَلَى
جَيْشِ ابْنِ حَرْبٍ بِالْحَرَّةِ الْقَشِيلِ

“Wretched indeed is the mother of those fleeing in panic,
as she sees the army of Ibn Harb weakened in the plains of al-Harrah”.

إِذْ يُطْرَحُونَ مِنْ سَنَمِ الطَّيْرِ
تَرْقَى لِقْنَةَ الْجَبَلِ

“When they were cast off like birds tumbling from the sky,
and rushed upward towards the peak of the mountain”.

جَاؤُوا بِجَيْشٍ لَوْ قِيسَ مُبْرِكُهُ
مَا كَانَ إِلَّا كَمَفْخَصِ الدُّبْلِ

“They came with an army that if its strength was measured, it
would be no more than the narrow nest of a small du'il bird”.

(al-'Ani, 1997)

The expression يُطْرَحُونَ مِنْ سَنَمِ الطَّيْرِ (*they were cast off like birds falling from the air*) conveys the image of the enemy discarding every supplies and military hardware, including supplies and equipment, in their desperate attempt to hastily flee. The action, تَرْقَى لِقْنَةَ الْجَبَلِ (*they climbed towards the peak of the mountain*), further suggests that they sought protection by abandoning anything that might slow them down. According to Arabic martial ethos, the act of discarding one's own equipment and provisions is the

clearest sign of cowardice, since a true warrior preserves his honor by safeguarding his possessions and weapons.

The simile, *كمفحص الدئل* (*like the tiny nest of a du'il bird*), diminishes the strength of the Qurashi army by reducing it to something tiny, fragile and insignificant. Even though the army may have appeared large and formidable from afar, Ka'ab reveals that their true strength amounted to nothing more than a cramped and feeble space incapable of endurance. Ka'ab rhetorically disparages the enemy's heroic image through this imagery of smallness, lightness and insignificance.

These verses, from a discourse linguistics aspect, portray the polytheists as an entity that completely lacks courage, inner fortitude and overwhelmed under pressure (Sleiman, 2024). They fled in panic while throwing away their load, scrambling upwards for shelter, and abandoning the honor associated with warriorhood. Ka'ab employed these linguistic effects to frame the enemy as being inherently cowardly, and their retreat upon hearing of the Prophet SAW's approach provides the clearest evidence of this psychological weakness (Ibn Hisham, 1990).

Ka'ab used this rhetorical strategy to ridicule the enemy and assert that their primary weakness lies not in their numbers or physical capability but their lack of courage (Isah, 2024). This, in turn, elevates the steadfastness of the Muslim community, whose strength is rooted in moral conviction, bravery and unity of spirit.

Enemy as Aggressors

The analysis shows that Ka'ab ibn Malik also portrayed the Qurayshi polytheists as an aggressor force that initiates physical confrontation. This *aggressor* image plays a significant role in the formation of representation, as it positions the enemy as an entity that disrupts peace and acts beyond moral limits. Ka'ab emphasized that the Quraysh possessed considerable strength, yet he portrayed this power as a form of uncontrolled and ethically unjustifiable violence (Isah, 2024). This image is depicted in the following verse:

وَقَدْ جَاءَتْ جُلُودُهُمْ وَسُيُوفُهُمْ
تُصَوِّتُ مِنْ حُمَى الْوَعَى وَهِيَ تَلْسَعُ
(al-'Ani, 1997)

*"Their bodies and their swords came forward,
emitting piercing sounds from the scorching heat of battle that struck like a sting".*

The expression, *جاءت جلودهم وسيوفهم* (*their bodies and their swords came*), indicates that the enemy is the entity that initiates the confrontation. The verb *تصوت* (*producing a sharp, ringing sound*) creates an acoustic image of an oncoming assault, while *حمى الوعى* (*heat of battle*) reflects an intense atmosphere of chaos and hostility. Ka'ab employed metaphors of *heat* and *sound* to depict a form of aggression that is irrational, like a burning or uncontrolled force.

The term *تلسع* (*it stings*) adds a strong sensory layer, likening the enemy's attack to a wild and harmful bite devoid of strategic wisdom. This harsh verb, from a rhetorical perspective, strengthens the image of the polytheists as a source of threat, while the Muslims are implicitly positioned as the defensive side.

This aggressor image is also reinforced in another verse:

جَاؤُوا يُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُطْفِئُوا نُورَنَا
فَرَادَهُمُ اللَّهُ ذُلًّا وَاخْتِرَاقًا

*“They came seeking to extinguish our light,
but God increased them only in humiliation and division”.*

(al-‘Ani, 1997)

The phrase, جاؤوا يريدون (*they came with the intention...*), illustrates a deliberate and purposeful attack. The expression, أن يطفنوا نورنا (*to extinguish our light*), expands the meaning of aggression from the physical realm to the theological one, whereby the enemy not only wages military confrontation but also attempts to suppress the truth and extinguish divine guidance. Linguistically, *light* symbolizes religion and revelation, while *extinguishing* signifies an assault on the Muslim community’s faith and spiritual purpose.

Ka‘ab then presents a moral reversal through the phrase فزادهم الله ذللاً (*God increased them in humiliation*). This phrase is not merely a narrative but a rhetorical strategy linking the enemy’s aggression to its moral consequences. Their attack results not in victory but utter disgrace and internal fragmentation.

Overall, the *aggressor* category portrays the Quraysh polytheists as the initiators of physical threats marked by noise, heat and uncontrolled force. Ka‘ab asserts, via sound imagery, temperature metaphors and the symbolism of light, that their aggression lacks moral legitimacy. This representation reinforces the Muslims’ position as being defensive and morally grounded, thus, emphasising the Muslim community’s ethical steadfastness in the context of war.

Enemy as A Doctrinal Threat

In addition to physical aggression, Ka‘ab also portrays the enemy as a threat to the community’s faith. This threat is far severe than physical confrontation as it operates through speech, deception and the distortion of meaning, which are mechanisms capable of destabilising the foundations of faith. Ka‘ab highlights how the polytheists used words as subtle weapons to sow doubt and misguide the early Muslim community, which renders their discourse as a destructive force that undermines the very structure of belief. This depiction appears in the following verse:

فَدَقُلْتَ بَاطِلَةً وَزِدْتَ ضَلَالَةً
وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّ قَوْلَكَ بَاطِلٌ

*“You have spoken a falsehood and added further misguidance,
and God knows that your words are indeed false”.*

(al-‘Ani, 1997)

The repetition of باطل (*false*) and ضلالة (*misguidance*) creates a strong moral emphasis, which signals that the enemy’s threat is based on the distortion of meaning and faith. Ka‘ab employs repetition to indicate that doctrinal harm occurs in varying degrees, whereby one false statement breeds deeper misguidance. The enemy’s speech is purposefully incorrect and acts as a corrosive element capable of misleading minds and destabilising the community. This threat is expanded in another passage:

يُحَاوِلُ قَوْمٌ عَدْرُوا بِأَمَانَةٍ
وَيَزْعُمُونَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ لَيْسَ بِرَاهٍ

*“A group who betrayed a trust attempts deception,
as though they claim that God does not see them”.*

(al-‘Ani, 1997)

Here, Ka‘ab combines social betrayal with the denial of divine oversight. The phrase عَدْرُوا بِأَمَانَةٍ (*they betrayed a trust*) indicates the collapse of moral integrity, while لَيْسَ بِرَاهٍ (*as though God does not see*) signifies a rejection of God’s presence and

surveillance, which is the core of doctrinal corruption. The use of the present tense verb expresses continuity, suggesting that this deviation is habitual and persistent.

This representation demonstrates that the enemy's threat is not limited to physical violence but extends to the manipulation of meaning that is capable of generating confusion regarding divine revelation. Ka'ab views the enemy's discourse as behaviour that damages the community's *structure of understanding*, consistent with the epistemic threat concept in Enemy Image Theory, namely pertaining to an assault on the way a community perceives and interprets truth.

Ka'ab believed that the enemy's attempts to distort meaning, create disharmony and spread misguidance constitute a deeper threat than military hostility. Ka'ab illustrates how the enemy seeks to weaken conviction and the foundations of early Muslim faith through repetition, moral metaphor and emphatic rhetorical strategies. His poetry counters threats to faith and reinforces the authority of divine revelation as being the sole source of truth, preserved only by those who uphold trust and view the world through the lens of absolute belief.

Enemy as Morally Disgraced

The analysis further shows that Ka'ab ibn Malik portrayed the Qurayshi polytheists as a group devoid of honour and lacking the social dignity and *muru'ah* that form the core of Arabic cultural values. This portrayal is significant because it positions the enemy as morally weak as well as a community that has fallen to the lowest ranks of Arab social hierarchy. Ka'ab applied linguistic strategies and social imagery to show that the polytheists exist in a state of perpetual disgrace and possess none of the noble qualities associated with Arab heroism.

This image is illustrated in the following verses:

سَأَلْتُ بِكَ ابْنَ الزَّبَعْرِىَ فَلَمْ
أُنْبَأَكَ فِي الْقَوْمِ إِلَّا هَجِينًا

*"I asked about you, O Ibn al-Zib'ara, but I heard nothing of you
except accounts of disgrace".*

حَبِيبًا تُطِيفُ بِكَ الْمُنْدِيَّاتُ
مُقِيمًا عَلَى اللُّؤْمِ جِينًا فَجِينًا

*"You are a vile person, surrounded by gatherings of corruption,
dwelling constantly in shame, time after time".*

The expression, *إلا هجينًا* (nothing but disgrace), portrays the enemy as an entity with an entirely ruined reputation. The term *هجين* carries strong connotations of social dishonour and low status, a particularly severe label in classical Arab society. The phrase *حبيبا تطيف بك المنديات* (a vile man, encircled by gatherings of wickedness) creates the image of an individual living in a contaminated moral environment, who is corrupted and serving as the centre of a broader circle of moral decay.

Meanwhile, the phrase *مقيما على اللؤم* (persisting in disgrace) indicates that the enemy's moral condition is not temporary but continuous. Dishonour is depicted not as a momentary lapse but as a defining characteristic of their identity. Linguistically, Ka'ab employs a chain of harsh adjectives, such as *هجين* (disgraced), *حبيث* (vile) and *اللؤم* (baseness), to strengthen the moral condemnation of the enemy. The harsh consonantal sounds in these words reflect a coarse and abrasive tone that matches the severity of the judgement. The verb *تطيف* (to surround) adds a spatial dimension, which gives the

impression that *disgrace* is characteristic the enemy and places it at the centre of an environment filled with corruption.

This passage constructs a static yet profound moral image, from a rhetorical perspective, whereby the enemy is portrayed as being immersed in disgrace with no sign of repentance. The metaphor *gatherings of wickedness* (المنديات) acts as a symbol of a morally degraded social space that puts the enemy in a state of dishonour and despised by society. This representation signals that the enemy has failed in strategizing or practicing ethical values, while totally lacking the moral legitimacy required for claiming honour in Arabic society. Overall, the *morally disgraced* category depicts the Qurayshi polytheists as a group stripped of honour, reputation and *muru'ah*. Ka'ab places the enemy at the lowest point of the Arab-Islamic value hierarchy by using depictions of *disgrace*, *morally charged adjectives* and *corrupted social environments*. He asserts that moral excellence, honour and dignity belong to the Muslim community, as it is the only group worthy of guiding society's moral direction.

Enemy as Opponents of the Prophetic Mission

Ka'ab ibn Malik also portrays the Quraysh polytheists as active opponents of the prophetic mission, since they intentionally obstruct the spread of truth. This representation is significant because it links physical conflict with the conflict of meaning, whereby the enemy themselves reject Islam as well as work to prevent others from receiving the light of guidance. Their opposition is depicted as a deliberate and organised effort rooted in hostility toward the prophetic message. This image appears in the following verse:

يَذُودُونَنَا عَنْ دِينِنَا وَنَذُودُهُمْ
عَنِ الْكُفْرِ وَالرَّحْمَنِ رَأَى وَسَامِعٌ

“They drive us away from our religion, and we repel them from disbelief;
while the Most Merciful sees and hears all things”.

(al-'Ani, 1997)

The expression يذودوننا عن ديننا (*they drive us away from our religion*) indicates a clear and intentional act of hostility. The verb يذودون means *drive away or push back or restrain*, thus indicating an aggressive attempt to halt the progress of *da'wah*. Ka'ab then presents the Muslim response in antithetical form, نذودهم عن الكفر (*we repel them from disbelief*), which asserts that *da'wah* moves toward truth while the enemy moves toward darkness. The closing phrase والرحمن رآه وسامع (*and the Most Merciful sees and hears*) serves as a moral legitimisation and affirms that all opposition to the *da'wah* occurs under divine surveillance. This provides assurance that efforts to obstruct the truth will ultimately fail. This image of resistance is expanded in another verse:

جَعَلُوا سُبُلَ الْحَقِّ بُهْتَانًا يُنَافِسُهُمْ
وَقَامُوا لِبَصْدِ النَّاسِ عَنْ نُورٍ تَبَلَّجَا

“They turned the paths of truth into falsehood that rivals their desires,
and they stood to block people from a light that had already begun to shine clearly”.

(al-'Ani, 1997)

The phrase قاموا لصد الناس (*they stood to block people*) signifies active and strategic resistance, thus indicating that the enemy does not merely reject the message but takes a defensive position to prevent others from accepting it. The term بصد carries connotations of force, pressure or deliberate obstruction. The metaphor نور تبلىج (*a light that has become increasingly clear*) presents the *da'wah* as a form of truth that is already unfolding and

illuminating. In this context, the polytheists' opposition to the truth appears irrational and morally unjustified, as they resist a truth that is already evident and unmistakable.

Ka'ab constructs an antithesis between نور الحق (*the light of truth*) and بهتان (*falsehood or slander*), from a linguistic perspective. The soft consonantal flow in نور creates a calming and luminous tone, whereas the harsher consonants in بهتان evoke sharpness, distortion and noise. This phonetic contrast strengthens the moral polarity between *da'wah* and the enemy's resistance.

The combination of these representations strongly suggest that Quraysh polytheists reject Islam and actively attempt to block others from reaching the rightful path of guidance. Opposition to the *da'wah* reflects the opposition to truth itself, which is a deeper form of ideological hostility that extends far beyond physical conflict.

Discourse on Enemy Representation and the Construction of Meaning

Discussions on the enemy representation's six categories in Ka'ab ibn Malik's poetry show that these depictions do not occur in isolation but are formed in an interconnected framework of mutually reinforcing meanings. The poetry does not simply document scenes of warfare, rather, it serves as a framework that influences early Muslims' perception of conflict, identity and their moral stance. In this context, language serves as a neutral description and a discursive instrument that influences perception and social meaning. Ka'ab uses language to construct social reality consistent with arguments by Hall (1997) and Van Dijk (2016), whereby representation is not a passive reflection of history but an active process of producing meaning that determines how a group can be understood. His use of forceful diction, such as تصوت (*it resounds*), تلسع (*it stings*), and repeated expressions like باطل (*false*) and ضلالة (*misguidance*), indicates that Ka'ab's representational strategy begins at the micro-linguistic level before developing into a broader ideological narrative. Ka'ab turns the discourse of war into a space for defining who is truthful, who is immoral, and who stands on the path to righteousness through his diction, metaphors and rhetorical structures. This linguistic continuity demonstrates that Ka'ab is expressing condemnation as well as establishing a framework of meaning that directs the early Muslim community's interpretation of history.

Coherence between the various categories (betrayal, cowardice, aggression, moral disgrace, doctrinal threat, and opposition to the prophetic mission) shows a logical continuity when constructing the enemy's image. Betrayal forms the moral basis that explains why the enemy is further portrayed as cowardly and dishonourable, since moral failure leads to inconsistent and degraded behaviour. The enemy's image as aggressors adds a physical dimension by depicting the Qurayshi polytheists as ethically corrupt, while acting aggressively without sound principles or justification. The doctrinal threat and opposition to the *da'wah* categories emphasise that the threat is not merely military-based but also targets the Muslim community's foundational beliefs and epistemology. This relational structure is evident when observing Ka'ab's use of recurring symbolic codes (light, sound and heat) and linguistic patterns that bind moral, psychological and theological threats into a unified system of meaning. Ka'ab portrays the enemy as a comprehensive threat seeking to undermine the Muslim community's physical and spiritual resilience by placing moral, physical and theological attacks in one framework. When all six categories are combined, the resulting image conjures a multidimensional enemy comprising moral, psychological, cultural, physical and theological dimensions, thereby reinforcing the Muslims' identity as a steadfast and honourable community.

These categories therefore function not as six isolated depictions but as complementary components of a collective narrative that defines who is trustworthy and who must be rejected.

These findings, from a theoretical standpoint, indicate that the application of Representation Theory and Enemy Image Theory. Hall's (1997) assertion that language is the source of meaning is evident in Ka'ab's repeated expressions, such as *he betrayed*, *he withdrew*, *he deviated* and *misguidance*, all of which consistently portray the enemy as being unprincipled. Theories by Keen (1986) and Oppenheimer (2006) regarding the construction of an enemy distinctly emphasise, especially in the denial of moral legitimacy, the focus on psychological vulnerability, and the threat to collective identity. The *muru'ah* concept in the Arab-Islamic context further strengthens this analysis by showing that Ka'ab evaluates the enemy based on theological critique as well as the Arab society's cultural codes, which place a high value on bravery, loyalty and honour. The integration of Western theoretical frameworks with Islamic and Arab cultural values demonstrates that Ka'ab's enemy representation is neither spontaneous nor emotional because it is built on a structured cultural and rhetorical logic. This reveals that his representational strategy operates at the intersection of Arab culture, Islamic ethics and discursive theory, thus making it more layered and complex than mere poetic criticism. This study offers a new perspective by emphasising the systemic relationship between the various categories of enemy representation, when compared to earlier studies (Borg, 2015; Zwettler, 1978; Farhan, 2025; Hussein, 2024). Previous research often focused on aesthetic elements, poetic structure or the role of poetry as a historical source but rarely examined its function as an ideological discourse that shapes collective consciousness. The present analysis shows that Ka'ab's poetry does more than depict battles. It structures how those battles are understood, establishes moral boundaries and determines the legitimacy of the actions. It also demonstrates that war poetry is not simply a reflection of the enemy but an active attempt to shape the community's worldview, an aspect that earlier studies failed to highlight (Wati, Imawan & Tiara, 2023). This feature is the key contribution of the present study, as it demonstrates that enemy representation is deliberately and systematically constructed to strengthen communal solidarity and the early Muslim community's worldview. As such, this study opens new pathways for understanding war poetry as a narrative text as well as ideological discourse that influences collective psychology and identity formation (Stetkevych, 2017).

Overall, the discussion indicates that enemy representation Ka'ab ibn Malik's poetry is the result of a deliberate and consistent discursive process. Ka'ab constructs a narrative that reinforces the early Muslim community's confidence, solidarity, and identity through language, imagery, metaphor and rhetorical structure. His poetry simply recounts conflict and portrays conflict in ways that place the enemy and Muslims in defined moral positions. Viewed in its entirety, it is evident that Ka'ab's poetry accompanies historical events and constructs meaning around them by turning poetry into an ideological instrument that strengthens the psychological and spiritual resilience of the Muslim community. In this light, Ka'ab's poetry should be read as historical narration and a text that builds meaning around history, thus, posing as a function that makes war poetry a significant ideological instrument that shapes early Islamic identity. Ka'ab's poetry serves as a record of events as well as a medium through which meaning is constructed and the early Islamic worldview is consolidated by shaping it rather than simply recording.

CONCLUSION

Poetry often functioned as a platform for meaning-making in the early Arab Islamic tradition, mainly a space where the enemy's history, identity and figure were articulated, negotiated and reconstructed. This present study aimed to address three primary objectives, namely to identify the categories of enemy representation in Ka'ab ibn Malik's poetry, analyse the linguistic strategies underpinning each category, and evaluate the ideological functions embedded in these representations. The in-depth analysis of the *corpus* of poetry demonstrates that all six categories, namely traitor, coward, aggressor, doctrinal threat, opponent of the prophetic mission, and morally disgraced, appear consistently and complement one another, thereby fulfilling the overall aims of this study.

This study advances the field by affirming that enemy representation in Ka'ab's poetry is not a spontaneous portrayal but the product of a deliberate and strategic discursive process. This finding shifts scholarly attention from purely aesthetic readings to an understanding of poetry as an instrument for constructing worldview, moral legitimacy and collective consciousness in early Muslim communities. Emphasis on the systemic relationships between the categories offers a fresh contribution to the study of Arabic war poetry, representation theory, and ideological analysis, which is an aspect seldom explored in earlier studies.

The findings, from a scholarly perspective, suggest that language and rhetorical structure in Ka'ab's poetry have an important influence on the social perception of an enemy, thereby illustrating the close relationship between language and power in classical Arabic discourse. This understanding provides a foundation for further applications in discourse analysis, Arabic sociolinguistics, conflict studies and early Islamic historiography.

Future research should explore comparative representations of the enemy found in the literary works of other poets of the *ghazwah* tradition, examine enemy narratives in pre-Islamic Arab culture, or apply digital humanities approaches to quantitatively map patterns of diction and metaphor. These directions hold the potential to deepen the understanding of how language constructs ideology and identity in Arab-Islamic tradition. Overall, this study demonstrates that Ka'ab ibn Malik's poetry documents a conflict and attaches meaning to that conflict. His poetry functions as an ideological text that reinforces the identity and resilience of early Muslim communities by interweaving moral, psychological, physical and theological dimensions in a coherent representational framework, thus making a significant contribution to the understanding of war discourse and meaning-making in classical Arabic literature.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was financed by Dana Pecutan Penerbitan (DPP) and Dana Insentif Penerbitan (DIP) from Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

REFERENCES

- 'Abd Allah, A. A. (2019). Suwar al-akhar (al-'aduw) fi shi'r al-fursan fi al-'asr al-Jahili [The image of the Other (the enemy) in the poetry of the cavaliers in the Jahiliyyah era]. *Majallat Buhuth Kulliyat al-Adab [Journal of Faculty of Arts Research]*, 30(116), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.21608/sjam.2019.146403>
- Abdul-Raof, H. (2006). *Arabic Rhetoric: A Pragmatic Analysis*. Routledge.

- al-‘Ani, S. M. (1997). *Diwan Ka‘ab bin Malik al-Ansari: Dirasah wa Tahqiq* (2nd ed.). ‘Alam al-Kutub.
- Ali, A. H. (2023). Religious rhetoric and the construction of the enemy in early Arabic poetry. *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 54(3), 245-270. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1570064X-12342112>
- al-Sudani, A. B. M. & al-‘Ardawi, A. I. A. W. (2020). al-‘Anf fi shi‘r Hind bint ‘Utbah. *Majallat al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah wa Adabuha*, 1(32), 39–54. <https://doi.org/10.36318/jall/2020/v1.i32.11676>
- al-Tayyib, ‘A. (1989). *al-Murshid ila Fahm Ash‘ar al-‘Arab wa Sina‘atiha* [Guide to understanding and crafting Arabic poetry] (2nd ed.). Kuwait: Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah.
- Bar-Tal, D. (1998). Societal beliefs in times of intractable conflict. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 9(1), 22-50.
- Bassa, A. K., Boori, M. B., Deryanord, M. & Mitwali, H. (2018). Analytical study of Qur’anic intertextuality in the Diwan of Ka‘ab ibn Malik. *Journal of College of Education and Human Sciences*, 38, 64-72. https://www.academia.edu/89113045/An_Analytical_Study_of_the_Quranic_Intertextuality_in_the_Divan_of_Kab_bin_Malik
- Borg, G. (2015). Poetry as a source for the history of early Islam. *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 15, 137-163. <https://doi.org/10.5617/JAIS.4649>
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Dayf, Sh. (1960). *Tarikh al-adab al-‘Arabi: al-‘asr al-jahili* [The history of Arabic literature: The Jahiliyyah period]. Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-Ma‘arif.
- Farhan, J. (2025). Representations of expressive realism in the poetry of Ka‘ab bin Malik al-Ansari (50 or 51 AH). *Anbar University Journal of Languages and Literature*, 17(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.37654/aujll.2025.155083.1102>
- Farrugia, M. (2003). War and peace in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. *Humanitas: Journal of the Faculty of Arts*, 2(A7), 143-153. https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/51535/1/Humanitas_2A7.pdf
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage.
- Hamka, I. H. & Safian, N. L. (2022). The images of heroism in the poetry of Ka‘ab ibn Malik and Mustofa Bisri: A comparative study. *Al-Irfan: Journal of Arabic Literature and Islamic Studies*, 5(1), 17–33. <https://doi.org/10.36835/alirfan.v5i1.4976>
- Husayn, T. (1958). *Fi al-adab al-jahili* [On pre-Islamic literature]. Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-Ma‘arif.
- Hussein, A. (2024). Ancient Arabian war (harb al-Basus) as reflected in classical Arabic poetry. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 36(2), 219-265. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etae061>
- Ibn Hisham, ‘A. al-M. (1990). *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah*. Dar al-Hadith.
- Ilham, A. (2022). The other face of poetry in pre-Islamic Arabia. *JBA Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*, 3(1), 1-10. <https://journal.unj.ac.id/unj/index.php/jba/article/view/36747>
- Isah, M. S. (2024). Arabic poetry in the Jahiliyyah and early Islamic period and role in the promotion of national security. *FMDB Transactions on Sustainable Social*

- Sciences Letters*, 2(3), 119-136.
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/392889308>
- Isma'il, B. S. (2017). Daliyah Ka'ab bin Malik al-Khazraji al-Ansari: A critical study. *Journal of al-Farahidi Arts*, 9(29), 47-68.
- Kamal, N. I. M. A. & Safian, N. L. (2024). The heroic figures of Islam through the war poetry of Ka'ab ibn Malik. *International Journal of West Asian Studies*, 16, 92-101.
- Keen, S. (1986). *Faces of the enemy: Reflections of the hostile imagination*. Harper & Row.
- Lawrence, J. (2021). It's all just poetry: Writing 'Umar ibn Abi Rabi'ah's life. *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 52(4), 333-359. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27131864>
- Muhammad, T. H. (2023). Narratives of Abdullah bin Ka'ab bin Malik in the Prophet's biography (Historical study). *Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities*, 30(6 Part 1), 215-239. <https://doi.org/10.25130/jtuh.30.6.1.2023.13>
- Oppenheimer, L. (2006). The development of enemy images. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 12(2), 111-128. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327949pac1202_2
- Qutbuddin, T. (2024). Early Arabic oration as literature: Foundational prose genre of Arabic. *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 55(2-3), 213-237. <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:a030e63f-6699-4c37-965c-e5399e8298ae>
- Sleiman, N. M. (2024). Automatic era identification in classical Arabic poetry. *Applied Sciences*, 14(18), 8240. <https://doi.org/10.3390/app14188240>
- Steiner, K. & Önnersfors, A. (2024). *Enemy images: Emergence, consequences and counteraction*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003279570>
- Stetkevych, S. (2017). Epic, myth, and history in early Islamic poetry. *Bulletin of SOAS*, 80(1), 23-48.
- Taher, G. M. B. (2022). *The Narrative Structure of the Poets of the Islamic Era (Ka'ab bin Malik As A Model)* [Master's thesis]. URD University. <https://urd.ac.ir/en/71382>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2016). Critical discourse studies: A sociocognitive approach. In J. Wodak (Ed.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 62-85). Sage.
- Van Gelder, G. J. H. (1988). *The Bad and the Ugly: Attitudes towards Invective Poetry (Hija') in Classical Arabic Literature*. Brill.
- Wati, E. S., Imawan, Y. & Tiara, H. (2023). Arabic literature in the Islamic period: Syi'ir and prose. *Afshaha: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra Arab*, 2(2), 92-102. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/b3c7/5005054cde2291a28f7ba86f2c46ae9aafef.pdf>
- Zwettler, M. (1978). *The oral tradition of classical Arabic poetry: Its character and implications*. Ohio State University Press.