BLACK EXCELLENCE AND THE CURSE OF HAM: DEBATING RACE AND SLAVERY IN THE ISLAMIC TRADITION

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Abstract: The Curse of Ham narrative claims that Ham (the son of Noah) and his progeny were cursed by God with "blackness and slavery." While the story can be located within Islamic literature, the tradition was refuted by numerous scholars for various reasons. Firstly, the story is not found within the Quranic text. Secondly, it was generally accepted that slavery was not linked to color but was a substitute for execution following defeat in warfare. Most importantly, scholars refuted the idea that blackness could be considered a curse due to a number of early Muslim heroes being described as black. This paper explores the debates and discourses surrounding blackness and the story of Ham.

Keywords: Islam, race, slavery, racism, Blackness, Black Excellence, curse of Ham, critical Muslim studies

> "We will remove every single infiltrator from the country, except Buddha, Hindus and Sikhs"
>
> —Amit Shah, president of the BJP

> "Don't move . . . I will shoot, *Wallahi*! I will shoot her!"
>
> —*Black Panther* (the movie)

It may appear slightly strange to begin a paper that seeks to address the "curse of Ham" narrative with a quote from the Bharata Janata Party. I would suggest, however, there exists a link between the study of blackness within Islamicate history and the claims of Amit Shah. Whether in the minds of politicians, Hollywood producers, dons of the academy, or indeed some Muslims, Islam has an intimate and enduring link with "Arabness" that ultimately renders it foreign and invasive to anywhere that isn't "Arabia."[1] In the film Black Panther, Islam in Africa appears as a violent, invading force, with a scene in which a gunman kidnapping children

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shouts "*wallahi*", a distinctly Arabic formula (see Hassan 2018). Within academic literature, Islam has consistently been framed as a religion of the "Arabs" that has been hoisted over "non-Arabs."[2] What Arab has signified historically within differing contexts is seldom explored within such works.

Studies have either ignored the relationship between racism and the Islamicate or reproduced essentialist narratives regarding racial hierarchies that lend themselves to Eurocentric readings of history. Bernard Lewis's widely circulated and oft-quoted *Race and Colour in Islam* exemplifies this approach. Lewis focuses primarily on negative depictions of Africans by Arab authors. The book does not explore, for example, the Malian empire of Mansa Musa, estimated to be the richest man to have ever lived.[3] Nor does it assess the renowned scholarship of Aḥmad Bābā and the University of Timbuktu, or any number of the remarkable and noteworthy feats of Black Muslims in Africa (Kane 2016).[4] Rather, Lewis (1971: 39–63) proceeds to juxtapose Islam, slavery and blackness, with 20 of the 24 paintings illustrated within the work depicting black slaves with white masters. The fact that the majority of slaves within the Islamicate were not African is conspicuously overlooked, and rather than highlight the complex nature of color, Lewis surreptitiously implies that Muslim lands were awash with anti-black sentiment. The narratological ark of his work situates the Islamicate as the location in which the kernel of anti-black racism was nurtured.[5]

Of course, Lewis is not alone in such an endeavor. His prevarications are representative of a larger discourse that projects the sins and iniquities of European colonialism onto the Islamicate. For example, the argument that Europeans were taught anti-black racism from Muslims, [6] or the claims that slavery only persisted in Europe due to Islamicate influences (Clarence-Smith 2006: 1), or the constant lamentation from scholars who deride the dearth of scholarship on the so-called "Arab-led slavery of Africans" while arguing too much attention is given to trans-Atlantic slavery.[7] As Sayyid (2013: 131) highlights, such framing paves the way for differentiating the "good empires" of Europe to the "bad empire of Islam," "by arguing that the imperial sins of Islam are far greater than those of western empires, or that Atlantic slavery was a lesser evil than Saharan slavery, or that 'Muslim racism' is more racist than western racism."

Furthermore, Orlando Patterson's (1982: 176) discussion of Islam and race in his *Slavery and Social Death* claims that "throughout the Islamic world, for instance, race was a vital issue." Patterson, somewhat confusingly, argues that racist attitudes against dark-skinned slaves were common, and that "Arab rulers viewed the conquered native [Malaysian] population with utter contempt." However, he simultaneously asserts ethnicity was in fact more important than race, and that racial difference from their masters was often advantageous to slaves (Patterson 1982: 178). The lack of a consistent manifestation of racial hierarchies is not

probed by Patterson; rather, he suggests the displacements are strange occurrences and moves on. In fact, the contradictions that Patterson is unable to reconcile may in part be due to his attempt to read race as universal rather than historical.[8]

This paper contributes to the debates regarding whether racism can be located outside the framework of European modernity. The paper is separated into three sections. In the first section, I discuss the logics of the relationship between the categories of "Arab" and "Black." In the second section, I focus on the circulation of the curse of Ham within Islamic literature. In the third section of the paper, I examine how the curse of Ham was refuted by Muslim scholars through the development of a genre that I describe as "Black Excellence" literature. By demonstrating how the curse of Ham generated different discursive responses, I contest the arguments which presume that the racial logics of Europe can be usefully deployed to understand the Islamicate prior to the advent of the colonial world order.

The Historical Imaginary of "Arab" and "Black"

It is fundamentally flawed to assume the relationship between "Arab" and "Black" functioned according to the same logic as notions of "White" and "Black" within European racism. Such readings carry presumptions that the lucidities of race function consistently as trans-historical and trans-cultural categories, whereas the actualization of racism can only be found in the West. All cultures pronounce myths regarding their superiority to some extent; however, as Isaac, Ziegler and Eliav-Feldon (2009: 9) state:

> The specific form of rationalising these prejudices and attempting to base them on systematic abstract thought was developed in antiquity and taken over in early modern Europe. Racism, the nineteenth and twentieth century ideology familiar to us, developed in Europe, not in China, Japan and India.

Indeed, when negative statements regarding blackness can be located within Islamic literature, it does not necessarily follow that those attitudes manifested and shaped the experiences of black communities in the Islamicate. Furthermore, such attitudes do not necessarily function according to the same ideological structures as those made by white supremacists in the West. For example, Ibn Khaldūn's (d. 808/1406) derogatory comments regarding "blacks" and their "lack of intellect" are often taken as clear signs of "Arab racism"; however, there is little to suggest that Ibn Khaldūn's discussion of color was linked to any notion of genetically preserved characteristics, as within other aspects of his work, he links intelligence to culture and climate, and presents similar arguments regarding "white Slavic peoples." As Jackson (2005: 106) affirms, "race . . . was simply not Ibn Khaldūn's thing."[9]

Additionally, constructing Arabs and Africans as distinct homogeneous blocs whose identities were clearly demarcated ignores the fact that these identities were constantly being redefined throughout history. Peter Webb (2016: 179–80) in his *Imagining the Arabs* makes a compelling argument regarding "Arabness" in early Islam being heavily linked to an ability to speak Arabic correctly. He argues that prior to the complete systemization of Arab genealogy, numerous tribes that were ostensibly "non-Arab" claimed Arab lineage and were accepted (Webb 2016: 188–90). Furthermore, Mamdani characterizes the pre-modern Islamicate as "assimilationist." He argues the fluidity of kindship led to numerous tribes adopting new identities as "constructions of genealogy were flexible" (Mamdani 2018: 193). As such, the assumption that "Arab" and "Black" were consistently juxtaposed in the same way "White/Black" identities are does not appear to correspond to historical realities.[10]

This is evidenced by the grammar used to discuss color as ethnic designation within Islamicate texts. While many scholars assume that the Arabic term *sūdān* (generally translated as black) consistently referred to Africans, and the term *bīḍān* (translated as white) referred to Arabs, the utilization of these terms historically appears far more complex. The classical scholar Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh al-Kisāʾī, within his *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* (617/1220), uses the term *sūdān* to refer to the "Nubians, Zanj, Berbers, Sindhis and Indians" (1922: 101), which appears to demonstrate that the term had a broader signification than "African" in his context. Furthermore, "early in their history the Arabs . . . actually identified themselves as black, against the generally lighter-skinned Persians, Greeks, and others, whom they generally referred to as red" (Jackson 2005: 106). Akbar Muhammad (1985: 49) highlights this point, stating the use of '*sūdān*' "is not consonant with 'Black' and 'Negro' as the latter terms are used in modern Europe and America."

This is not to assert that anti-black sentiment cannot be located within the history of the Islamicate. It is simply to claim that the history of blackness cannot be properly recovered through the exceptional focus on one aspect of it. Such readings lead to problematic claims and unsubstantiated conclusions. David Goldenberg's work exemplifies this type of approach. He argues that the curse of Ham was pivotal in the justification of slavery within the Islamicate, as "in Islamic history, it was not Canaan who was enslaved, but Black Africa . . . The same mythic justification was then adopted from Islam by other societies in which the Black became the slave" (Goldenberg 1997: 34–5). A similar argument is presented by Sweet (1997: 149):

> In Muslim cosmology, the sub-Saharan African emerged as the son of Ham, destined to perpetual servitude. The Hamitic curse provided a justification for the increasing debasement of sub-Saharan Africans. Muslim vilification of blacks was

> constantly being refined as blackness and slavery came to be regarded as synonymous. Muslims came to view slavery as the condition that best suited sub-Saharan Africans.[11]

While the curse of Ham was used as a justification for anti-black racism throughout the transatlantic slave-trade, the narrative was simply not deployed in the same manner within the Islamicate. Indeed, the curse of Ham was seldom invoked by Muslim scholars to justify slavery.[12] Rather, the linkage between slavery and blackness often caused consternation among scholarship, as slavery was justified due to disbelief and not blackness within Islamic doctrine. Therefore, non-black unbelievers could legitimately be taken as slaves, while a black Muslim could never be enslaved according to Islamic law, and the curse of Ham appeared to contradict this well-established belief. Therefore, statements that insinuate that "Black Africa" was enslaved by Muslims due to the Hamitic narrative demonstrate the problematic nature of projecting the history of Europe onto the Islamicate. As Jackson (2005: 104–5) correctly highlights, black communities did not constitute a slave-class in the Islamicate and "there is no evidence to the effect that most blacks were slaves." Therefore, to properly situate discourse addressing blackness within the Islamicate, there is a need to shift away from the Eurocentric historical imaginary constructed by Orientalism. The following section explores the curse of Ham narrative and its various interpretations within Islamic literature.

The Curse of Ham within Islamic literature

The story of Noah's ark can be located throughout the Qur'ān; however, there are no references to the curse of Ham within the scripture.[13] Narrations of the Hamitic narrative within Islamic literature generally derive from and cite (Genesis 9:20-25). The biblical account reads:

> Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. But Seth and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked. When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers."

The biblical story has generally been understood to have developed as a justification for the Israelites domination over the Canaanites (Goldenberg 2003: 98).

This perhaps accounts for the strange invocation against Canaan, the son of Ham, instead of Ham himself. Furthermore, there exists no clear reference to blackness within the actual text of the Bible, and the origins of the anti-black aspect of the curse has caused disagreement among scholars.

Goldenberg, in his study of the curse of Ham in Abrahamic religious discourse, claims that the addition of blackness to the curse of slavery "begins to appear in 7th century Islamic texts. This exegetical innovation coincides with the seventh century Muslim conquests in Africa, which brought an increasing influx of black African slaves to the Near East" (Goldenberg 2003: 197). A similar argument is elected by Firestone (2007: 53) who argues that there is no association between blackness and slavery on the Rabbinic and Biblical levels, and the association "would come only later with the Islamic and then later Christian interpretive layers, when the curse of slavery and blackness are joined together in order to provide authoritative justification for enslaving Africans under Muslim and Christian slavers."

El-Hamel, however, highlights that Talmudic exegesis dating back to 500 AD clearly cites blackness as part of the curse. Furthermore, he also argues the term Ham in Hebrew carries connotations of blackness, whether it is explicitly referenced within the passage or not. El-Hamel (2013: 64–5) states that "the Hamitic curse can be found in early Judaic literature (predating Islam) and clearly brings race, that is, blackness, to the forefront as the punishment levied on Ham's descendants."

Nevertheless, the story of Ham was transmitted within Islamic literature. The fact that the story could not be located in the Qur'ān did not restrict exegetes and commentators from narrating the tale. Due to the general ambiguity surrounding the parables of the Prophets (*Qaṣaṣ al-'Anbiyā'*) within the Qur'ān, exegetes relied on extra-Quranic material in order to provide detailed accounts of the elliptical narratives. As a result, Muslim scholars often used Biblical exegesis (*israʾīliyyāt*) to provide names, dates and places to events that the Qur'ān simply refused to disclose. The use of *israʾīliyyāt* was deemed controversial by scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah, while it was outrightly rejected by modernists such as Muḥammad 'Abduh (Abu-Zayd 2003). However, within classical exegetical and historiographical works, there appears to be a strong reliance on the literature.

The generally accepted narrative runs that Noah conveyed the message of monotheism for 845 years, to no avail. As a result, God punished humanity with a flood which destroyed the world. The world was subsequently repopulated through Noah and his three sons: Shem (*Sām*), Ham (*Hām*) and Japheth (*Yāfidh*). The medieval historian Ibn al-Athīr (d.630/1233) states, "Shem is the father of the Arabs, Persians and the Romans, Ham is the father of the Blacks, and Japheth

is the father of the Turks and Gog and Magog" (al-Athīr 1987: 1.61). Ham's blackness is considered as part of Noah's curse upon him and his progeny, as well as the malediction of slavery.

Accounts of Ham's curse within Islamic literature run concurrent to the Biblical account; however, there are notable differences. Specifically, no readings of the story within Islamic accounts cite Noah's drunkenness as the reason for his laying naked upon the ark. This omission would be expected in light of conceptions of Prophets and their infallibility ("*Iṣmah al-Anbiyā*"), and the conflict Noah's drunkenness would create theologically. Interestingly, the two dominant accounts within Islamic literature attribute the cause of the curse to either Ham viewing his father naked, or Ham having sex upon the ark.[14]

For example, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), in his seminal *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk* (*History of the Prophets and Kings*) narrates that Ham was cursed due to initiating intercourse on the ark, though it had been forbidden. The tradition reads, "Ham had sex with his wife in the ark, so Noah prayed that his seed be altered, and he produced the Blacks" (Al-Ṭabarī 1989: 1.196). Similarly, Ibn Kathīr (d.793/1373) also cites Ham having intercourse on the ark, but equally references viewing his father naked. He states:

> It is stated that Ham had intercourse with his wife upon the ark and Noah prayed to God to disfigure his disposition and seed. Therefore, he had a son who was black, and he was Canaan b. Ham, the ancestor of the Blacks. It is also stated that he saw his father sleeping and his private parts were exposed, and he did not cover them, but his brothers did. Due to this, [Ham] was cursed so that his seed was changed and his progeny would be slaves to their cousins. (Ibn Kathīr 1988: 110)

Generally, narrators appear to give preponderance to the narrative in which Ham is cursed due to seeing his father's genitals. Ibn al-Athīr (1987: 1.61), in his *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh* (*The Complete [book] of History*), narrates:

> The Blacks (*al-Sūdān*) are from the lineage of Ham, because Noah was asleep with his private parts exposed, and Ham saw this and did not cover them. Then, Shem and Japheth saw this and threw a covering over their father. When Noah awoke, he learnt what Ham and his brothers had done, and he cursed Ham.

A similar rendition of the story is provided within the *Tārīkh* of al-Ya'qūbī (d. 284/898). However, al-Ya'qūbī emphasizes Ham's laughter at his father's genitals as the primary cause of the curse. Unlike Ibn al-Athīr, al-Ya'qūbī also alleges that the curse was not invoked against Ham, but Canaan instead. Al-Ya'qūbī (1969: 1.12–13) narrates,

> Verily, Noah was sleeping during the day and his robe was not covering him. His son Ham saw his genitals and laughed. His brothers Shem and Japheth were informed about this and they took a covering to place on top of Noah. With their faces turned away from him, they threw the covering over him. When Noah awoke from his sleep and became aware of the news, he cursed Canaan the son of Ham, and he did not curse Ham.

Perhaps one of the most detailed renditions of the tale can be found within the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* of al-Kisā'ī. As with al-Ya'qūbī, al-Kisā'ī emphasizes that Ham laughed at his father's genitals, which becomes the motivating factor for the curse. Al-Kisā'ī (1922: 98–9) states:

> It is stated that one day Noah approached his son and said, "I have not had the pleasure of sleep since boarding the ark, and I would like to sleep until I am satisfied." Noah placed his head on the lap of his son, Shem, and fell asleep. Then, a strong wind blew and uncovered Noah's genitals. Ham began to bellow with laughter, whereas Sam covered him up. When Noah awoke, he asked, "what was the laughter?" Shem informed him of what had taken place and Noah became angry with Ham. "You laugh at the genitals of your father?" Noah exclaimed, "May God alter your complexion and blacken your face." And at that moment, Ham's face became black. Noah turned to Shem and said, "you protected your father's privacy, may God protect you in this world and show mercy on you in the next. From your lineage, may God bestow you Prophets and nobility. From the lineage of Ham, may there be slaves and slave-girls until the day of resurrection. From Japheth's lineage, may he bestow tyrants, kings and rulers."

Throughout the various narrations, Ham is consistently described as the antagonist of the tale, while Shem is lauded as the protagonist. Within much of this literature, Shem is extolled as the honorable son who protects his father's honor. On numerous instances, Shem and his progeny are praised as the rightful heirs to Noah's legacy (Al-Masʿūdī 1938: 83; see also Al-Masʿūdī 1973). Descriptions of Japheth are more ambiguous in this respect. While al-Ya'qūbī places Japheth alongside Shem in his narration, al-Kisā'ī omits Japheth from the curse story entirely. The most interesting, and rare, account of the story can be found in al-Masʿūdī's (d. 345/ 956) *Akhbār al-Zamān* (*History of Time*) in which he claims that the curse was invoked upon both Ham and Japheth. Al-Masʿūdī (1938: 83) states:

> Noah was asleep and his private parts were uncovered. Ham saw this and did not cover his father but instead began to laugh. Japheth remained silent and did not rebuke him. Shem shouted at both of them. Noah learnt of this and cursed Ham

> so that his progeny would be black, disfigured and slaves to the children of Shem. And he cursed Japheth that his progeny would become slaves to the children of Shem, and they would be the most wicked of people.

In this fascinating account, the children of both Ham and Japheth are cursed by Noah to be slaves to the children of Shem. While this version of the story appears to differ significantly from the Biblical account as well as other narrations, the inclusion of Japheth within the remit of the curse follows a particular logic. The practice of slavery in the Islamicate was generally not linked to any specific peoples or color. While the curse of Ham appears to highlight the enslavement of black peoples, it does not explain the enslavement of other groups. Therefore, the amendment to the story may have been al-Masʿūdī's attempt to explain the existence of non-black slaves within the Islamicate.[15]

Overall, the curse of Ham narrative generally appears within historiographical and exegetical works. According to several historians, the origins of blackness derived from a curse from Noah that included slavery. A clear difference between Biblical exegesis and those provided by Muslim scholars is the focus on Ham's laughter serving as a catalyst for Noah's wrath within Muslim interpretations. Furthermore, commentators differed upon whether the curse was aimed at Canaan or Ham, and the role of Japheth within the narrative.

Importantly, while the general connotation of the narrative seeks to frame blackness negatively, such constructions do not encompass the scope in which the story has been interpreted and appropriated. While there are no doubt countless renditions scattered throughout the oral histories of Muslim communities, a remarkable interpretation of Ham's blackness can be located with the Harratin, a North-African peoples that reside across Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria. For the Harratin, the source of their blackness does not represent a curse. Rather, it signifies the divine word of God:

> The Harratin relate that they are the descendants of Noah's second son, Ham, and that once upon a time they used to be white. One day, however, Ham protected his head during a heavy rain-storm by carrying the Koran on top of it. The rain was so heavy that it washed all the characters of the holy book on to Ham's skin; these characters, being sacred, were indelible, and so they turned Ham and his offspring black forever! (Ensel 1999: 34)

"Black Excellence" and the Curse of Ham

The curse of Ham was contested by many Muslim scholars who found the narrative antithetical to core Islamic beliefs. Aḥmad Bābā al-Timbuktī (d. 1033/1627)

famously rejected the curse as "inauthentic" in his *Mi'rāj al-Su'ūd* (The Ladder of Ascent), arguing that slavery could not be linked to blackness as "there is no difference between one race and another" (Al-Timbuktī 2000: 25–6). Ibn Khaldūn (2005: 169–70) similarly concluded that there was no scriptural justification to validate the story. Numerous scholars provided differing rationales for their refutations; however, this section of the paper focuses primarily on the rejection of the curse narrative from a genre that I describe as "Black Excellence" literature.

This distinct form of literary production has existed within the Islamicate for over a millennium and has been characterized by a number of defining features. Firstly, "Black Excellence" texts all explicitly reject the curse of Ham and argue for the "natural origins" of blackness as a color. Secondly, the literature contains appraisals of the "virtues of black figures" (*Manāqib al-Sūdān*) which celebrate important figures in Islam such as Luqmān, Bilāl ibn Rabāh and the Negus of Abyssinia. Finally, these works all contain detailed histories of famous black kings, poets and scholars, highlighting numerous instances of black excellence. The four texts that I explore within this section are Al-Jāḥiẓ's (d.255/869) *Fakhr al-Sūdān alā al-Bīḍān* (*The Pride of the Blacks*), Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 597/1200) *Tanwīr al-Ghabash fī Faḍl al-Sūdān wa al-Ḥabash* (*Illuminating the Darkness Regarding the Virtues of the Blacks and the Abyssinians*), Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's (d. 911/1505) *Raf' Sha'n al-Ḥubshān* (*Elevating the Status of the Abyssinians*) and Mullah ʿAlī Effendī's *Raf'i ul-Gubus fi Fezayili al-Hubus* (*Dispelling the Darkness regarding the Merits of the Abyssinians*).[16]

The birth of this genre causes much speculation, although some commentators link the literature with the Zanj revolt (869–83) during the Abbasid caliphate (Muhammad 1985: 48). The Zanj revolt consisted of a slave uprising against the caliphate, led by the charismatic preacher Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī (see Talhami 1977). The Zanj were considered "black" and commentators have cautiously speculated that early authors may have penned a defense of blackness in a bid to show their support for the slave rebellion. The earliest, and only surviving text, of the literature responding directly to the Zanj revolt can be found with al-Jāḥiẓ's *Fakhr al-Sūdān alā al-Bīḍān*.

However, a number of texts that have been lost to history are referenced within secondary literature. For example, the *Risāla fī Faḍl al Sūdān alā al-Bīḍān* (*An Epistle concerning the Superiority of the Blacks over the Whites*) by Abū al-Abbās Alī bin Muḥammad al-Anbārī (d.286/906) and the *Kitāb al-Sūdān wa Faḍluhum alā al-Bīḍān* (*The Blacks and their Superiority over the Whites*) by Abū Bakr ibn Khalaf al-Baghdādī al-Marzubānī (d.309/921), were both written directly after the Zanj revolt and written in defence of the "black" community following the rebellion. Other texts, penned slightly later, that developed the genre have also been lost. These include Abū Muḥammad Ja'far al-Qārī's (500/1106) *Kitāb Manāqib*

al-Sūdān (*The Book highlighting the Virtues of the Blacks*), and Abū al-Faraj al-Makkī al-Shāfi'ī's (458/1065) *Kitāb Rawnaq al- Ḥisān fī Fadā'il al-Ḥubshān* (*The Book highlighting the Excellence of Virtues among the Abyssinians*).[17] The fact that so many texts praising the excellency of blackness were produced greatly complicates and challenges Orientalist constructions and framing of Islam as a purveyor of anti-black sentiment. Numerous Muslim scholars clearly viewed an intimate link between Islam and blackness. The earliest of these texts can be seen with Al-Jāḥiẓ's contribution.

"Al-Jāḥiẓ," Pride of the Blacks

Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr b. Baḥr b. Maḥbūb, commonly known as al-Jāḥiẓ, has often been described as one of the greatest writers of the Islamicate (Hefter 2014: 1). Al-Jāḥiẓ is said to have been born in Basra, Iraq, around the year 160/776, and his biographers suggest that he had African ancestry (Al-Baghdādī 2001: 14.124); however, it is difficult to determine whether al-Jāḥiẓ penned his work giving voice to the Zanj rebellion due to a form of self-identification with the East-African rebels. As Hefter (2014: 142–3) asserts, al-Jāḥiẓ would have "viewed his own origins and potential as quite different from those of East Africans." What is relatively clear is that through giving a voice to the rebellion, al-Jāḥiẓ risked incurring the wrath of the Abbasid elite, whom he was challenging through his work.[18]

Regarding the curse of Ham narrative, al-Jāḥiẓ (1979: 1.219-220) dismisses the claim that being black is a disfigurement or punishment from God. He states:

> We state that Allāh did not cause us to be black to punish us, rather the environment has impacted us. The evidence for this is that there are also black tribes amongst the Arabs, such as the people of Sulaym ibn Manṣūr. All [of the tribes] that have descended from the warmest regions are also black . . . Blackness and whiteness are impacted by properties of the environment in the same manner that God has caused water and soil to be impacted by the proximity of the sun, and its strength or lack of. [The differences in color] are not the result of any disfigurement, punishment, mutilation or shortcoming (*laysa dhālika min qibali maskh wa lā uqūba wa lā tashwīh wa lā taqṣīr*).

Al-Jāḥiẓ explicitly rejects the notion that blackness can be understood as divine punishment, and while he does not cite the Hamitic curse by name, the reference to the curse is relatively clear. He proceeds to establish the virtues of the color black, citing that the most valuable copper is the darkest and the stone from paradise is also black (Al-Jāḥiẓ 1979: 1.219).

Furthermore, al-Jāḥiẓ celebrates black figures from Islamicate history to emphasize that blackness cannot be framed in a negative manner. For example,

in a chapter entitled "*Manāqib al-Sūdān*" ("Virtues of the Blacks") he names Luqmān al-Ḥakīm, a figure from the Qur'ān who is sometimes described as a Prophet. He also cites a prominent jurist Sa'īd ibn Jubair, the Negus of Abysinnia, and devotes a lengthy section to the prominent companion Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, of whom Caliph 'Umar said "Indeed, Abū Bakr is our master and he emancipated our master [Bilāl], and he alone constitutes a third of Islam" (Al-Jāḥiẓ 1979: 1.180).

One of the most unique aspects of al-Jāḥiẓ's argument can be seen through his attempt to link blackness to the Prophet Muḥammad. Firstly, he argues that the Egyptian Copts are considered black, and since Arabs claim their lineage through the Copt Hagar, Arabs have also descended from blacks. Furthermore, he cites that the Prophet Muḥammad's only son, Ibrāhīm, could also be described as black as his mother Maria was an Egyptian Copt, and "[The Prophet Muḥammad] was given the appellation Abū Ibrāhīm (The father of Ibrāhīm) by Gabriel" (Al-Jāḥiẓ 1979: 1.218). Through linking seminal figures within Islamic theology and Arab lineage to blackness, al-Jāḥiẓ shrewdly challenges those that denigrate blackness to reflect on the fact that they are also denigrating previous Prophets, companions and members of the Prophet Muḥammad's family, as well as the Prophet Muḥammad himself.

Importantly, al-Jāḥiẓ rewrites blackness as a blessing in place of a curse. He links blackness with the divine message of God and the mission of the Prophet Muḥammad. Citing a Ḥadīth tradition, he narrates that the Prophet Muḥammad stated, "I have been sent to the red and the black" (Muslim, 4.1058). Therefore, al-Jāḥiẓ solidifies the link between the Prophet Muḥammad and blackness. Al-Jāḥiẓ (1979: 1.210) continues,

> He was sent to us. Indeed, his use of the term "black" (*al-aswad*) refers to us. Therefore, if the Arabs are red (*al-aḥmar*), then they are amongst the ranks of the Romans (*Rūm*), Slavs (*Saqāliba*), Persians and those of Khurāsān. But if they belong to the black peoples, then this word is derived from us . . . Therefore, we are the first people to whom he was commissioned (*nahnū mutaqaddimūn fī al-da'wah*).

As can be seen within his work, al-Jāḥiẓ forcefully rejects the argument that blackness can be viewed as a curse or punishment from God. He links color to the environment and dismisses the Hamitic curse. Additionally, he celebrates numerous black figures from within Islamic history, such as the companion Bilāl, the Negus of Abyssinia and Luqmān. Furthermore, he highlights that the Prophet Muḥammad's lineage, as with all Arabs, was also intertwined with black ancestry.

Importantly, al-Jāḥiẓ reinterprets blackness as a blessing in lieu of a curse, as he claims that the Prophet Muḥammad stated that he was sent specifically for

the black community, and this should be viewed as a blessing that black communities can lay claim to. Interestingly, within his work, he deploys the term *sūdān* to describe Arabs, Coptic Egyptians, Africans, Indians and other Asians. Al-Jāḥiẓ's work is perhaps the first of its kind; however, it certainly was not to be the last. His contribution inspired the development of a number of works celebrating blackness and was quoted and referenced widely by numerous authors across the Islamicate.

Ibn al-Jawzī's Illuminating the Darkness

Ibn al-Jawzī was born and raised in Baghdad. He was a specialist in theology, jurisprudence and Ḥadīth. Linked to the Ḥanbalī school, it is claimed from biographers that he authored over 340 works, of these was his famed *Tanwīr al-Ghabash fī Faḍl al-Sūdān wa al- Ḥabash* (Muhammad 1985: 52). The reason for his writing of the text is contested; Alawiye (1985: 32) suggests the purpose may have been linked with a battle in which 80,000 "black" soldiers were defeated and executed in Egypt. As a result, Ibn al-Jawzī felt the need to honor the memories of these soldiers through valorizing blackness within his work. Within his text, Ibn al-Jawzī addresses a number of differing themes. These include providing a history of the origins of black people, sections focused on black prophets, kings, scholars and poets and the similarities between Quranic Arabic and the Ethiopic language. Ibn al-Jawzī reserves specific sections for "the noble black companions" and "the eminent black female companions."

Ibn al-Jawzī takes aim at the curse of Ham within the first chapters of his work. In a chapter entitled "The Origin of Black People," Ibn al-Jawzī affirms that black people have indeed descended from Ham. He narrates a tradition from the Prophet Muḥammad that states, "Noah had three sons: Sam, Ham and Yafith. As for Sam, he is the father of the Arabs, the Persians and the Greeks of Byzantium. As for Yafith, his is the father of Yajūj and Majūj. As for Ham, he is the father of the black-skinned (people)" (Alawiye 1985: 65). As for the origins of blackness, Ibn al-Jawzī rejects the story of the curse. He argues:

> As far as colour is concerned, it would appear that there is no ostensible cause for it . . . Ham's sons, however, settled in the [direction of the] southerly and westerly winds, and so their colour changed. However, it is neither true nor authentic that when Noah's body appeared naked and Ham did not cover it, Noah cursed him and consequently Ham became black. (Alawiye 1985: 67)

Upon dismissing the curse, Ibn al-Jawzī proceeds to discuss important black figures from Islamic history. Similar to al-Jāḥiẓ, he invokes the Quranic figure of Luqmān al-Ḥakīm, and also references the semi-mystical figure of Dhū al-Qarnayn,

citing narrations that both were black. He emphasizes the importance of the Negus of Abysinnia for early Islam and devotes a lengthy section to the figure of Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ.

Ibn al-Jawzī bases his rejection of the curse on a combination of factors. The lack of scriptural references are cited, but equally important were the virtuous black figures within Islamic history that Ibn al-Jawzī refused to link to a curse. Ibn al-Jawzī's work is generally considered one of the seminal texts within this genre, and references to his treatise can be found in numerous works that treat the subject area, as well as those from outside the genre. Consider, for example, the seventeenth-century Egyptian scholar 'Abd ul-Ra'ūf al-Munāwī (d.1621). In his commentary on Ḥadīth, al-Munāwī references Ibn al-Jawzī and his position on the curse of Ham. In his *Fayd al-Qadīr*, Al-Munāwī (1972: 111) states, "As Ibn al-Jawzī stated, black is an authentic colour . . . what has been narrated regarding Noah's private parts being uncovered, and Ham not covering him causing the curse of blackness is inauthentic and false."

Al-Suyūṭī's Elevating the Status

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī was born and raised in fifteenth-century Cairo. He is generally considered a polymath and one of the most preeminent scholars of Islamicate civilization, having contributed countless works in numerous fields. He appears to have been particularly interested in the topic of color as he wrote three different books on the subject. These include his *Azhār al-Urūsh fī Akhbār al-Ḥubūsh* (*The Flowers of the Throne concerning information regarding the Abyssinians*) and *Nuzhat al-'Umr fī al-Tafdīl bayna al-Bīd wa al-Sūd wa al-Sumr* (*The Journey of a Lifetime concerning preference for Whites, Blacks and Browns*). His *Nuzhat al-Umr* is a short treatise that consists of a number of poems praising white, black and brown people, and his *Azhār al-Urūsh* serves as an abridgement to his *Raf' Sha'n al-Ḥubshān*. Therefore, in this section I focus on his major contribution *Raf' Sha'n al-Ḥubshān* (*Elevating the Status of the Abyssinians*).

Al-Suyūṭī's *Raf' Sha'n al-Ḥubshān* is clearly influenced by the aforementioned Ibn al-Jawzī's *Tanwīr al-Ghabash*, and in many instances mirrors its structure and arguments. The reasons al-Suyūṭī elected to write his *Raf' Sha'n al-Ḥubshān* are not made explicitly clear within the treatise. He does make reference to reading Ibn al-Jawzī's *Tanwīr* and feeling that many important details were omitted. As a result of such, he claims to want to expand and develop the work (Al-Suyūṭī 1991: 59). Al-Khathlan (1983: 32) notes that this may be part of al-Suyūṭī's attempt to establish his ability as a polymath, as within a number of his works he "claims to have a wider knowledge of the subject than his predecessors and tries to show himself as a scholar able to write in many different fields." However, Al-Khathlan also points out that his motive for writing the text should not be simplified to sheer

hubris, as al-Suyūṭī devoted a number of texts to the subject which appears to demonstrate his interest in the subject matter more generally.

As with all "Black Excellence" literature, al-Suyūṭī expressly rejects the curse of Ham narrative. He states, "regarding what has been narrated concerning Noah's private area remaining exposed, and Ham not covering this so [Noah] cursed him with blackness, this is not established and is inauthentic" (Al-Suyūṭī 1991: 371). Al-Suyūṭī explains that the differences in color are not linked to any form of punishment or a curse; rather, they are evidence of divine provenance.

To justify this claim, Al-Suyūṭī cites a Ḥadīth attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad. The Ḥadīth reads:

> Allāh created Ādam from a handful of clay that He gathered from the entire earth. Therefore, the sons of Ādam are like the earth. Some of them are red, some are white, some are black, and some are mixed. Some of them are easy, some of them are difficult, some are evil, and some are good.

Al-Suyūṭī adds that the tradition is authentic and argues that differences in color are due to the differing clay that man was created with. As such, denigration of a specific color would in essence constitute a rejection of divine wisdom. Furthermore, al-Suyūṭī also devotes large sections of his work to praising black figures from Islamic history, including a fascinating poetized saga of Bilāl's trials and tribulations (Al-Suyūṭī 1991: 252).

Al-Suyūṭī's text ultimately served as a recension of the work of his predecessor Ibn al-Jawzī. However, al-Suyūṭī appears to have focused more on the Abyssinians. Due to the lineage of figures such as Bilāl and the Negus, and the early Muslim migration to Abyssinia, Abyssinians appear to have been held in particularly high regard within his work. While his contribution certainly builds from the *Tanwīr al-Ghabash*, it includes far more information regarding the historical figures it discusses.

Mullah 'Alī Effendī's Dispelling the Darkness

Writing in the early seventeenth century, the Ottoman scholar Mullah 'Alī Effendī penned his famed *Raf'i ul-Gubus fi Fezayili al-Hubus.* Described by a contemporary French ambassador as "the man who governed the Ottoman empire," 'Alī rose to power among the Ottoman ranks becoming a chief judge and earning a position on the Ottoman imperial council. Mullah 'Alī, or 'Alī bin 'Abdur Ra'ūf el-Ḥabeshī, was originally of African origin, and his meteoric rise from freed slave to chief judge was facilitated by the hugely powerful network of black eunuchs working within the Ottoman ranks, chiefly his patron and mentor, Meḥmed Āghā (Junne 2016: 155).

However, Mullah ʻAlī's rise clearly attracted jealousy and disdain from others within the Ottoman ranks. Literature penned by some of his peers refers to him as Sunbul ʻAlī, a term which Tezcan (2007: 83) argues was used disparagingly and suggests that ʻAlī was attacked due to his dark skin and African origins. ʻAlī responded to these attacks through writing his *Raf'i ul-Gubus fi Fezayili al-Hubus* (1612), which appears to be named after Ibn al-Jawzī's Arabic work *Tanwīr al-Ghabash*. Within his text, Mullah ʻAlī defends his color and pays tribute to the network of black eunuchs that helped him succeed. Importantly, ʻAlī cites both Ibn al-Jawzī and al-Suyūṭī as his sources and repeats many of the arguments that have already been highlighted.

Mullah ʻAlī summarizes the arguments regarding the origins of blackness:

> The arguments of those, who claim that the diversity of the colours of humans does not stem from the beginning of creation but happened afterwards as a result of an accident, are grounded on two points. One of them is the curse of Noah, peace be upon our Prophet and upon him; and the second is the influence of the air (different) places. (Tezcan 2007: 89)

'Alī claims that both of these arguments are unfounded and cites Quranic verse Q30:22 as his proof. The verse reads, "And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are Signs for those who know." Using the Qur'ān as justification, 'Alī argues that diversity in human colors are ordained by God as a blessing for mankind, and were not developed as a curse, nor an aberration due to the climate.

Furthermore, he explicitly refutes the curse of Ham arguing "a sound mind and a straight disposition perceive its weakness" (Tezcan 2007: 90). He questions the logic of Noah cursing his son for a small mistake and claims that even if this event had taken place, the punishment would not have been this severe. Additionally, Mullah 'Alī highlights the contradictions between the story and the realities of the Islamicate, pointing out that non-blacks are also taken as slaves. ʻAlī proceeds to dissect the curse further by arguing that had blackness been a curse, the child of a black man and a white woman would still be completely black. However, the change in the color of the child clearly demonstrates that blackness cannot be viewed as a curse. Having refuted the curse of Ham, ʻAlī proceeds to establish that within Islam, the color of skin is inconsequential, the truly important aspect of a person is linked to their piety. As Tezcan (2007: 93) notes:

> In his final remarks, Mullah ʻAlī states that even though the colour black is superior to white, implying that blacks are better than whites, what matters in the eyes of God is not one's skin colour, but righteousness and piety. He then employs

> intelligent and creative play on words in reference to a Quranic verse, which reads "God said: The noblest one among you in the eyes of God is the most pious" he did not say "the most good-looking, the most handsome, the whitest."

As with previously explored "Black Excellence" literature, Mullah ʻAlī's contribution rejects the curse of Ham narrative and argues that blackness should not be understood as an aberration. As with al-Suyūtī, ʻAlī links the differences in color as a sign of divine wisdom and cites the Qur'ān to justify his argument. One of the most unique aspects of ʻAlī's rejection of the curse narrative is his claim that it simply defies logic and does not make sense. Furthermore, ʻAlī's work also celebrates many of the important black figures from Islamicate history that have previously been explored.

ʻAlī was writing in seventeenth-century Ottoman Istanbul, and within his work, he cites both Ibn al-Jawzī's *Tanwīr al Ghabash* and al-Suyūtī's *Raf' Sha'n al-Ḥubshān*. His work also appears to refer to Ibn ʻAbd al-Bāqī al-Bukhārī al-Makkī's *Al-Ṭirāz al-Manqūsh fī Maḥāsin al-Ḥubūsh* (*The Coloured Thread concerning the Virtues of the Blacks*). Ibn al-Jawzī produced his text in twelfth-century Baghdad, al-Suyūtī penned his contribution in fifteenth-century Cairo, while Ibn ʻAbd al-Bāqī's treatise is dated pre-sixteenth century and was probably compiled in Medina. Furthermore, writing around the same time as ʻAlī, albeit on a different continent, was the aforementioned Aḥmad Bābā of Timbuktu. In his *Mi'rāj al-Su'ūd* (*The Ladder of Ascent*), Bābā also quotes directly from both Ibn al-Jawzī and al-Suyūtī and makes reference to al-Jāḥiẓ. The fact that these scholars had access to various different copies of these works across different centuries highlights the spatial and temporal ranges of "Black Excellence" literature. Clearly, these texts were produced and reproduced, circulating widely in the medieval Islamicate, which certainly appears to affirm al-Musawi's (2015) concept of a "Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters."

Conclusion

> O people! Arabic is not a father or grandfather but rather a spoken tongue. Whoever speaks in it is an Arab except that [all of] you are the children of Ādam and Ādam is of dust. By God, an Abyssinian slave who obeys God is better than a Qurayshī chieftain who disobeys God. Indeed, the most honourable among you is the most righteous among you.[19]

In his *Islam and the Blackamerican*, Sherman Jackson (2005: 100) argues that black Muslims in the US are occasionally treated as though they had contracted "the

disease of cultural/racial apostasy" due to their affinity to Islam. The arraignment presupposes that historical Islam is at essence antithetical towards blackness, and therefore to be authentically black, one cannot be authentically Muslim. Jackson links these arguments to a type of discourse he refers to as "Black Orientalism." The presumptions that Jackson highlights and critiques, however, are not limited to Black Orientalism and can be located within much of the literature that attempts to treat the issue of Islam and race.

The various narrations of the curse of Ham within the Islamic tradition have circulated widely within the Western tradition, yet very few works cite the "Black Excellence" literature explored within the third section of this paper. This, I would argue, is ultimately due to the fact that the contours and categorizations utilized in the study of race within the Islamicate have not shifted from the positions constructed by the early pioneers in the field; namely, Orientalists such as Bernard Lewis, who is often referenced as an authority on the topic.[20]

Importantly, however, the conversation is far broader than the methods utilized by scholars, nor their political machinations. Rather, the more important inquiry, to my mind at least, would be to question why particular stories regarding discrimination against Black and African communities within the Islamicate have been produced, reproduced and travelled so well within the Western canon. From scholars who have been flagrantly brash with their generalizations, to others who are far more assiduous and whose work has generally been beneficial to the academy, similar narratives regarding Islam and blackness have been promoted and propagated.

While it would be difficult to posit a definitive answer, I would speculatively assert that the narratives regarding the subjugation of black communities in the Islamicate have ultimately served to reaffirm a particular understanding of the history of Western nations and their relationship with race. In a sense, through focusing on the "anti-black racism" within Muslim history, the atrocities committed by white supremacy become relativized. Through reproducing the idea that the "Arab/Muslim" world was hostile towards blackness and was also racist, there is a minimization of the effects and implications that European empire-building had on non-white peoples, and a narrative in which the world as we currently know it, is the world that has always been. In this sense, white supremacy becomes less of an aberration, and sits neatly beside "Arab supremacy" which equally deserves attention.

Naturally, then, when scholars come across texts such al-Jāḥiẓ's *Fakhr al-Sūdān*, it is readily dismissed as parody, as it disrupts a distinct conceptualization of the world. Ibn al-Jawzī and al-Suyūṭī's contributions can be overlooked and ignored, though these works travelled from Cairo, to Timbuktu, to Istanbul and were referenced freely for centuries. The various intellectual

centers such as Timbuktu, and the Malian dynasties that flourished in Africa can be marginalized as anomalies. As to accept that anti-black racism has not always existed would necessitate an exploration of how and why anti-black racism has become so commonplace within our contemporary world, and for scholarship in the West, that would perhaps be a far more introspective, and certainly, more daunting proposition.

This paper has explored the various ways in which blackness and Islam has been discussed, framed and debated through the discourses surrounding the "Curse of Ham" narrative. Clearly, the curse narrative was transmitted within Islamic literature, as has been evidenced. Equally important to note however is that the names of Luqmān, Bilāl, the Negus of Abyssinia, as well as numerous others, also travelled the span of the Islamicate and were consistently evoked as symbols signifying the excellency of blackness.

The literature celebrating blackness within Islamicate history may have found its earliest manifestations with al-Jāḥiẓ; however, it has had numerous additions since the ninth century. More recently, the Senegalese Sheikh Mūsā Kamarā (d.1945) penned his magnum opus *Zuhūr al-Basātīn fī Tārīkh al-Sawādīn* (*Flowers of the Garden from the History of the Blacks*). In the modern day, the scholar Habib Akande has added to this literary genre producing three books of this type, naming his work after Ibn al-Jawzī's *Tanwīr al-Ghabash* (see Akande 2012, 2015, 2016). Within all of the "Black Excellence" literature cited, the curse of Ham narrative is unequivocally rejected.

This paper began with a brief discussion regarding the way in which Islam has been framed as an "Arab" religion and the modern-day implications of accepting this Orientalist categorization. I close with a fascinating tradition that captures a discussion between the esteemed eighth-century scholar Shihāb al-Dīn al-Zuhrī and the Caliph ʿAbd al-Mālik.

'Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ relates in the book of his travels that al-Zuhrī, the famous theologian, once appeared at the court of the Caliph ʿAbd al-Mālik and introduced himself to the commander of the Faithful. The following remarkable conversation is said to have ensued between the ruler and the scholar:

C: Where do you come from al-Zuhrī?
Z: From Mecca.
C: Who had authority over the people there while you were present?
Z: 'Aṭā' b. Rabāḥ.
C: Is this man an Arab or a mawlā?[21]
Z: A Mawlā.
C: How did he succeed in getting such influence over the inhabitants of Mecca?

Z: Because of his religiosity and his knowledge of the tradition.
C: This is right, men who fear God and are knowledgeable in tradition are fitted to be eminent among men. But who is the most eminent man in Yemen?
Z: Ṭāwus b. Kaysān.
C: Is he of the Arabs of the Mawālī?
Z: Of the Mawālī.
C: How did he gain his influence?
Z: With the same qualities of 'Aṭā'.

> The caliph asked these questions about all the provinces of Islam, and al-Zuhrī told him that the leadership of Muslim society was in the hands of Yazīd ibn Abī Ḥabīb in Egypt, of Makhul—son of a prisoner of war from Kabul, set free by a Hudhaylite woman whom he served—in Syria, Maymūn b. Mihrān in Mesopotamia, al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. al-Muzāḥim in Khurāsān, al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥasan in Baṣra, and Ibrāhīm al-Nakhā'ī in Kūfa; all of these were mawālī'. (Goldziher 1967: 109–10)

For those familiar with the legal or exegetical tradition in Islam, the names of 'Aṭā', al-Ḍaḥḥāk, al-Nakhā'ī or al-Ḥasan are not particularly new. They are consistently cited as masters of their disciplines, and Muslims who should be emulated. The fact that "non-Arab" figures held such authority in early Islam contradicts the false categorization constructing Islam as a religion of "Arab supremacy." Indeed, the fact that it is simply inconceivable that Indians or Africans could have been governors of London, Paris or Lisbon within European empires highlights the differences in the logics that governed these societies.

The study of the relationships between differing tribes and ethnicities within the Islamicate is crucial work and remains fertile ground for research and inquiry. However, any legitimate study must firstly be detached from a Eurocentric reading that seeks to use the history of the Islamicate as a tool to narrate and reaffirm stories about the exceptionality of the West. The study of the Islamicate must be deracinated from its Orientalist roots in order for it to be properly understood. This, ultimately, is the project of critical Muslim studies.

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Notes

1. In BJP-ruled India, for example, it has become common to attack Muslims by labelling them "Arab slaves," "invaders" and "infiltrators." Interestingly, similar slurs have been used against the Rohingya in Myanmar and the Uighurs in China.
2. See Crone's descriptions of "Arab conquests" and her framing of race (Crone 1980).
3. For more information on Mansa Musa and the Malian Empire, see Levtzion (1963).
4. Kane situates Timbuktu as one of the esteemed centers of learning in Muslim West Africa, but he importantly demonstrates Timbuktu was one among many scholarly institutions across West Africa.
5. In contrast to this, consider a separate but equally potent elixir of the Orientalist imagination in which Arabs/Muslims are depicted *as blacks* in comparison to their white victims. A clear example of this can be seen with Jean-Léon Gérôme's famous painting *The Slave Market* (1866), in which three visibly black Muslim slave-owners menacingly surrounding a naked white female slave. Furthermore, Ella Shohat's contribution on the "whitening of the Jews" in European literature also demonstrates how Muslims were associated with blackness within certain strands of Orientalism. Shohat highlights the shift in representations of Jews becoming noticeably whiter than their Arab counterparts as Jewish communities became increasingly seen as victims of "Arabs/Muslims" (see Shohat 2018). Additionally, Escalante's work also highlights the intertwining tropes shared between Islamophobia and anti-African racism (Escalante 2019). Taking these conflicting views of race, slavery and the Islamicate into consideration, the self-serving nature of these portrayals becomes clear. Within this discourse, "the Muslim" undertakes an interminable metamorphosis, not in a particularly Kafkaesque fashion and more along the lines of Schrodinger's model; black enough to be terrifying, yet white enough to be culpable of "racism."
6. For example, Sweet (1997: 149) writes, "Iberian Christians became acquainted with the Muslim system of black slavery and adopted the same sets of symbols and myths, with additional arguments." Similarly, David Davis (2006: 63) claims "it seems highly probable that racial stereotypes were transmitted, along with black slavery itself . . . as Christians traded and fought with Muslims from the first Islamic challenges to the Byzantine Empire, in the seventh and eighth centuries, through the era of the crusades."
7. Gubara (2018) devotes a lengthy section highlighting the colonial genealogy of the study of slavery in the Islamicate, and the numerous problematic and contradictory suppositions that underlie categorizations of what she describes as "AIS" (Arab/Islamic slavery).
8. Other works equally reproduce a Eurocentric reading of race and project these categories onto the Islamicate. Within these works, Islam is conflated with "Arabness" and constructed as distinct from "Africanness" and "Blackness." See Segal (2002); see also Hall (2011), Davis (1984), Bacharach (1984) and Sheikh (1998). These works range from the more scholarly (Bruce), to the journalistic (Segal), to the outright polemical (Sheikh); however, the constant remains the framing and enactment of Arabness and Islam, and how it is bifurcated with Blackness/Africanness.
9. Jackson has a more detailed exposition on Ibn Khaldūn's views on color and their link with "race." See Jackson (2005).
10. The fact that white and black could never mix is highlighted most clearly with the social/legal "one drop rule" in the US, which states that if a person possesses even one drop of "black blood," they cannot be considered white. See Jordan (2014).
11. Also see Davis (1984: 42). Davis states, "[Arabs] increasingly invoked the Biblical curse of Canaan to explain why the 'sons of Ham' had been blackened and degraded to the status of natural slaves as punishment for their ancestor's sin."

12. Within legal texts, for example, discussions of slavery never make reference to the curse narrative for justification. See Al-Qudūrī (2010: 666).
13. The only mention of an "unnamed son" of Noah in the Qur'ān can be found in Q11:40-46. The unnamed son refuses to board the Ark with Noah, and Noah pleads with God to pardon his son. God replies "O Noah! he is not of thy family: for his conduct is unrighteous." Al-Qurṭubī suggests the "unnamed son" that the Qur'ān refers to in this verse may in fact be the "Can'ān" mentioned in the Bible. This is somewhat strange considering Canaan is generally considered to be the grandson of Noah. See Al-Qurṭubī (1995: Vol.11, p. 122). He also states that another view claims the fourth son may have been called Yām. Interestingly, Razi discusses whether the fourth "son" of Noah is his biological son or whether the term "ibn" is simply a sobriquet, as some argue that a biological son of an infallible prophet cannot be a disbeliever. See Al-Rāzī (1995: Vol. 17, p. 240).
14. Both of these accounts can also be found within Biblical exegesis, along with a number of others. These include Ham attempting to castrate Noah, paternal incestuous rape, and maternal incestuous rape. See Bergma and Hahn (2005).
15. Interestingly, a current of thinking found within legal texts states that Arabs can own slaves but cannot be enslaved. For example, Ibn Taymiyyah discusses the issue in his *Majmū'* He states, "Abū Ḥanīfa does not permit the enslaving of Arabs (*la yajūzu istarqāq al-'arab*) . . . as the Arabs have been favoured by their noble lineage (*ikhtaṣṣu bi-sharaf in-nasab*), as the Prophet was from among them." This appears to have been influenced by a narration from 'Umar which states: "Arabs cannot be owned." See Ibn Taymiyyah (1998: vol. 31, pp. 219–220). However, this is a minority view among exegetes, with enslavement predominantly linked with belief/disbelief and not lineage.
16. Another important text can be seen with *Al-Ṭirāz al-Manqūsh fī Maḥāsin al-Ḥubūsh* of Muḥammad 'Abd al-Bāqī Al-Bukhārī. His work equally celebrates the virtues of black figures from Islamic history; however, I have not included the work in my analysis as he also affirms the Hamitic narrative as legitimate. See Al-Bukhārī (2013: 27).
17. For more on the classical works that have been lost, see Bashir (1992: 69–70). Also see Alawiye (1985).
18. In place of viewing al-Jāḥiẓ's work as a brave piece of scholarship, Lewis (1990: 32) problematically suggests that it should be read as parody. His spurious claim is then repeated within literature on the subject. For example, Colville (2002: 25). Similarly, quoting Lewis, Davis repeats the argument, erroneously claiming that "the only unqualified and full-scale defence of black Africans" is a parody (Davis 1984: 44). The problem with this argument is that there is little evidence provided to suggest that it is satire; further, at this juncture in history a number of tracts defending blackness are developed within the Islamicate. Hefter (2014: 147) has equally concluded that there is nothing to suggest that al-Jāḥiẓ should be read as satire.
19. The quote is taken from Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, who attributes the tradition to the Prophet Muḥammad (Afsaruddin 2007: 24).
20. The most recent example of this I have come across can be seen in Heng's *The Invention of Race* in which she cites Lewis as an authority "on Islamic civilizations negative responses to black skin and Africans (despite, apparently, al-Jahiz's laudatory treatise)." The subtle question raised regarding al-Jāḥiẓ's contribution through the use of "apparently" highlights the broader point regarding the suspicion of pro-black literature emerging from the Islamicate. See Heng (2018: 12).
21. The term *mawlā* has a number of different meanings, and its definition is often disputed. From the context of this tradition, it appears to refer to "non-Arab" Muslims. For more on the term *mawlā* and its usage, see Urban (2012).

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