

## The Effect of Religion on the Illustrations and Images of Arab Children

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study is to present the effect of religion on the illustrations and images of Arab children that can be grounded in art teaching. The method used in this study is visual ethnography. The researcher attended art classes in one of the private primary schools in Al Ain, UAE (United Arab Emirates), where the data composed using the narrative transcriptions, interviews with the children to gather insightful information and interpretation of the meaning projected by the children. Also an actual drawings and photos of the artwork where collected along with the observation of the art production for two months. There were 400 illustrations collected. An analysis of the art works of children from grade 1 and 2 resulted in the notion of three types of illustrations of religious understanding: 1) Realistic, practical and typical religious practices subjects. 2) Imaginative and inspired illustrations. 3) Personalized and customized illustrations. This study is interpretative.*

**Key Words:** spiritual, art, teaching, religion, culture, tradition, research

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to present the effect of religion on the illustrations and images of Arab children that can be grounded in art teaching, and to define where and under what situations religion grounded in art teaching is found and does shine. This study explores the effect of religion on Arab children's imaginations as articulated in illustrations and images through specifically directed research, displayed relatively different results as establish by those who studied what children verbally say about their religion. The most debatable element of this study is the definition of the term "religion" in the western literature which helps the purposes well, be clear in its likeness spirituality, significant verses clarifying significant elements in human life. As a professor, teaching across the Arab world and supervised student teachers in schools in Jordan, USA, and United Arab Emirates (UAE). I viewed and studied thousands of children's drawings. What captivated me was the great effect of religion on their representation and illustration.

In this paper the researcher provided an insight look about the effect of religion on the illustration and images of Arab children using visual anthropology as a tool and a method of study. Visual anthropology is a subfield of cultural anthropology that is concerned, in part, with the study and production of ethnographic photography, film and, since the mid-1990s, new media. While the term is sometimes used interchangeably with ethnographic film, visual anthropology also encompasses the anthropological study of visual representation, including areas such as performance, museums, art, and the production and reception of mass media. Visual representations from all cultures, such as sand paintings, tattoos, sculptures and reliefs, cave paintings, jewelry, hieroglyphics, paintings and photographs are included in the focus of visual anthropology. Human vision, its physiology, the properties of various media, the relationship of form to function, the evolution of visual representations within a culture are all within the province of visual anthropology. Since anthropology is a holistic science, the ways in which visual representation are connected to the rest of culture and society are central topics.

#### 1.1. Literature review

There are significant proofs that children in different parts of the world draw objects differently. However religion influences on the style of children's illustrations have been acknowledged, but the effect of these influences on children lives have not been studied. Because such influences may affect the manner children understand themselves, society, and their views of the surrounding, and decide on how to live their lives (Wilson, 2002).

How race, ethnicity, socioeconomics, and religion affect children's enthusiasms and approaches about illustrations has not been explored comprehensively, however, there are possible essential influence on their creative work. (Alland, 1983; Dennis, 1966; Malchiodi, 1998). Recently, researchers have used children's drawings to study their views about media and consumer associated behaviors, as well as image of superstars (Gauntlett, 2005), views of market places (McNeal, 1992), and visual memory of product packaging (McNeal and Ji, 2003). These illustration studies are grounded on the basis that children will draw what they value; what they like; and, what they favor (Dennis, 1966; Golomb, 2004) and that children can better express what is in their minds using visual illustrations than they can with words (Cox, 1992). Art goes beyond verbal language to communicate feelings that might not otherwise be expressed. According to Van Oers (2007) the major point about language use is the capability to employ it in practical and adequate ways in socio-cultural practices. Children have been usually defined by their intellectual limitations, a presumption that has caused difficulties for scholars attempting to understand young children spiritual and religious experiences or perception. The preoccupation with stages has serious consequences, among them obstructing our understanding of the gradual and the difficulty and distinctiveness on individual religious progress (Spilka et al 2003).

This is what motivated the researcher to explore the effect of religion on the illustration and images of Arab children. There is a lack in the literature and practice of art education studies of the spiritual (religion) intentions of art, and the effect of religion on children's illustrations and images. A large collection of associated terms can be originated in contemporary writings. For example, spirituality has been defined as relating to interior life, religious experience, the search for meaning and purpose, expression of relatedness, transcendence, immanence, ultimate value, integrity, identity, connection to something greater, and awareness (Bosacki, 2001; Champagne, 2001; Chater, 1998; Crawford & Rossiter, 2003; Eade, 2000; Engebretson, 2002; Fisher, 1997; Harris & Moran, 1998; Keating, 2000; O'Murchu, 1997).

In the Arab world, the art education curriculum clearly indicates the religion (spiritual) purposes of art and is addressed at all grade levels of instruction. Here are some of the spiritual goals as indicated in the National Team for Art Education (1995) curriculum documents: first, students should feel the power and the greatness of God through universal elements such as shapes, colors, and relationships. Second students should express, voice, and appreciate religion and Islamic heritage and have some perspective of the position of Islam about art. Third students should emphasize on the spiritual values of Islam through their expression, and creative work of art. The results of several studies indicated that the major goal of early education in the Arab States is the development of religious and spiritual domains such as in Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Gulf States in general (Alserorr, 1998; Arab Journal of Education, 1984; Bureau of Education for the Gulf States, 1999) While an investigation of specialized literature and proof of practice in Arab world public art education delivers great examples of the effect of religion, culture and tradition on art teaching. In the Arab world, spiritually inspired artists and their teaching in many forms and places are visible. Also the Art education curricula provide instruction within the vast majority of public and private schooling. Atteh (1996) discusses that in spiritual art, artists manipulate shape, form, color, etc. to create deep artistic meaning that brings out the artist's spirit within.

Bassiouny (1984) concludes: "spiritual values are judged in their practice through human relations, not outside this realm. The curriculum, besides containing environmental themes should include basic subject-matter derived from Koran and Islamic art tradition with guiding principles" (p. 152). Hassanvand, M. (2004) points out that "[Islam] rejected any picture of image of God because there is nothing akin to god." (p. 33). Cultural and social representations provide various possible identities which allow people to position themselves in a variety of ways in relation to the symbolic field of culture (Duveen, G. & Psaltis, C, 2008). Ellen Dissanayake (1988) recommends that reviewing the marvels of artworks of individuals using an anthropological method we directly notice that art is a universal way which people have raising their status to a telling significance. We precede this exceptional creation activity as identical with artistic activity, and also as a spiritual exercise. Children's illustrations appear not only consistent but also rather predictable. Freeman (1980) stated, "children's drawings often look stereotyped" (p. 19). Collections of recognized forms or images can always be identified as dominating in children's drawings (Markham, 1964).

Wilson & Wilson (1984) argued that illustrations are very much like languages, enclosing basic elements and culturally distinct meanings, construction, and structure. Children's improvement in drawing is a course of learning and adjusting to the culture specific graphic languages which are created and exploited by adults.

Purpose and intention cannot be detached; the meaning of the work of art is its intrinsic form as much as the soul is the form of the body. The purpose of the work of art may always have a spiritual meaning. (Coomaraswamy, 1956). As the literature proposes, that children art practice and the verbal exchange that goes with the making of art can reflect the thoughtfulness of constructing meaning, which makes thinking noticeable. Undoubtedly, religion is one of the most difficult expressions of children's social life. Children's religious knowledge can be articulated only by limited use of their sensible and logical commands. Jung (1938) and Werner (1926) argue that the main and most significant part of the contents of religious knowledge falls outside of that range of consciousness which the average individual is able to verbalize, and they established that this most significant part of religious knowledge can-not at all be communicated by a verbal language but can be articulated only pictorially and symbolically. Children can illustrate things through their art that they don't even have words for yet. Ruppell (2012) stated that it is certainly significance that another form of conflict – identity conflicts with religious and/or ethnic origins – has now developed virulent in addition to the purely socio-economic conflicts of interest. This kind of conflict represented visually with dynamics nurtured by religiously communicated identity to today's most important trouble places in the world. When children draw an image, and paint a portrait, those children are beginning to communicate visually. Children may illustrate to document a real experience, release spirits of happiness by painting with colors, or share an expressively emotional experience like the passing of a loved one through art.

An organized process is able to catch up with children inspired involvement by making illustrations, images, or figurative designs, to which clarifications or verbal additions may be given. These illustrations offer reasonable outcomes and to be nearly the one technique by which the researcher is able to collect data about practices which cannot be articulated verbally. This is evident that's why humans created music, fine arts, and of poetry to communicate their feelings and experiences, because unquestionably they could not converse everything with simple plain words. When children play with objects like toys, visualizes, and making stories, much earlier than the use of logical and coherent forms of communication. Observing the logical and coherent purposes of the verbal language in its strict sense, children will not be able to express themselves ideally before the age of fifteen. Therefore, the researcher devises nonverbal approaches which essentially parallel to the standing of the children's perceptive. This relates to the field of religious or spiritual knowledge as a social and cultural communication to be more noticeable specifically in children more than adults. Comprehensively, the researcher was guided in this study by the following question: What kind of religious events do Arab children illustrate based on their understanding of religion through art making?

Then the children's illustrations and images were categorized and discussed according to its: 1) Realistic, practical and typical religious practices subjects. 2) Imaginative, symbolic and inspired illustrations. 3) Personalized and customized illustrations.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Context of the Study**

All the Arab students in UAE schools share the same language, traditions, and religion. Religion is one of the major subjects taught in all schools, in addition to math, science, languages (Arabic and English), and the arts (music and visual art).

The school located in the middle upper class area of Al Ain (UAE). There are art rooms with great amount of supplies and offer art classes once a week for 45 minutes. The researcher attended and observed the art class of Mrs. M. who taught art for fifteen years. Art class is a compulsory at the elementary level. She is a creative art teacher who gives the students the freedom to express themselves. She works with two and three dimensional.

### **2.2. Participants**

Participants were fifty four students, from grad 1 and 2 from one of the private schools in Al Ain city, United Arab Emirates (UAE), because public schools permit and admit only local Emiratis children which they do not represent all Arabs. There were 33 girls and 21 boys represent almost a wide range of Arab countries such as: UAE, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Sudan, Iraq...etc. Children were selected randomly from a local private elementary school in the city of Al Ain in United Arab Emirates (UAE). This school serves a broad cross-section of the Arab community in terms of socioeconomic background.

### 2.3. Data collection and procedures

The method used in this study is visual ethnography that is a procedure of the data collection and content and comparative analysis of a daily experiences. The researcher attended art classes, in one of the private primary schools in Al Ain, UAE, where the data composed using the narrative transcriptions, interviews with the children to gather insightful information and interpretation of the meaning projected by the children. Also an actual drawings and photos of the artwork where collected along with the observation of the art production for two months.

The art teachers lead all lessons using Arabic and English language especially in the UAE in grade 1 and 2 classes. The lessons were implemented by the teacher who regularly taught the class, in order to avoid discomfort and anxiety. The teacher talked to the children freely on subject related to familiar religious topics. The children were instructed to visualize such topics in their mind in about four minutes time, later children were instructed to transfer what they visualized in their minds into an illustrations and images on drawing paper.

Children were given sufficient time to illustrate and draw their images. In order to gain more clarification and information on the illustrations children were given the choice to inscribe supplementary remarks on the other side of their drawings. Then the illustration grouped according to the themes and topics to understand the individualities and the characteristics of these illustrations and images expressed by the children.

The meaning and ideas were analyzed through the narrative transcriptions and examination of the artworks. Some of the art works were easy to interpret because of the written descriptions by the children on their art works. The researcher examined the artworks of the children. The researcher focused on the illustration of ideas and meanings. This study is interpretative. The researcher individually worked with each student who participated in this study in a semi-structured interview setting. This technique is used to collect qualitative data by setting up the interview that gives the participant the time to dialogue and express his/her opinion on a chosen topic. This type of interview permits the interviewer to deeply examine the individual feeling and sensitivity about specific concerns. The aim is to recognize the participant's perception. Open-ended questions are used, similar to: What can you tell me about your picture and who is in it? Where did you get the idea? How were you feeling when you made this Drawing? Also some the questions led by a particular answer through the interview ("You just said ...can you tell me more?"). The interviews were navigated and transcribed. Audio recording was made of all students' reaction to the interview questions. The recordings were transcribed daily after the interviews were concluded. The researcher examined the transcriptions and started to categorize patterns in the children's responses. A total of 400 illustrations were collected. The illustrations represented of realistic, practical and typical religious practices subjects, imaginative, symbolic and inspired illustrations and personalized and customized illustrations.

### 3. Results

The students in these classes were requested to illustrate their desired activities to define their interest and capabilities. The teacher talked to the children freely on subject related to familiar religious topics. Then she asked the students to write on the back of their illustration their names, age, and brief statement about the illustration. All students were aware of art materials, tools, and the art process. Therefore, there were variations in the art making among all students in this study. All students used art materials in painting and drawing, and illustrating projects, using different media and techniques. Children in general have the skill to draw on their own by the time they enter the school and advanced outside the simple lines they use to draw at young age. The results of the illustration were varied in themes including variations of subjects related to religion. Students have no restriction to illustrate religious (spiritual) subjects and discuss them and emphasizing on the objectives and values of these religious themes. To explain children's illustrations and images of the effect of religion that can be grounded in art teaching, and to define where and under what situations religion grounded in art teaching is found and does shine, the researcher examined children's drawings and their interview responses. Three themes for children's illustrations were recognized. These themes were: 1) Realistic, practical and typical religious practices subjects. 2) Imaginative, symbolic and inspired illustrations. 3) Personalized and customized illustrations (see Table 1 for frequency and percentage of themes illustrated by children).

### **3.1. Realistic, practical and typical religious practices subjects:**

School age Arab children appear to form specific images and illustrations of how religious and spiritual features look like in their own practice. These forms and features were then converted to something real they believe and accepted as a part of their lives. At this age also Arab children developed serious awareness of the facts of their religion. This awareness multiplied and increased through going to mosques and listen to sermon (kutbah) which given by the (sheikh) as a religious institution. Also the illustrations of the prayer in mosques were evident, mosques are the place of worshiping for Muslims and prayer is second in the "Five pillars" of Islam. The "Five Pillars" of Islam are the foundation of Muslim life: 1) Faith or belief in the Oneness of God and the finality of the prophet-hood of Mohammad; 2) Establishment of the daily prayers; 3) Concern for and almsgiving to the needy; 4) Self-purification through fasting; and 5) The pilgrimage to Mecaa for those who are able. In addition to the mentioned above illustrations the image of the pilgrimage (Hajj) to Mecaa (Al Kabah) which is the fifth pillar in Islam is a major illustrations presented by the children (see Figures 1 and 2). Another theme was noticeable is Muslims' holydays such as (Eid al Adha) the sacrificing of the lamb. The event in history gave birth to Eid-al Adha - Festival of Sacrifice, where Muslims all over the world remember the tough sacrifice Ibrahim had to make and was rewarded by Allah by sparing Ismail and making him an example to follow. Similarly is the Eid al Fitr which comes immediately after the fasting month of Ramadan, the illustrations showed the children in their new clothing in playing outside in celebration the festive mood of al Eid (see Figures 3 and 4). In another illustrations researcher observed the illustrations of traditional and religious images of veiled women. This is a mixture of traditional and religious believes (see Figure 5). In observing the majority of the graphical religious and spiritual expressions of children, researcher notices a strong realistic feature. This becomes mainly apparent in comparison with other illustrations. This realistic expression of the religious and spiritual fashions is a form of talk through images and symbols. Consequently, this is where children express their emotion in more direct realistic details.

### **3.2. Imaginative, symbolic and inspired illustrations:**

It is forbidden to represent God in a form of drawing or illustration like Westerns or others, the children used their imagination to represent God's power, in a form of reward or punishment. This concerns the role and the nature of religious knowledge, and specifically who is God to them? This shows an imagination combined with moral respect for the religious knowledge. Children picked their themes and topics about religion understanding and knowledge from an extensive series of religious and spiritual influences. Images demonstrated to be an especially favorite representation of rewards of good or bad deeds. The hellfire and heaven and the gates of heaven appear in variations, also the crescent and star which characterize Islam is often selected because Islam prohibits the illustration of God (ALLAH) or any of His Messengers (see Figure 6-8).

This was evident in one of the illustration by a Jordanian boy of the eight gates of heaven between tall fruit trees with the exuberant people of heaven as shown in figure 6. On the contrary figure 7 is a scene of the hellfire illustrated by a Palestine girl with people crying over a red hot fire. When asked to elaborate she said "those people were bad, they did bad things and missed everyday prayer. In addition scripting and symbols of religious identity was strong elements in some of the illustrations. They consist of the written word of (Allah Akbar) God the Greatest, in addition to the star and crescent to symbolize Islam (see Figure 8). A wonderful and evoking illustration by W 7.5 years old from Egypt, about hellfire at the afterlife, represented a boy over a hot red fire with an Arabic inscription "thief" (see Figure 9 and). The researcher asked the girl why you have this boy burning over the fire, she said "Mom told me, as Muslims, we cannot lie, steal, and do bad things or we will burn in fire at the afterlife. This boy is a thief because he took my sandwich and I want him to go to hell-fire".

### **3.3. Personalized and customized illustrations**

Hence, the researcher observed reactions and feelings drifted into the religious and spiritual expressions in an indirect way. The children itemized religious approaches which could be labeled as individualistic. Children started to think for themselves and to feel independently and self-sufficiently about asset, death, optimism, belief, and insatiability. These profound passionate understandings indicate a great degree of sensitiveness in those children. Children with such sensitivity need a deeper understanding from adults about their religious and spiritual feelings. M is an eight years old girl for Jordan illustrated an image of a mosque with inscription in Arabic says "the mosque for girls and women".

When asked why she wrote such statements she replied that “every Friday I ask my dad to take me to mosque, as he does with my brothers every Friday and he always says no, mosque is for men only and you are not, that’s why I made my own mosque for all the women I love”. (see Figure 10). Another extraordinary images and illustrations by Arab children were the result of the effects of religious teaching on their representations of all conflicts around them. The Arab spring and peace and war appeared as relevant to sociology of religion and culture. Over the last sixty years there has been a histrionically change in the kind of difficulties and troubles witnessed on the Arab society because of the east-west conflict, internal conflicts, and Arab Israeli war and peace circumstances. Illustrations of fighting and casualties including images of buildings on fire, individuals armed with selections of weapons, some in a position of fire their weapons and some just ready to fire. Also a heavy armor is present in the illustrations such as aircrafts, helicopters, tanks, and mortars. Some illustrations exposed dead people (martyrs as stated by the children throughout the interview), in addition to the scripting of religious expressions (see Figure 11 and 12). One illustration is a reflection of the understanding of the religious concept of martyrs as an Islamic perception of individual who loses his/her life in a war. When asked the Palestinian boy who illustrated drawing he said “this martyr who died in Gaza as a result of the Israelis attack”. On the contrary, figure 12 is presenting the same concept with different parties involving in the war from the same religion. “This is the war in Syria, people die for nothing, but Alhamdulillah (thanks God) they are going to heaven”. How did the children come to understand these issues? The interview of the children revealed that children religious knowledge of the mentioned issues had been influenced by school, family and family members, and media, which was the major influential on their understanding of conflicts around them.

#### 4. Discussion

Parallel to cultural studies by Alland (1983), the researcher found that as children given the opportunity to illustrate using various tools and materials, they tend to create works that replicate their particular religious beliefs. Affected by the Islamic culture, Arab children in this study produce 66% (n = 263 Illustrations) of their subjects related to realistic, practical and typical religious practices. The subjects were focusing on their real life experiences and knowledge of religious practices through teaching in classroom, family and family members, and media. These results exhibited an expression of relatedness, transcendence, immanence, ultimate value, integrity, identity, and connection to something greater, a result consistent with the findings of (Bosacki, 2001; Champagne, 2001; Chater, 1998; Crawford & Rossiter, 2003; EAUDE, 2000; Engebretson, 2002; Fisher, 1997; Harris & Moran, 1998; O’Murchu, 1997). This study highlighted that these practices were transformed by the children to something real they believe and accepted as a part of their lives. At this age also Arab children develop serious awareness of the facts of their religion and the daily routine that goes with it. As discussed by (Bassiouny, 1984; Duveen, G. & Psaltis, C, 2008; Ellen Dissanayake, 1988) this genuine appearance of the religious and spiritual styles is a system of communication through images and symbols. As a result, children articulated their reaction in more direct realistic facts. The data obtained in this study indicated that the illustrations presented by the children were grounded in tradition and religion which is a mixture of traditional and religious believes. Islam is a way of life based on the guidance of God given in the books of God and the example of the prophets of God. Islam literally means "Submission" (to the One True God) (Duveen, G. & Psaltis, C, 2008).

The results relating to children's imaginative, symbolic and inspired illustrations, 31% (n = 126 illustrations), can be described as self-reflection of what they think is best to symbolize an idea (Cox, 1992; Dennis, 1966; Golomb, 2004) and that children can better express what is in their minds using visual illustrations than they can with words. Also, in this study the researcher was attracted in when and how children come to represent spirits in their illustrations. The researcher observed the creative children as affectively motivated human beings who approached their illustration with sensitivity, imaginations and wishes (Fox & Berry, 2008). Golomb (2004) stressed that children sometimes “focus on drawings as representations of inner world feelings” (p. 128). Smoker & Groff (1996) stated that if a symbol can signify an entire philosophy to the spiritual stream of enlightenment, then possibly these symbols, from different religious traditions, are a simple visual way to do so. These symbols are also typical and therefore interconnect in deeper conventional ways to our spirit or perception.

In addition it is documented by this study that children used the written language to symbolize an image of God rather than an actual imaginative image of God or any of His Messengers. This study confirms the findings of Hassanvand, M. (2004) that describes the creation an image of God or anything similar, is worst form of idolatry as Islam emphasizes God’s worship.

From an Islamic point of view representing God is forbidden. Thus Islamic art is different from other arts, as it attempts to develop religiousness based stimulation in the world without restoring to the image of God. As Wilson (1984) discussed that artworks are very much similar to languages, providing plain simple elements and traditionally distinctive implications and structure. Children's development in illustration is a way of understanding and adapting to the culture definite graphic languages which are shaped and exploited by adults. As suggested also by (Smoker, P. & Groff, L, 1996) God or spirit is outside all dualisms, which is the mystic conducts of all religions seem to suggest. It is obviously God or spirit is also outside our human efforts to categorize and recognize as anything within the human understating. Nevertheless in the children's limited perception, and in their effort to create relationship with what is basically outside form, immeasurable, and contributing of the unlimited unknown, children tend to symbolize God, spirit, or religion in various means. For such reason Arab children used the written words of (Allah Akbar) God the Greatest, in addition to the star and crescent to symbolize God presence--being there--and the religion of Islam. Even with the absence of the verbal communication, illustrations convey stories and expose layers of information. Art is communication method that develops symbols (visual) to express meaning. Given this to be true, both verbal expression and image have the capabilities for communication, separately or in conjunction with one another (Edwards, 2010).

This study revealed that 3% (n = 11 Illustrations) fell outside the frame of realistic and practical or symbolic of imagination of religious themes. There were illustrations representing sadness, wishes, distress, and suffering. Destruction, war, killing and dead (Martyrs) leading to heaven. This was represented by the religious concept learned by children. There were humanitarian symbols of compassion. They were all individually illustrated as expressions of personal impressions grounded in religious believes, and more general religious intentions which illustrated in lovely personalized forms even within the grief in them. Children of this age seemed to have the highest degree of emotional sensitivity. In their personalized religious themes they discovered suitable means for this strong passionate sensitivity which is tied with creativity and cleverness. The researcher observed illustrations which formed religious purposes that were not from the arrangements of the child's religious believes. However, the observed illustrations still introduce some religious specific concepts with a personal trait to resolve a religious conflict to fit the child's needs as discussed in (Figure 10 Mosque for women). Jung (1938) confirmed that this type of expression is a contradiction with those who symbolize religious authority. Also this study underlined illustrations by children as result of the effects of religious teaching on their representations of all conflicts around them (Ruppell, 2012). The Arab spring and peace and war appeared as relevant to sociology of religion and culture. This study demonstrated that, through the interview of the children and their illustration, religious knowledge had been influenced by school, family and family members, and media, which was the major influential on their understanding of conflicts around them (Rodd, 1985; Tephly, 1985; Walker et al., 2003). When religious beliefs take the form of strict view, and the followers' beliefs and conduct are acknowledged to be right, while those of outside that circle, even someone within one's own religion, are identified to be wrong (Smoker, P. & Groff, L, 1996).

Results offered in this study may assist in constructing our understanding of how children influenced by religion and religion teaching through schools, homes, and media. Families, teachers and schools should know that they have the major influence on children as they develop their awareness of religion and conflicts around them. Also to help children understand their religion accurately and objectively and steer them away from literal religious fanaticism. (Al-Dajani, 1993) explains that to portray any religious group from any religious tradition, which adopts purely literal, as opposed to metaphorical or mythical, interpretations of their holy book, and which denies the validity of other interpretations or religious traditions, believing truth resides with their perspective only. We should teach children to understand that a Muslim is one who submits to the will of Allah and is an establisher of peace. Whereas Islam means establishment of peace, Muslim means one who establishes peace through his actions and conduct.

This study of children's art was noteworthy to Arab Children, because it is an opportunity for self-express about their emotional ideas and understanding of their religion. In Addition the study delivered a perceptible about understanding art for those who are accountable for the education of children. This offers the teachers a moral understanding of the meaning of spirituality and religion in art, which assists educators to organize and assemble the procedures of art making to permit children to express their needs, emphasizing on the spiritual and religious value that represent the real Islam in their world and away from extreme and radicalism. However, educators need to be aware that children in elementary school art convey meanings that are observable through visual language.

## 5. Implications

This study could lead to a communication system that help parents, family and schools understand children through art (as visual language) the power of meanings that reflect a true representation of children's lives. This helps to understand children feelings about themselves and their surroundings and in return gives parents, family and schools the opportunity to provide a safer, secure and comfortable environment for children to progress and develop. Elementary teacher education programs may profit from these findings, as they brought evidences concerning elementary education teachers' of understanding children's art. Teacher education programs and teacher educators might display important strategies on the significance of the visual art as a way to understand children for better teaching. Also pre-service and in-service teachers build the knowledge and skills needed to deal with teaching art and teaching through art in the classroom, through university coursework and professional development workshops.

## 6. Limitation and Further Research

The number of children participated in this study was small, and were selected from private school and from Al Ain city in the UAE. To expand generalities, future research should include a large more diverse sample of children in terms of schools and location and include other children that represent other religions within the Arab world, such as Christianity. Moreover, the researcher encourages art educators to further examine the unique and artistic processes that associate young children's perspectives on religion and spirituality

## 7. Conclusion

This study pointed out evidence from within the illustration and the drawing of children that would support tactics for accepting and understanding children's illustration relative to influence of religion on the visual expression and the visual language. The children in this study produced distinctive illustrations into which their personal religious and spiritual beliefs were bonded. The illustrations provided the researcher an indication on how children see themselves and others as they communicate their religious and spiritual ideas and thoughts visually. This study has developed the theme that visual expression of religion and spirituality needs a vibrant equilibrium between what children understand about religion within, and others from the outside. This should encompass a balance between both religion and sensible values. This evenness should be in such a way that children's visual experiences of religion surpasses all stereotyping including male and female, internal and external aspects of religion, such as religious practices and prayer, and an external element that deals with peace and social reasonableness.

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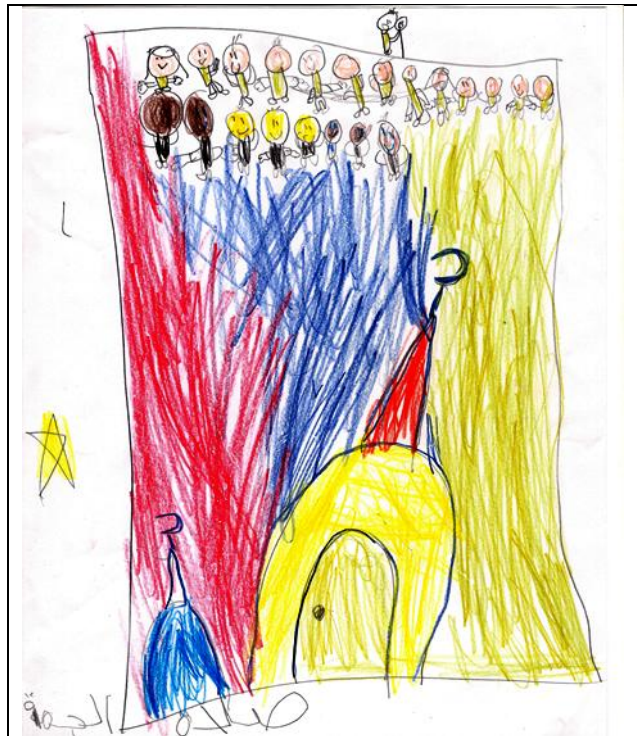
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**Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of Themes Illustrated by Children from Grade 1 and 2**

<i>Themes Illustrated</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Realistic, practical and typical religious practices subjects	263	66
Imaginative, symbolic and inspired illustrations	126	31
Personalized and customized illustrations	11	3
<i>Total</i>	<i>400</i>	<i>100</i>



**Figure 1 (Friday prayer and Kutbah)**



**Figure 2 (Pilgrimage to Mecca)**



**Figure 3(Eid-al Adha - Festival of Sacrifice)**



**Figure 4 (Eid al Fitr children at play)**



**Figure 5 (Veiled women)**



Figure 6(The eight gates of heaven)

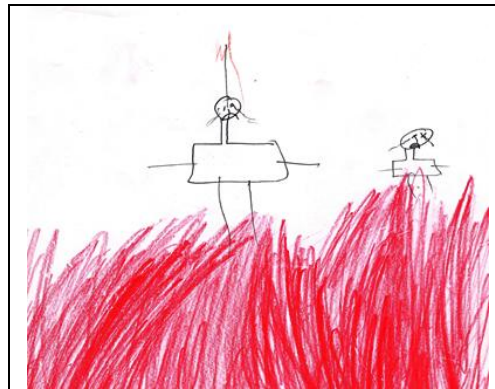


Figure 7 (people crying in hellfire)



Figure 8 (Mosque crescent and star, God The Greatest)



Figure 9(A thief in hellfire)

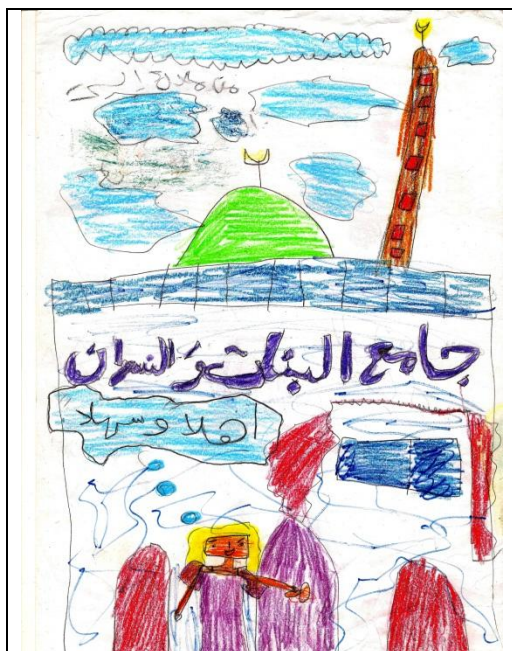


Figure 10 (Mosque for women)



Figure 11 (Martyr from Gaza)

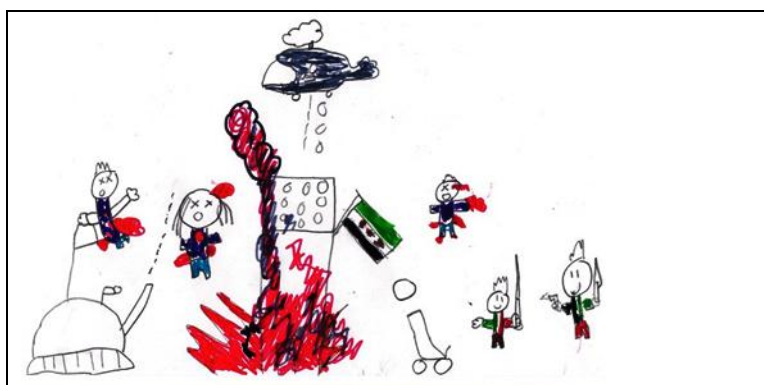


Figure 12 (Martyrs from Syria)