
Islamic Art: An Analytical Study of Ismail Al-Faruqi's Views

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Abstract: Ismail Al Faruqi offered many opinions on the principles and foundations of the aesthetic of Islamic art. For this reason, this paper aims to present an analytical study on the set of opinions presented by Al-Faruqi to enrich Islamic art, and also to reveal some concepts related to the beauty of Islamic art from Al-Faruqi's point of view. The approach followed in this study is the methodology of content analysis. The study concluded that Ismail Al-Faruqi is the founder of the Islamic aesthetic and artistic theory, based on the Holy Quran as the first source of Islamic knowledge. The study also concluded that monotheism (Tawhid) is the principle of beauty inherent in Islamic art, based on the opinion of Al-Faruqi.

Keywords: Islamic Art; Islam; Ismail Al-Faruqi.

1 INTRODUCTION

Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi was born in Jaffa, Palestine, in 1921 into a well-known wealthy family. He graduated from the French Dominican College - Frere (Saint Joseph) in the year 1936, then obtained a BA in Philosophy from the American University of Beirut in the year 1941. After graduation, he was appointed to a number of government positions under the British Mandate Government in Jerusalem. With the outbreak of war in Palestine in 1948, Al-Faruqi participated in a number of resistance operations and after the war which resulted in the fall of Palestine, he left for the United States. It was then he obtained two master's degrees in philosophy from Indiana University in 1949 and from Harvard University in 1951. Successively, his PhD. in Philosophy (1952) from Indiana University with a thesis entitled : "The Theory of Goodness: Metaphysical Aspects and the Theory of Knowledge of Value." (Al Faruqi,1986).

Professor Ismail Al-Faruqi's (1921–1986) was a Palestinian- American philosopher, visionary and an authority in comparative religion. His research encompassed the whole spectrum of Islamic Studies such as the study of religion, Islamic thought, approaches to knowledge, history, culture, education, interfaith dialogue, aesthetics, ethics, politics, economics, and science. He presented the meaning and message of Islam to the worldwide, pointing to tawhid (the unity of God) as its essence and first determining principle which gives Islamic civilization its identity. Islamic art based on the Qur'an, the Holy Scripture of Islam. Islamic culture is Qur'anic in basis. Its motivation including its implementation and goals - the arts of Islamic civilization should be viewed as aesthetic expressions of similar derivation and realization. Undoubtedly, the Islamic arts are indeed Qur'anic arts. This statement may be startling to non-Muslims who have long viewed Islam as an iconoclastic and conservative religion that denied the arts of Islamic Civilization. How then are the Islamic arts to be seen as Qur'anic expressions : in color, in line, in movement, in shape, and in sound. (Al Faruqi,1986).

Islamic arts, according to al-Faruqi, is the infinite pattern or 'the art of the infinity'. Islamic artistic entities are models that are completely in harmony with the aesthetic principles of Islamic doctrine, "which stimulate reflection on the final patterns, and direct the mind towards the Creator, so that Art becomes a reminder and reinforcement of religious belief, and since Islamic doctrines, which are based on monotheism, distinguished in an absolute way between the Creator God and natural creation, then art becomes: it is the process of revealing the essence of the post-nature within nature, and presenting it visually ... Art is the reading in nature of the essence of something that is not natural in it. Islamic art is art in its kind, contents, and expressions, not in the material from which it is formed". (Al Faruqi,1982).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Al-Faruqi elaborated further about Islamic arts. In the beginning of the eighties, a very important book was published, 'Al-Tawhid: Its implications for thought and life'. He concluded with a chapter on «Monotheism: The Principle of Aesthetics». Perhaps much of what he wrote on Islamic arts appeared in the chapters of his latest book, The Cultural Atlas of Islam, which was based on the cohesion between the doctrinal principles and art. In the beginning, some Muslim thinkers attempted to clarify the relationship between Islam and art by revealing the intentions of art and its aesthetic and nodular function, and among those was Ismail Raji Al-

Faruqi, who sought to clarify the relationship between art and monotheism. Base on the assumption that 'monotheism is the principle of beauty', Qur'anic arts is considered to be the intellectual origin of the theory of art in Islam and monotheism extends beyond the fact that God is the one transcendent God. It includes the idea of aesthetic formation in direct and tangible artistic work with the search and expression of the transcendent that transcends any description. It is impossible to represent it in any way. By linking monotheism with art, Al-Faruqi opposes the 'Western concept of art, which considers art a naive photographic simulation of nature, but rather an attempt to perceptually represent a tribal idea and momentary manifestations of the idea of nature and the human being, which is the richest and most complex manifestation of nature.' (Hanash,2014).

Al-Faruqi used a completely different approach in his study of Islamic arts. He started from a frame of reference that provided him with an important standard for understanding the artistic work in his philosophy. This frame of reference was "The Noble Qur'an." He used this frame of reference to study all the artistic forms known to the Islamic community and which he classified into five sections: arts of literature (includes poetry, prose, proverbs, proverbs etc.), arts of Arabic calligraphy of all kinds, the arts of plant and engineering decoration, spatial arts that are concerned with building engineering, architecture and gardens, sound engineering, and last but not least - what is concerned with reciting the Qur'an : hymns, remembrance, singing and music. Al-Faruqi saw that the Noble Qur'an is the primary source of all forms of Islamic creativity, and that the arts represented a fundamental place in Islamic culture, whether in form, content, or influence. Al-Faruqi even went as far as to assert that: "Islamic culture is, in fact, a Qur'anic culture; without the Qur'anic revelation, this Qur'anic culture would not have been generated... And as these aspects of Islamic culture may be rightly seen as Qur'anic in terms of the foundations, motives for implementation and goals. The arts of the Islamic civilization must be viewed as aesthetic expressions from the same source, yes! Islamic arts are actually Qur'anic arts. (Malkawi,2014).

3 METHODOLOGY/MATERIALS

The approach used in this study was the content analysis approach, which Berluson defined as a research method applied in order to arrive at a meaningful and structured quantitative description of the content of the material to be analyzed. This approach emphasizes the following characteristics: It is limited to describing the apparent and what a person said or wrote explicitly only, without resorting to its interpretation. Also, this approach does not specify a method of communication alone, but the researcher can apply it to any written or photographed communication material. That is, it depends on the systematic, iterative monitoring of the selected unit of analysis (Al-Assaf, 1989, 235).

4 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Al-Faruqi was preoccupied with studying Islamic art in its various forms, then provided an important explanation regarding the value of aesthetic expression in Islam. He noted that Islamic arts is fundamentally different from the arts of other nations. The Muslim artist who senses God's oversight in his life and work, makes the monotheism of God his outmost focus, but he knows that God is the One, Glory be to Him: "There is nothing like Him, and He is the Hearing and Insight." [Ash-Shura: 11]. The Ethical Principle of Monotheism: Islamic art is based on the transcendent principle of monotheism. It is the common factor between all Muslim artists and all artistic forms in all regions of the Islamic world. Since monotheism is the aesthetic principle, it is based on this that the goal of Islamic art is to emphasize the monotheistic interconnections between religion and art. The Qur'an as a frame of reference: Since the Qur'an is the artistic model in its structure, influence, and meaning, this Qur'an is the first artistic exploit in Islam. (Al-Faruqi,1980).

With regard to the qualities and characteristics of Islamic art from al-Faruqi's point of view, he summarized them in abstraction, fragmentary structures, successive combinations, repetition, dynamism, and intertwining. Al-Faruqi says that Muslim artists have produced works of arts that corresponds to their monotheistic worldview, which says that nothing in nature can represent the

Creator, and nothing can be a symbol of Him, glory be to Him. For this reason, Muslim artists had to stereotype the naturalist as much as possible. The plant or even the flower of the plant will lose its natural identity, and for the Muslim artist it becomes a pattern that is repeated endlessly to deny any diagnosis and remove any natural referral from the awareness of the beholder. The aesthetic characteristic that the Muslim artist creates through final repetition, impossibility of similitude, and natural grouping, rises to the level of expression in the language of discourse on the testimony of monotheism: "There is no god but God." (Al-Faruqi,1981).

The principle of monotheism, according to Al-Faruqi, can easily be found in its manifestations in all types of Islamic art, whether the sound arts which we find in the recitation of the Qur'an and religious chants of various kinds. It can even be the visual arts that include engineering entities, calligraphy, decoration, and all kinds of architecture. Based on this basis, Islamic art is a monotheistic art, produced by the doctrine of monotheism as stated by Islam, and it expressed the aesthetic artistic production of all Muslims (Al-Faruqi,1986).

Al-Faruqi noticed that the Noble Qur'an had led the Islamic arts, as it was the first and main model for aesthetic creativity. The Holy Qur'an is divine in its form and content. His letters and ideas presented the six

characteristics represented in the endless styles of Islamic arts. - abstraction: in the absence of a diagnostic-pictorial representation; Segmented Structure: Integrated modular parts of a larger design; Cascade composition: with multiple centers of aesthetic interests and multiple scenes; Redundancy: for successive units that prevent one design from taking precedence over the other; Dynamism; The complexity of entanglement: or the multiplicity of internal elements, to form patterns, and this entanglement stimulates any pattern to attract the attention of the beholder, and forces him to focus on the structural entities. As for Al-Faruqi's classification of Islamic art topics, the current research focused on the art of Arabic calligraphy and the art of Islamic decoration (Al-Faruqi,1983).

4.1 The art of Arabic calligraphy

Al-Faruqi noted that "...the Qur'an influence has made Arabic calligraphy the most important form of Islamic culture, and that this influence and this importance is evident in all parts of the Islamic world, in all centuries of Islamic history, in all branches of artistic and aesthetic production, and in all kinds of art that can be imagined..." Among all the categories of Islamic art, Arabic calligraphy was the most widespread - the most important, the most appreciated and respected among Muslims. He said that his findings, based on the six Islamic arts mentioned previously, can be identified, and distinguished in calligraphy specifically, they are: abstraction, fragmentary structures, successive structures, repetition, dynamism, and intertwining. Al-Faruqi indicated that few contemporary calligraphers have tried to develop different styles that lack any meaning - moving away from the deep integration between letters and words associated with the Arabic language and the Qur'anic message. He believes that such lines cannot be considered Islamic art in any way. Nevertheless, Al-Faruqi realized that there was a strong tendency for contemporary calligraphers to "preserve the features from which Islamic art was formed and created a distinctive tradition through the centuries and in every region of the Islamic world." (Al-Faruqi,1986).

4.2 The art of Islamic decoration

Al-Faruqi says that the functions of Islamic artistic decoration are firstly a reminder of monotheism, to avoid dividing the life of the individual and / or Muslim community into religious and secular. Secondly, transferring materials to emphasize abstraction, alter the nature of artifacts, hide the original characteristics of the material, and avoid concern about its valuable value. Thirdly, transforming the structure to attract the viewer's attention to a higher level of expression and meaning. Fourth: Cosmetic is to produce something that pleases the viewers with its consistency, color, and shape. It is certain that the decorative elements have regional peculiarities, which differ from one country to another in the Islamic countries, but it is also certain that these elements retain a set of characteristics that make them all Islamic arts. Among the most famous types of Islamic decoration is the arabesque, which is an endless pattern that consists of a number of structural types that are repeated in countless types, and according to Al-Faruqi, it is rightly called arabesque because it is Arabic, as well as Arabic poetry and the Arab Qur'an. He describes four categories of infinite Islamic structures in the art of Islamic decoration, namely: the multi-unit structure, the intertwining structure, the zig-zag structure, and the extended structure. Each of these structures has its own characteristics, but they all bear a rich and deep essence of Islamic art. For Al-Faruqi, decoration "...is the essence of Islamic arts - a core that determines the use of materials, creates molds that visualize shapes, and creates a series of structures that can be distinguished in each branch of artistic production. Hence, this necessary element is not merely a result of social, economic, or geographical factors, or influence of some kind ... Rather, it results from the incentives inherent in the entirety of the culture and civilization of Islamic peoples. It was determined and determined by the monotheistic message of Islam..." (Al-Faruqi,1983).

5. CONCLUSION

Finally, this paper is limited to explaining the effort exerted by one science of Islamic thought. The paper was limited to Al-Faruqi's view of Islamic art as a description of monotheism. His vision and research in Islamic arts is part of his project for Islamic intellectual reform. Art was one of the disciplines he dealt with, and he employed his Islamic vision in it in an extensive and unique way. He succeeded in clarifying the misconceptions and misunderstandings that he found among those who dealt with Islamic art. The main contributions of Al-Faruqi was his emphasis on the distinction between Islamic arts. Many acknowledged his responses and treatment of the arts in the Islamic vision - that the artistic styles that he spoke of are the patterns known in the history of Islam and Islamic people, including the arts of calligraphy, construction, decoration and sound engineering. In reflecting on Al-Faruqi's treatment of the topic of Islamic arts, we will notice a number of aspects of distinction. It is a cognitive treatment related to the entirety of arts topics and their manifestations in time and space. It is a systematic treatment that attempted to read the mind of the Muslim artist and his way of expressing his quest for emotional transcendence. Al-Faruqi believes that the Islamic civilization, with all its manifestations, especially in the arts, has an essence that can be known, described, and interpreted, and this essence is monotheism, and it is the highest goal of Islamic law.

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