



Transforming Islamic Values in Malaysia: The Role of Al-Faruqi

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Abstract

This paper investigates the methods and contributions of Prof. Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (1921-1986) in transforming and reinterpreting Islamic values and practices in Malaysia. This includes his role in realizing and inspiring Islamization of knowledge in IIUM, projecting the *tawhidic* worldview, reclaiming Islamic religious ideal and tradition, developing and assisting Malaysian government in implementing Islamization policy, initiating civilizational dialogue, and establishing network with key *da'wah* organizations in Malaysian, particularly non-governmental organization (NGO)'s such as ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia – Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement). The principle focus of this study emphasizes on al-Faruqi's greatest contributions in realizing the ideals of Islamization in IIUM, as well as his role in transforming *da'wah* tradition in Malaysia through his involvement in ABIM in early 70s and 80s.

Keywords: *Al-Faruqi, IIUM, Islamization, Islamic values, ABIM.*

Abstrak

Kajian ini membincangkan kaedah dan sumbangan Prof Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (1921-1986) dalam mengubah dan mentafsirkan semula nilai-nilai dan amalan Islam di Malaysia. Ini termasuk peranannya dalam merealisasikan dan menginspirasi pengislaman ilmu di UIAM, memberi pandangan dunia Tawhid, menuntut kembali Islam sesuai agama dan tradisi, membangunkan dan membantu kerajaan Malaysia dalam melaksanakan dasar Islamisasi, memulakan dialog peradaban, dan mewujudkan rangkaian dengan organisasi dakwah utama dalam Malaysia, khususnya pertubuhan bukan kerajaan (NGO) 's seperti ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia - Gerakan Belia Islam Malaysia). Fokus prinsip kajian ini memberi penekanan kepada sumbangan besar al-Faruqi dalam merealisasikan cita-cita pengislaman di UIAM, serta peranannya dalam mengubah tradisi dakwah di Malaysia melalui penglibatannya dalam ABIM di awal 70-an dan 80-an.

Kata kunci: *Al-Faruqi, UIAM, pengislaman, nilai-nilai Islam, ABIM.*

Introduction

This paper discusses the significance role of Ismail Raji al-Faruqi in transforming Islamic values in Malaysia. It will focus on his struggle to advocate the idea of Islamization of knowledge and its significant impact in International Islamic University Malaysia. The vision he projected had tremendous impact to reinforce the University's aspiration in gearing and inspiring reform leading to comprehensive

implementation of Islamization of knowledge in IIUM. The discussion will focus on his principle role and contribution in Malaysia and his connection to IIUM and ABIM. It will critically look into three major aspects of Islamization in IIUM, that profoundly impacted from his ideal, namely (1) Islamization of knowledge (2) integration of knowledge and value (3) the study of religion in IIUM. This study is fundamentally based on library research. It undertakes extensive study on the works of al-Faruqi that presented his ideas of Islamization of Knowledge (IOK), integration (*takamul*) of science and its methodological framework, and his outstanding works as intellectual and activist with principle focus on his effort and contribution to transform Islamic practice and values in Malaysia. It

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will employ the analytical and descriptive method to analyze the data. Some conclusive information was also gathered from interviews and surveys. The data were reviewed and investigated in three stages; general, explorative, and focus study. This constitutes comprehensive material in an attempt to summarize the finding and conclude the result.

Al-Faruqi's Influence in Malaysia

The significant role of al-Faruqi in establishing the IOK project in Malaysia and its lasting influence in IIUM was promulgated and developed in early 80s. He founded the branch of International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) in Petaling Jaya and established strong connection with ABIM, projecting the inclusive role to initiate civilizational dialogue, while gearing reform in the governmental policy of Islam and educational initiative (Abaza, 2002). He was instrumental in pushing the implementation of Islamization policy in Malaysia and was responsible in assisting and advising government on the framework and task of inculcating Islamic ideals, values and norms, as demonstrated in his letter dated 26 January 1981 to the President of ABIM: "The opportunity which H.E. Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, has afforded me and my colleagues to study the Government's policies, has confirmed beyond doubt our conviction that the political condition of Malay Muslims is far better than that of their counterparts in other Muslim states" (Al-Faruqi, 1981). This was also strengthened by Abaza (2002) in her analysis of al-Faruqi's idealism and perspective of IOK and his unfailing support extended to the Islamization effort in Malaysia: "Al-Faruqi visited Malaysia many times, and it seems he maintained close contacts with the student movement around Anwar Ibrahim and ABIM (Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia). He also built up a relationship with Mahathir, during his early years in the government as an adviser on the Islamization of culture." This statement was also emphasized by Sven Alexander Schottman (2013) while discussing the relationship between al-Faruqi and Mahathir "Mahathir was also advised by an influential group of local and international Muslim scholars, and thinkers such as Ziauddin Sardar and Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi."

In his letter addressed to the President of ABIM dated 11 January 1981, following his discussion on the possibility of cooperation with the government, al-Faruqi expressed his high aspiration for renewal and reform of the ummah and the emergence of strong political and religious movement in Malaysia: "The responsibility of Malaysian leadership therefore is augmented geometrically, as their action has

become consequential for the Islamic world movement as a whole. Allah Ta'ala has guided Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad to be well disposed toward the Islamic movement, for his goals and your goals are one. His responsibility to maintain the precarious security of Malaysia, and of Muslim sovereignty in Malaysia, is extremely grave. It is hence his duty to weigh everything according to its criterion. Certainly, such Islamic responsibility deserves our and your support, indeed, the support of all Muslims around the world." (Al-Faruqi, 1981). This undivided support by al-Faruqi led to Anwar's joining the government in March 1982 (Allers, 2013). The combination of Mahathir's strong leadership and Anwar's Islamic credential has led to the revival of Islam in different shape and form including the establishment of Islamic institutions and agencies such as International Islamic University, Bank Islam and the promotion of Islam and its ideal and values at the core of governmental policy (Furlow, 2005; Hamid, 2014).

Al-Faruqi's Impact on International Islamic University Malaysia

As portrayed by Ibrahim Mohamed Zein in his article, "Religions As a 'Life Fact': Al-Faruqi's Impact on the International Islamic University Malaysia" al-Faruqi's major influence in Malaysia was his effort in inspiring and projecting the IOK agenda in IIUM, that had decisively impacted the movement of IOK in the University and its Kulliyah. Ibrahim argued that "Al-Faruqi...had a highly visible presence in the intellectual and academic climate of IIUM. This was because of his writing that was used in IIUM as textbooks and his supervision of the postgraduate works of a number of leading professors at IIUM." (Zein, 2011). His works such as *Christian Ethics*, *Islam and other Faiths*, *Al-Tawhid*, *Islamization of Knowledge*, *Islam* and others were highly influential, and broadly discussed and referred to in the initial workplan of Islamization that inspired the systematic planning of IOK in IIUM.

This phenomenal and decisive role as the architect of the process of Islamization of modern knowledge was perceptively illustrated by Ibrahim in his writing that "the intellectual leaders of IOK, who assumed the leadership of the IIUM by 1988 – and to a limited but growing extent, the University professors of IIUM – were at last ready to embark on the project of reforming Islamic education according to the IOK vision. Although al Faruqi was not around, yet, his intellectual legacy was at the centre of the process – through the presence of his students who were well represented in the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences." (Zein, 2011). This

highly important and strong position of al-Faruqi in the progress of IIUM was further buttressed by Ibrahim while arguing and describing his experience with al-Faruqi (1985-1986): "Few months before his tragic death in 1986, al-Faruqi was ready to serve the Ummah by accepting the post of the rector of the IIUM. He had high regards for both Malaysian Muslim intellectuals and the political leadership of the country. It seemed that International Institute of Islamic Thought would be given the chance to implement their ideas about Islamic education and the IIUM would be the platform for such an experiment" (Zein, 2011). This revealing experience was done in the 2nd International Conference on Contemporary Scholarship on Islam: The Legacy of Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi (ICCSIF) at IIUM. Its organizer articulate this meaningful experience: "For the Department of Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion, Professor Ismail al-Faruqi is especially meaningful and is highly appreciated. He is the source of her inspiration for her courses in comparative religion. It is to honor and commemorate this great scholar-activist that the Department organizes this seminar." (ICCSIF 2013). His eminent contributions in introducing the science of religion (*religionswissenschaft*) and civilizational course in IIUM and developing the Islamic worldview and integrative approach in the University's curriculum were also lasting and profound (Zein, 2011).

Islamization of Knowledge

In the context of International Islamic University Malaysia, al-Faruqi was its pioneer in introducing the systematic ideal of Islamization of Knowledge (IOK) and projected its comprehensive framework and workplan. His profound contributions to the process and aspiration for the accomplishment of Islamization project was crucial for the revival of rational and scientific spirit and religious conscience of the ummah. Arguably, this project has yet to be realized, as it is a continuing process unfailingly carried out and concretize since its inception. The initial planning and construction of this ideas and vision was demonstrated by Prof. Ibrahim Mohamed Zein (Zein, 2011) in his article, "Quite obviously, al Faruqi saw in the establishment of the IIUM a great opportunity for implementing his ideas on Islamic education...for al Faruqi, Malaysia unlike other Muslim countries created an atmosphere of mutual trust between the political leaders and Muslim scholars. That trust contributed to a healthy dialogue on Islamic issues at the national level."

In his introduction to the book written by Maulana Sadrudin Islahi, *Ma'rakah Islam-O-Jahiliyyat*, Israr

Ahmad Khan had expressed his confidence on this unprecedented effort of al-Faruqi to lead the project of IOK and reclaim the leading role of the ummah in the field of science and knowledge: "In the early seventies some young and energetic Islamic scholars, namely, Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, Taha Jabir al-'Ulwani, Abdul Hameed Abu Sulaiman, Jamal al-Barzanji and others launched a much-needed and timely movement billed as that of Islamization of Knowledge which aims at streamlining all disciplines of education including Islamic studies and shari'ah sciences, and making the whole corpus of knowledge, both secular and religious, consistent with and relevant to both basic sources of Islamic law, the Qur'an and the sunnah; and the existing and prevailing situation." (Islahi, 1997).

In the context of IIUM, the philosophy, and methodological framework of IOK was developed on the principle worldview defined by al-Faruqi as Islamization of modern knowledge as "integrating the new knowledge into the corpus of the Islamic legacy by eliminating, amending, re-interpreting and adapting its components as the world view of Islam and its value dictate." (Al-Faruqi, 1982). The Islamization or Islamization of knowledge in IIUM is thus meant to project a revolutionary and radical transformation of science from the Qur'anic worldview, and reforming contemporary knowledge, as remarked by former President of IIUM, Tan Sri Dato' Seri Sanusi Junid, "The International Islamic University Malaysia is founded upon a renewed awareness of the perennial value of the teachings of Islam and is dedicated to positive Islamic reorientation of the ummah and to the welfare of mankind. Your education at this institution includes a dimension that is missing elsewhere, for IIUM strives not merely for excellence in teaching and research, but to create an arena in which you can develop as a balanced, integrated person ready to face successfully the challenges of the contemporary world," (M.K. Hassan, 2001). In addition, Prof. Dr. Mohd. Kamal Hassan, former Rector of IIUM stated: "In translating the University's mission and visions into practice, IIUM has ensured that the programmes it offers are of a quality recognized internationally. These programmes are designed in such a way that both the Islamic heritage and modern approaches to scholarship are given their due weights. The aim is to produce professionals and scholars who are the pride of the Muslim world." (M.K. Hassan, 2001).

Integration of Knowledge and Value

The process of integration involve the inclusion of Islamic dimension and its intrinsic philosophy and worldview in the entire corpus of human science such as economics and management sciences, engineering, biological sciences, medicines, laws, architecture and environmental design and information technology and other branches of acquired knowledge. This approach was reflected in the recently concluded FWCII-2013 (First World Congress for the Integration and Islamization of Acquired Human Knowledge) that highlighted this objective: “to showcase the achievements of IIUM in fulfilling the mission of Integration and “Islamisation of Human Knowledge” as stated in the University’s Constitution.” It provides the platform for “IIUM academic staff in all Kulliyahs to highlight their intellectual and technological products, research papers, research findings, teaching experiences, consultancy projects, etc. based either on the mission of Integration (or input) of Revealed worldview, values, norms, perspectives, precepts, ethics; or Islamization of some aspects or issues in acquired human knowledge in their area of specialization.” (IIUM, 2013). The congress symbolized the ideal and embodied the vision of Islamization as aspired by the University, which it refers to as “a process of teaching, constructing, developing, researching, disseminating or reconstructing aspects of acquired or contemporary human knowledge, philosophical assumptions, theories, practices, traditions, paradigms, cultures, or aspects of human thought, personality, behavior or action in accordance, or in harmony, with the worldview of Islam, or the tenets of its ‘Aqidah or Shari’ah or Akhlaq.” Its theme: “constructing the alternative paradigm of tawhid” strongly resonate and reverberate the ideal emphasized by al-Faruqi on tawhid as “the primeval source determining all phenomena of Islamic civilization” (Al-Faruqi, 1985).

The basic principle and fundamental ideal of the University was broadly influenced by the idealism and worldview of al-Faruqi reflecting his broad spectrum of Islamist project. In his brief Presidential message Anwar Ibrahim, former President of IIUM had profoundly clarified this significant approach of integration that he projected, “The International Islamic University (IIUM) was founded to revitalize the intellectual tradition of the ummah. It endeavors to equip students with the ability to integrate their Islamic learning as the basis for intellectual creativity and for attaining a full life in the service of human welfare. It strives to instill a respect for academic excellence balanced by an integrated personality, so that its graduates are ready to face the challenges of

the contemporary world.” (Ibrahim, 1997). The exemplary practice of al-Faruqi in integrating *ilm* and *amal salih* was also emphasized by him in his speech on the momentous occasion of The Ismail Faruqi Award Presentation Ceremony: “He was acutely conscious of the realities of the time and the condition of the contemporary *ummah*. In this regard, he exemplified the conjunction between theoretical learning, *ilm*, and the righteous deeds, *amal salih*. He devoted the best years of his life, before his death under tragic circumstances, to the upliftment of the *ummah*.” (Research, 1995)

The idea of integration was well reflected in the courses offered in IIUM such as subjects of ethics and fiqh in medical science in order to inculcate awareness of religious limitation and worldview in medical practitioners to shape and form professional career of Muslim doctors. It was also manifested in the effort of integrating, incorporating, reorienting, synthesizing, and constructing Islamic input in the subjects undertaken in the Kulliyahs, as part of the Islamization of Human Knowledge agenda in IIUM, as briefly outlined by Prof M. Kamal Hassan (Mohd Kamal Hassan, 2013): “integration or incorporation of Divinely revealed values and norms/Islamic worldview/Islamic or Qur’anic perspectives/positive aspects of Muslim religious and intellectual legacy with the contemporary social sciences, human sciences, humanities, natural sciences, applied and professional sciences. A form of limited integration called “Islamic Input” has been going on for some time now in the Kulliyah of Medicine.” The integration (*takamul*) of subjects includes Islamic administration in political science, Islamic banking and business ethics in economics, ethics in engineering, and revealed knowledge in human sciences in order to effect internal integration of individual with balance personality and worldview.

The Study of Religion

Al-Faruqi’s determination and constant effort to introduce religious discipline has led to the establishment of the Department of Religion in Temple University in the United States. This momentous experience was unprecedented and “was a rare exception” (Zein, 2011) that became increasingly popular and followed by a number of institutions in the United States. He had initially developed this idea since his time in Pakistan (Central Institute of Islamic Research), to introduce religious courses from comparative perspectives and standpoint, which unfortunately did not materialized. It has also been envisioned earlier in Chicago Islamic College, and in the postgraduate program of Islamic

studies in the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) in North America which also failed, and then, “the only hope was embodied in this new institution of higher learning (IIUM) established in a country in which al Faruqi had a great trust in its political leadership.” (Zein, 2011).

He embarked on this project by formulating a concept paper that provide structural planning for the establishment of Islamic University in Malaysia and outlined the critical Islamic methodology that principally based on an integrated philosophy of revealed and acquired knowledge. His proposal was realized with the establishment of IIUM in 1983 by the Malaysian government that aspired to implement his profound ideal and philosophy (Zein, 2011). The IOK project was then comprehensively pursued and “quite obviously, al Faruqi saw in the establishment of the IIUM a great opportunity for implementing his ideas on Islamic education.” His dictate was to making Islamic civilization a mandatory course, which “should seek to give the Muslim student knowledge of the first principles of Islam as essence of Islamic civilization in the first year; of the historical achievements of Islamic civilization in the second year; how Islamic civilization compares and contrasts with other civilizations in essence and manifestation, in the third year; and of how Islamic civilization is the only viable option in dealing with the fundamental problems of Muslims and non-Muslims in the contemporary world, in the fourth year (Al-Faruqi, 1982; Haider Naqvi, Bilal, Yusuf, & Simm, 2012).

Since the establishment of the *Kulliyyah* of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS) in 1990, the teaching of Islam and other religion had been introduced and “has been largely influenced by the works of Ismail R. al-Faruqi – especially *Christian Ethics*, *Islamization of Knowledge*, and *Cultural Atlas of Islam*.” (Zein, 2011). In fact, “the establishment of IIUM and the religious study curriculum implemented at IIUM is a development of Faruqi’s earlier vision regarding the teaching of Islam as a civilization and worldview.” (Zein, 2011). Using his theory and ideas of religion as a “life-fact”, and his challenged to “the discipline of the history of religion from within”, and his usage of the canons of universal rationality to argue for both Islamic and secular humanism, it has “encouraged Muslim scholars to engage others in a meaningful inter-religious dialogue, and not to be inhibited by the secular humanist restrictive agenda.” (Zein, 2011).

Al-Faruqi and ABIM

Al-Faruqi had developed strong connection with Islamic movement in Malaysia especially ABIM (Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement) (Abaza, 2002). His idealism had lasting influence in the movement’s school of thought and his legacy continued to impact its aspiration and intellectual tradition (Baharudin, 2002). His prolific works had been consistently published and translated by ABIM such as *The Hijrah: the Necessity of its Iqamat or Vergegenwartigung* (*Hakikat Hijrah*, 1985), and *Islam and Culture* (1983). Besides, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), Institut Terjemahan dan Buku Malaysia (ITBM) and Thinker’s Library had also translated his important works, such as *Atlas Budaya Islam* (1992), *Pengislaman Ilmu* (1991), *Kesenian Islam* (1990), *Fikiran dan Budaya Islam* (1990), *Tauhid: Implikasinya kepada Kehidupan dan Pemikiran dan Trilog antara Agama-Agama Abraham*, dan *Islam dan Kepercayaan Lain* (ITBM, 2008)

His proposal for interfaith dialogue and religious engagement had remarkable influence in the policy of ABIM that consistently engage in inter-religious dialogue with various segments and religious affiliations of the society, which reflected his strong influence and idealism in the movement, as stated by Ibrahim Mohamed Zein “his impact was enormous and more significant. This was because his writings and ideas were appreciated and accepted on their merits.” (Zein, 2011).

This practice of mutual engagement had gained increasing momentum in the activities of ABIM since late 70s with meaningful outcome that promote mutual respect and understanding, which is “vital for a multi religious and cultural society such as Malaysia” (Manuty, 1997). This phenomenon had been observed by Muhammad Nur Manuty, former president of ABIM, in his paper presented at the International Seminar on Civilizational Dialogue entitled “Inter-civilization dialogue at the community level: the case of Malaysian society” that survey the experiments and experiences of cultural interface and religious dialogue among selected Malaysian voluntary organizations: “for instance, ABIM (Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement) – one of the leading Islamic organizations in the country has been engaged in inter-religious dialogue with Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist communities since 1970’s. Perhaps it can be said that ABIM has succeeded in opening venues for other races with different religious background in sundry affairs. In 1989, ABIM and MYM (Malaysian Young Movement) – a Chinese based youth organization with more than 200,000

members jointly initiated a “Spiritual Camp” in Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan, which is a significant event in our history attended by committed Muslim and Buddhist youths...their experience through cross religious and cultural activities surely would enhance the process of national integration and the vision of achieving civilized society.” (Manuty, 1997). This phenomenon could be traced to the influenced of al-Faruqi, as mentioned by Zuriati and Engku Ahmad Zaki (Rashid & Engku Alwi, 2010) “Ismail Raji al-Faruqi was a strong believer in inter-religious dialogue.” He was the leading exponent of common dialogue and understanding between diverse faith and religious persuasions that transcend barriers and propound the universality of the world-ummah.

Al-Faruqi had unmitigated faith in the future of ABIM and had extended his unwavering support and helped to procure substantive support from Saudi’s government, in facing the mighty challenge of financial trouble, as indicated in his letter to the President of ABIM “I have asked Mahathir to plead ABIM’s case in Saudi Arabia, the purpose of being to obtain a quick release of the million dollars committed to the ABIM building, so that the necessary preparations for construction could begin forthwith. Indeed, I have asked him to seek far more funds from the Muslim states represented at the summit, for Islamic da’wah in Malaysia and Southeast Asia.” (Al-Faruqi, 1981).

Aspiring for reform and to revitalize the spirit of *ukhuwwah* as an “Islamic worker-brother”, he persuaded ABIM to avoid conflict with government and striving for unity, that was imperative for Islamic resurgence and survival of the ummah, “in light of this great objective, every dispute or difference loses its significance. Our and your task is to pull together behind his leadership, to spare no erg of energy in fulfilling this crucial Islamic goal...it is therefore my and my colleagues’ judgment that you ought to respond to Mahathir’s gesture of good will (his removal of restrictions and stopping of harassment) with an equal or superior gesture of support and cooperation. It is not only becoming, but imperative for the Islamic movement publically to proclaim its slate clean of any condemnation of the Government’s policies of Malay reconstruction...in the name of Allah and the interest of the Islamic world movement, I renew my appeal to you to do everything in your [possible] power to break the frigid ice that has formed between the movement and the government and to move closer toward *shura* and cooperation in obedience to Allah Ta’ala and His Prophet (saw).” (Al-Faruqi, 1981).

Conclusion

This paper had briefly discussed the tremendous impact of al-Faruqi in transforming and reinterpreting Islamic practices and values in Malaysia. The methodology he developed had inspired the significant transformation and gearing comprehensive and radical change in the International Islamic University Malaysia. The Islamic vision of knowledge and the transformation could be idealized, with resolute struggle and commitment to reconstruct the inclusive worldview “along the Faruqian lines”, based on his exemplary and progressive framework of da’wah, interfaith dialogue and IOK, as summarized by Prof. M. Kamal Hassan, “It is not impossible for the new Malay (read Southeast Asian Muslim) generation to...fulfill the agenda of qualitative changes and civilisational transformation, provided it adheres to God-given formula of integration – that of material well being with spiritual values, action with inward reflection, human sciences with revealed knowledge, politics with divine guidance, science and technology with accountability to God, and professional skills with moral-spiritual values. It has to be deeply ingrained in the minds of the present and future generations that it is a divine imperative for the *mu’minun* (believers) to attain ‘*izzah* (honour and dignity), overall strength (*al-quwwah*) and leadership status.” (Yusuf, 1997).

Al-Faruqi’s efforts in outlining an intrinsic philosophy and paradigm of knowledge rooted on Islamic vision of reality and truth and in advocating its universal values which the University had imparted had profoundly contributed to reforming the educational system in the Muslim world. His dynamic works and idealism that reflected the tawhidic worldview had gearing significant reform in the practice of dakwah and civilizational dialogue carried out by ABIM that embodied the comprehensive and holistic vision of Islam which positively respond to intellectual and spiritual challenge of the ummah.

Acknowledgements

This research is funded by RAGS (Research Acculturation Grant Scheme) of KPT (Ministry of Higher Education) and UniSZA (Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin).

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Article history

Received: 10/08/2014

Accepted: 03/06/2015