



THE CONCEPT OF *AL-JAMAAL* FOR PUBLIC ART IN
THE INSTITUTIONAL OUTDOOR SPACES

BY

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ABSTRACT

The secularism has brought enormous shifts to the meaning of Islamic aesthetics that caused variance in interpretations of aesthetics and art between Islamic and secular ideologies. Despite many studies in Islamic aesthetics in various disciplines, there has been a handful of study to understand it through appreciation and contemplation in the context of outdoor public art. Numerous studies have attributed Islamic contemplation as the stage of spiritual cognition through the understanding of the Qur'an and Sunnah. In this regard, intellectual and ethical dimensions are vital in dictating the choice of form and content of Islamic public art that promote contemplative outdoor spaces. Even though public art has aesthetic quality, it is often considered only for the beautification of spaces, not promoting a contemplative environment to observers. Thus, aesthetics quality in public art is claimed to contribute limited functions in promoting contemplative environment. This study establishes the concept of '*Al-Jamaal*' as a lens to explore the Islamic aesthetics concept. A framework derived from the concept can be applied as a public art expression and ways to promote contemplation of outdoor spaces. The framework outlines the meaning, attributes and roles of outdoor Islamic public art in promoting a contemplative environment. Four objectives were set out in the research: (1) To identify the concept of beauty and aesthetics in arts and public art, (2) To examine the meaning of *Al-Jamaal* in relation to the concept of Islamic aesthetics in public art, (3) To examine the significant attributes and roles of *Al-Jamaal* concept for public art, and (4) To propose a framework of *Al-Jamaal* for public art in promoting contemplative outdoor spaces. The research adopted qualitative research with two main types of data collection which are site inventory and in-depth interview. Before main data collections, review from seminal literatures is vital to establish the fundamental concept of *Al-Jamaal* and the pre-determined variables of the research. Site inventory through direct observation was used to document the forms and contents (message, function and location) of public art with visible Islamic elements such as calligraphy and arabesque forms. In-depth interviews were carried out among 16 key informants by using directed content analysis to explore the meanings, attributes and the roles of *Al-Jamaal* as public art expression, particularly in the local context. Findings of the research suggest: (1) The meaning of Islamic aesthetics is based on spiritual, intellectual, ethical, socio-cultural, psychological and environmental dimensions. All these dimensions are laid out in the translation of *Al-Jamaal* (one of the Attributes of Allah as the Most Divine Beauty) in reference to Al-Qur'an and Sunnah. (2) Contents (message of the artwork) and Forms (physical appearance of the artwork) are found to be significant as the attributes of Islamic public art. Findings indicate that outdoor public art applications in the local context have weak meaning and intention. As such, the study suggests that spiritual, intellectual, ethical, environmental and socio-cultural play crucial roles manifest public art in Islamic perspectives. Their contributions transcend the idea of serving society because arts in Islamic context are considered as an act of glorifying the Supreme Creator.

خلاصة البحث

أدت العلمانية إلى تحولات هائلة في معنى الجماليات الإسلامية، والتي بدورها تسببت في تباين في التفسيرات الجمالية والفنية بين الأيديولوجيات الإسلامية والعلمانية. على الرغم من العديد من الدراسات في علم الجمال الإسلامي في مختلف التخصصات، فإنّ هناك القليل منها ما هو مخصص لفهم ذلك العلم من خلال التقدير والتأمل في سياق الفن العام أو الخارجي. وقد عزت العديد من الدراسات أنّ التأمل الإسلامي هو مرحلة الإدراك الروحي من خلال فهم القرآن والسنة. وفي هذا الصدد، تعتبر الأبعاد الفكرية والأخلاقية أمراً حيوياً في إملاء اختيار شكل ومضمون الفن العام الإسلامي الذي يعزّز المساحات الخارجية التأملية. على الرغم من أنّ الفن العام له جودة جمالية، فإنه غالباً ما يعتبر فقط لتجميل المساحات، وليس تعزيز بيئة تأملية للمتأملين. وبهذا فإنه يدعي أنّ الجودة الجمالية في الفن العام تسهم في وظائف محدودة في تعزيز البيئة التأملية. إنّ هذه الدراسة تهدف إلى اتخاذ مفهوم "الجمال" كعدسة لتوضيح واستيعاب مفهوم الجماليات الإسلامية. ويمكن تطبيق إطار مستمد من المفهوم كتعبير عن الفن العام وسبل تعزيز التأمل في الخارج. إنّ هذا الإطار يحدّد معنى وخصائص وأدوار الفن العام الإسلامي في البيئة الخارجية مع تعزيز بيئة تأملية له. وقد تم تحديد أربعة أهداف في البحث: أولها التعرف على مفهوم الجمال والجماليات في الفنون والفن العام. ثانياً، دراسة معنى الجماعة فيما يتعلق بمفهوم الجماليات الإسلامية في الفن العام. ثالثاً، دراسة السمات والأدوار الهامة لمفهوم الجمال للفن العام، رابعاً وهو اقتراح إطار للفنون العامة يساعد في تعزيز المساحات الخارجية التأملية. لقد اعتمد البحث النوعي مع نوعين رئيسيين من جمع البيانات هما دراسة تحليلية للموقع بالإضافة إلى مقابلة متعمّقة. تعتبر المراجعة قبل جمع البيانات الرئيسية أمراً حيوياً لإرساء المفهوم الأساسي للجمال والمتغيرات المحددة مسبقاً في البحوث. تم استخدام دراسة تحليل الموقع من خلال الملاحظة المباشرة لتوثيق النماذج والمحتويات (الرسالة والوظيفة والموقع) للفن العام مع العناصر الإسلامية المرئية مثل الخط العربي وأشكال الأرابيسك. تم إجراء مقابلات متعمقة من بين 16 مختبراً رئيسياً باستخدام تحليل المحتوى الموجه لاستكشاف المعاني والصفات والأدوار التي يلعبها المجتمع كالتعبير الفني العام وخاصة في السياق المحلي. وتشير نتائج البحث إلى: إنّ معنى الجماليات الإسلامية يقوم على أبعاد روحية وفكرية وأخلاقية واجتماعية وثقافية ونفسية وبيئية. كل هذه الأبعاد موضوعة في ترجمة "الجمال" (واحدة من صفات الله باعتباره الجمال الأسمى) في إشارة إلى القرآن والسنة. محتويات (رسالة العمل الفني) وأشكال (المظهر المادي للعمل الفني) قد وجدت لتكون كبيرة في أهميتها كما هي سمات الفن العام الإسلامي. وتشير النتائج إلى أنّ تطبيقات الفن العام في الهواء الطلق في السياق المحلي لها معنى ضعيف ونية. وعلى هذا النحو، تشير الدراسة إلى أنّ الأدوار الحسية والفكرية والأخلاقية والبيئية والاجتماعية والثقافية تؤدي. الأدوار الحاسمة تظهر الفن العام في المنظور الإسلامي. وتتجاوز مساهماتهم فكرة خدمة الجمهور ولكن أيضاً الحضارات لأن الفنون العامة في السياق الإسلامي تعتبر صورة للجمال العالمي ويقبلها الجميع.

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DECLARATION

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

So be patient (O Muhammad SAW), with a beautiful patience. (Qur'an, al-Maa'rij: 5)

Indeed, Allah is beautiful and loves beauty (Muslim, Sahih Muslim)

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the Mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science (Einstein, What I believe, Forum, October 1930)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The remarkable Qur'anic verse, hadith and stunning quote above represent the essence of beauty in a profound way. In a broad sense, they reflect the meaning of aesthetics in this study. There is a growing body of literature that recognises the concept of beauty, aesthetic and arts in various disciplines. Although aesthetics has been profoundly embedded in all civilisations, the term aesthetics was originated from the Western during the 18th century (Otter, 2008; Lamarque, 2008; Viladesau, 2014). Thus, the meaning of aesthetics has been extensively referred based on the Western definition. In the early stage, aesthetics has dealt with the works and values of arts through theoretical and speculative studies in the lens of metaphysical perspective. In this regard, the aesthetics was framed in the light of God, revelations and sacred subject.

More recently, aesthetics is attributed to the new trend of secularism that immensely established by autonomous value and humanistic worldview (Khatijah Sanusi, 1998; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 2006; Nasim, 2010; Rahbaripour, 2013; W. Sabri, Zuriati, Tasnim et al., 2015). Secularism has contributed to the lack of clarity in its meaning. It is because the subject of aesthetics has been gradually separated by

metaphysical observation and worldly lifestyle. In tandem with the growing demand in defining aesthetics, public art field becomes more challenging to be addressed. It is because public art in a generic sense has been recognized as an instrumental or a means to serve the public. On the contrary, aesthetics is intrinsic that has always been associated with a personal sense of contemplation. Therefore, this gap provides us with a challenge to define aesthetics through public art application. However, Islamic public art seems to correspond to the sense of contemplation. Hence, the research contends to seek the understandings concerning beauty and arts, aesthetics, Islamic aesthetics (Divine beauty), and public art application in promoting the contemplative environment.

Thus, the study sought to define and understand the meaning of Divine Beauty as being derived as the attributes of Allah which is '*Al-Jamaal*', in dealing with public art application. *Al-Jamaal* means beauty in Arabic, is addressed through the reference of Al-Qur'an, Sunnah, Sufi tradition and Muslim scholars. It can be best described as aesthetics that is prominent in its conceptual meanings and practical knowledge. Central to the focus of public wellbeing, public art must be experienced in outdoor spaces. Therefore, the study attempts to translate the practical knowledge in public art experiences in promoting contemplative outdoor areas as the result of Islamic artistic manifestation. In this regard, the study considers several field of study such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, empirically, morphology (linguistic), and theology that closely related to the built environment and landscape architecture discipline. In particular, the study aims to propose the framework of *Al-Jamaal* as an Islamic aesthetic concept for public art in outdoor spaces in promoting the contemplative environment. The inquiry on how the concept of *Al-Jamaal* that literature review sections is derived will be further discussed.

In the remaining part of this chapter, the background and underpinning, research issues and problem statement are provided. Next, the aim and objectives and significance of study are elicited. Then, the scope of the study, the operational definition in relation to the study, brief research methodology and limitation of the research are presented. Lastly, the organisation of the following chapters is introduced briefly.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH

The subject of Islamic aesthetics has received growing attention among the Western scholars. As mentioned earlier, the meaning of aesthetics has been dramatically influenced by the Western ideologies through the lens of secularism. As far as the study is concerned, the definition of aesthetics in Islam, the expression of Islamic aesthetics in public art and the contribution towards the contemplative outdoor environment are worthy of further explanation.

1.2.1 The Meanings of Islamic Aesthetics in Art Discipline

In general, aesthetics has been closely related to the discussion on the faculties of senses and personal perceptions in seeking the laws of beauty, through the works of art and judgement of taste. As explained in the introduction, it is clear that Islamic aesthetics has gained growing interest among scholars in the West. In this regard, the aesthetics has been defined in ideologies and philosophies that are based on the autonomous view (Nasim, 2007). Central to sense of self-judgment (autonomy), the scholars immensely articulated beauty and aesthetics in humanistic thought that is genuinely independent on the intellectual capabilities (Eysenck, 1940, 1941, 1983; Margolis, 1962; Frois and

Eysenck, 1995), stimulus sensitivity (Birkhoff, 1993; Leder et al., 2004; Myszkowski et al., 2014), personality traits and self-experiences (Kneller, 1986; Furnham and Walker, 2001; Silvia, 2005; Smith, 2006; Nasim, 2010). All these accounts are seen as the practice of art that entirely based on the human perspectives and desires.

Conversely, beauty and aesthetics in Islam are based upon *Tawhid* that is absolute unity of God (Lois Lamy Al-Faruqi, 1985; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 1987; Mohd Affandi Hassan, 1992; Saoud 2004; Jamal and Mustapa, 2011). It has been perceived far more beyond the intellect, sensual and perceptions, but directed by revelation (Qur'an and Sunnah), injunctions, statements and propositions that conform to Islamic worldviews (Nasim, 2010). The concept of autonomy as a self-enclosing entity (Holcombe, 2015), and *Tawhid* as a doctrine of the oneness of Allah (Haseeb Ahmad Ayazi, 2015) creates a clear distinction between Non-Muslim and Muslim worldviews on beauty and aesthetics. Hence, most of the Islamic aesthetics theory, particularly among the Western scholars were derived from art criticism and approaches that are based on a particular tradition (Erzen, 2007). In specific, Islamic art through the Western philosophies said to be descriptive (Birkin, 2010; Aanavi, 2012) and speculative, rather than analytic conceptual (Nasim, 2010). Consequently, Islamic artistic tradition has dominated the aesthetics worldview from the Western. It makes Islamic aesthetics understanding is far more from original. It means that its evaluations and analysis are mostly done by orientalist who view Islamic art and aesthetics through western values and concepts (Saoud, 2004, Nasim, 2010). In general, it seems that the meanings of aesthetics from Muslim and Non-Muslims are conflicted.

Therefore, the study found that Islamic aesthetic concept needs to be refined in the most comprehensive manner, mainly as art applications in the built environment. It aims to give the meanings of aesthetics that are derived from the definitive sources, which

are the Qur'an and the Sunnah. In this sense, the aesthetics become timeless and unified in upholding the message of Islam for all as contradictory to aesthetics in Western, which concerns on human desires, hence subject to changes due to development of time and trend.

1.2.2 Islamic Aesthetic Concept (*Al-Jamaal*) as the Expression of Public Art

Central to the paradigm of *Tawhid*, the study explores the meanings of beauty in Islam, which is *Al-Jamaal*, in Arabic term, it is equivalent to aesthetics in the Western perspective. The concept of *Al-Jamaal* is understood as the sense of beauty that has an ability to translate aesthetics through conceptual meanings and practical knowledge. In this regard, it allows designers to promote a sense of contemplation to the public. Previous studies have reported that *Al-Jamaal* has been discussed in the accounts of representation, affordance and spirituality towards embracing the contemplative environment. The concept of *Al-Jamaal* is derived from revelations which are Qur'an and Sunnah and contemplation of nature through the understanding of intellectual capabilities. Based on the Qur'anic comprehension, *Al-Jamaal* is a spiritual beauty principle that portrays Islamic ethics as the needs of individual and society. Numerous research translates *Al-Jamaal* into contents (message) and forms (physical appearance) and recognises the role of *Al-Jamaal* as the contemplative source in the built environment context. However, the meaning, attributes and the roles of *Al-Jamaal* as public art expression remains unclear.

History has revealed that the contributions of aesthetics and arts in Islamic civilisations, particularly in the Middle Age and Renaissance period were in the form