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Islam's Combat of Racism as Evidenced by Al-Qur'an and Hadith

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Abstract

A few months ago the USA was overcome by nationwide protests that continue to this day; these protests expanded internationally. The protests were sparked by the death of George Floyd, an unconvicted African-American man. The incident indicates that racism is still prevalent. This article shall argue that Islam condemns racism and that it came with a plan to end slavery, which was very popular in pre-Islamic days and also to end racist action in all its forms. According to Islamic teaching, racism should have disappeared fourteen centuries ago. This article shall present Qur'anic verses and Prophetic hadith to the effect that in Islam all people are supposed to live in harmony and equality. There should be no discrimination on bases of race, money, skin color or religious believes.

Keywords: *Qur'anic Verses, Hadith, Racism, Companion.*

Abstrak

PERJUANGAN ISLAM TERHADAP RASISME DALAM AL-QUR'AN DAN HADITS. Beberapa bulan yang lalu Amerika Serikat diliputi oleh protes nasional yang berlanjut hingga hari ini. Protes ini meluas secara internasional. Protes dipicu oleh kematian George Floyd,

seorang pria Afrika-Amerika, yang tidak terpidana. Peristiwa tersebut menunjukkan bahwa rasisme masih merajalela. Artikel ini akan memaparkan bahwa Islam mengutuk rasisme dan itu datang dengan rencana untuk mengakhiri perbudakan yang sangat populer di masa pra-Islam dan juga untuk mengakhiri tindakan rasis dalam segala bentuknya. Menurut ajaran Islam, rasisme seharusnya sudah menghilang empat belas abad yang lalu. Artikel ini akan menyajikan ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an dan hadis Nabi yang menyatakan bahwa dalam Islam semua orang harus hidup dalam harmoni dan persamaan. Tidak boleh ada diskriminasi atas dasar ras, warna kulit, atau keyakinan agama.

Kata Kunci: *Ayat Al-Qur'an, Hadis, Rasisme, Sahabat.*

A. Introduction

A few months ago the USA was convulsed by nationwide protests, that went on violently for several days, over the death of an African-American man in police custody. George Floyd died after being arrested by police, footage of the arrest shows a white police officer kneeling on the African-American man's neck while he was pinned to the floor. "I can't breathe," Mr. Floyd said repeatedly, pleading for his life and begging, "Please, please, please." For approximately nine minutes, the policeman kept his knee on the man's neck. About six minutes into that period, the African-American man became unresponsive. In videos of the incident, this was when the African-American man fell silent, as bystanders urged the officers to check his pulse. One of the other officers did just that, checking the man's right wrist, but "couldn't find one". Yet the other officers did not move. After nearly nine minutes the policeman removed his knee from the man's neck. Motionless, he was rolled on to a gurney and taken to a medical center in an ambulance. There he was pronounced dead. George Floyd's last moments were captured on multiple mobile phones and shared widely on social media. In the following pages I shall present Qur'anic verses and Prophetic hadith that bring to light Islam's stance on such incidents.

B. Discussion

1. Islam's Combat of Slavery

The painful scene of the African-American man's struggle reminded me of an image I kept in mind when I was a school girl, although completely contrasted. The image in my mind portrays the "superior" man putting his head on the ground, voluntarily, and asking the "inferior" man to put his foot on his cheek. According to the account of some Hadiths books, this event did take place. Both men are from the Prophet's closest Companions.¹ Al-Bukhari (d. 256 H/870 M) narrates on the authority of the Companion al-Marur, who says: I saw Abu Dhar wearing a *burda* (garment) and his slave too was wearing a similar *burda*, so I said (to Abu Dzar), "If you take this (*burda* of your slave) and wear it (along with yours), you will have a nice suit (costume) and you may give him another garment." Abu Dzar said, "There was a quarrel between me and another man whose mother was a non-Arab and I called her bad names. The man mentioned (complained about) me to the Prophet." The Prophet said, "Did you abuse so-and so?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Did you call his mother bad names?" I said, "Yes." He said, "You still have the traits of the *Jahiliyyah* (Pre-Islamic period). They (slaves or servants) are your brothers, and Allah has put them under your command. So the one under whose hand Allah has put his brother, should feed him of what he eats, and dress him of what he himself dresses, and should not ask him to do a thing beyond his capacity. And if at all he asks him to do a hard task, he should help him therein."² In his commentary on one of the versions of this hadith,³ Ibn Baththal (d. 449 H/1057 M), commentator

¹When spelled with a capital letter, the word "companion" refers to Muslims who were frequently in company with Prophet Muhammad or associated with him.

²Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Shahih al-Bukhari*, Book of Knowledge, transl. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, (Riyadh: Darussalam Publisher and Distributer, 1997), hadith no. 6050, 8: 52; Muslim ibn al-Hajaj ibn Muslim al-Qushairi, *Shahih Muslim* (n.p.: Dar Taybah, 2006), hadith no. 1661, 787; Muhammad ibn Isa at-Tirmidzi, *Sunan at-Tirmidzi* (Cairo: Dar at-Tasil, 2014), 3: 219.

³This hadith is mentioned in slightly different versions in three of the books of *Shahih al-Bukhari*. These are the Book of Belief (hadith no. 30), the Book of Manumission

of the *Shahih of al-Bukhari*, mentions that Samura ibn Jundab narrated that the man who was abused by Abu Dzar was Bilal. Ibn Baththal also narrates on the authority of the Companion Dlamra ibn Habib that there was a quarrel between Bilal and Abu Dzar, mentioning the same incident with the Prophet saying to Abu Dzar, "I wouldn't have thought that you still maintain some of the arrogance of the *Jahiliyyah*." Upon this Abu Dzar threw himself to the ground, put his cheek on the soil and swore not to lift it until Bilal put his foot on it.⁴

Bilal was a man of Abyssinian origin. He was a slave to one of the Arabic clans;⁵ the prominent Companion Abu Bakr ash-Shiddiq bought him and manumitted him when he embraced Islam. Bilal rose to prominence in Islam. It is well known in the Islamic tradition that he was the *mu'azzin* (the person who recites *adzan*, call for the prayer) of the Prophet. Some sources also mention that the Prophet appointed him as a minister of the treasury (*khazin*).⁶ He was well respected among the Companions of the Prophet. Al-Bukhari reports that the Companion 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (later to become the second Caliph, following Abu

of Slaves (hadith no. 2545), and the Book of Good Manners (hadith no. 6050). All three versions maintain the main parts of the hadith: Abu Dzar admitting his mistake, the Prophet reprimanding him and the Prophet advice of treating slaves.

⁴Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Khalaf ibn Battal, *Syarh Shahih al-Bukhari* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Rushd, n.d.), 1: 87.

⁵Bilal ibn Rabah, his mother, Hamama, was a slave to the clan of Banu Jumah; so Bilal was born in slavery. When Prophet Muhammad started to preach for Islam, Bilal was one of the first seven people to believe in him. Bilal's master, Umayyah ibn Khalaf, a notorious opponent of the Prophet, used to torture him to force him to recant. He was saved when the Companion Abu Bakr (later to become the first Caliph of the Prophet) bought him. See Syamsuddin Muhammad ibn Ahmad adz-Dzahabi, *Siyar A'lam an-Nubala* (Lebanon: Bayt al-Afkar ad-Duwalayya, 2004), entry no. 1247, 1242-44.

⁶Ibn al-Athir Ali ibn Muhammad, *Asud al-Ghabah fi Ma'rifah ash-Shahabah* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2012), 129. The report that Bilal was the minister of the treasury might be supported by al-Bukhari's report: "Once Allah's Apostle came out while Bilal was accompanying him. He went towards the women thinking that they had not heard him (i.e. his sermon). So he preached them and ordered them to pay alms. (Hearing that) the women started giving alms; some donated their ear-rings, some gave their rings and Bilal was collecting them in the corner of his garment." Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Shahih al-Bukhari*, Book of Knowledge, transl. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh: Darussalam Publisher and Distributer, 1997), hadith no. 98, 1: 114.

Bakr) used to say, "Abu Bakr is our chief, and he manumitted our chief," meaning Bilal.⁷

The hadith corpus is replete with hadiths to the effect that slaves were to be treated with equality and kindness before and after they are manumitted. The Companion Abu Mas'ud narrates: "I was beating my slave when I heard a voice behind me saying: Abu Masud bear in mind Allah has more dominance over you than you have upon him (the slave), I turned around to find that it was the Prophet. I said: O messenger of Allah, I set him free for the sake of Allah. The Prophet said: Had you not done that the Fire would have burnt you."⁸ Another hadith reports the Prophet saying: "One should not say, my slave (*'Abdi*), or my girl-slave (*Amati*), but should say my lad (*Fatai*), my lass (*Fatati*), and my boy (*Ghulami*)."⁹ In pre-Islamic days slaves were persecuted. Those who tried to embrace Islam were greatly tortured; most of them recanted. Islam is against slavery and racism. However, because slavery was very popular and much relied on in pre-Islamic days, Prophet Muhammad could not have ordered it to be ended at once. Instead he tried to phase it out. This appears in many hadiths and Qur'anic verses that encourage manumission of slaves. The Prophet is reported to have said, "Whoever frees a Muslim slave, Allah will save all the parts of his body from the (hell) fire as he has freed the body-parts of the slave."¹⁰ Recommendation of freeing slaves does not mean to choose those who are easily affordable or come with low prices. The Prophet recommends manumission of the most expensive slaves.¹¹ Moreover, if a person would like to free his

⁷Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Shahih al-Bukhari*, Book of the Virtues of the Companions of the Prophet, transl. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh: Darussalam Publisher and Distributer, 1997), hadith no. 3754, 5: 69.

⁸Muslim ibn al-Hajaj ibn Muslim al-Qushairi, *Shahih Muslim* (n.p.: Dar Taybah, 2006), hadith no. 1659, 786.

⁹Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Shahih al-Bukhari*, Book of Manumission (of slaves), transl. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh: Darussalam Publisher and Distributer, 1997), hadith no. 2552, 3: 418.

¹⁰Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Shahih al-Bukhari*, hadith no. 2517, 3: 402.

¹¹Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Shahih al-Bukhari*, hadith no. 2518, 3: 402-3.

share of a common slave and he has sufficient money to free him completely he should give his partners the price of their shares and manumit the slave completely. He should only manumit the slave partially if he does not have sufficient money.¹²

Thus, instead of accumulating wealth, Muslims are encouraged to spend it on what might help create a healthy society. So much for creating a healthy society, that the Prophet encouraged marrying slave-girls. Al-Bukhari reports, the Prophet said, "Three persons will have a double reward." The first of these is, "A Person from the people of the Scriptures (*Ahl al-Kitab*, i.e. Jews and Christians) who believed in his prophet (Jesus or Moses) and then believed in (Prophet) Muhammad (i.e. has embraced Islam);" so this person initially will be rewarded for believing in the first Prophet. Then, for his continues belief that all these religions are interconnected, come from the one source and lead to the same end, by embracing Islam, his reward will be doubled. The third person is, "A master of a woman-slave who teaches her good manners and educates her in the best possible way (the religion) and manumits her and then marries her."¹³ It is significant that this type of person is put in equal footing with the person who embraces Islam. This indicates that Islam is eager to end racism. Nothing can be more effective in ending inequality than marriage between different classes of the society.

That Islam meant to phase out slavery can also be discerned from Al-Qur'an. Many verses state freeing of a slave as expiation of a crime or a mistake. A Muslim is categorically forbidden to kill another Muslim unlawfully, "And never is it for a believer to kill a believer except by mistake. Whoever kills a believer intentionally his recompense is Hell, wherein he will abide eternally" (Q.S. an-Nisa' [4]: 92-3). In case a believer kills another believer by a mistake "then the freeing of a believing slave and a compensation payment presented to the deceased's

¹²Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Shahih al-Bukhari*, hadiths no. 2521-2525, 3: 403-5.

¹³Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Shahih al-Bukhari*, hadith no. 97, 1: 113.

family [is required] unless they give [up their right as] charity". Thus, the compensation payment can be forsaken if the family of the deceased give it up whereas the freeing of a slave is stated as the first option and can only be replaced by the second option, a fast for two months consecutively, if the killer has no slave to free and cannot afford to buy one (Q.S. an-Nisa' [4]: 92).

Two other verses in which freeing of slave is stated as atonement of mistakes are Q.S. al-Ma'idah [5]: 89 and Q.S. al-Mujadalah [58]: 3. In contrast to the atonement for unintentional homicide, the slave in these verses is not qualified as "believing". The freeing of a slave in Q.S. al-Mujadalah [58]: 3 is the first prescribed penalty of *zihar*.¹⁴ Similar to the penalty of unintentional homicide it can be replaced by fasting two months consecutively, as a second option, only if no slave is available. In Q.S. al-Ma'idah [5]: 89 the freeing of a slave is prescribed as one of three options of atonements for breaking a solemn oath. The verse states, "Allah will not impose blame upon you for what is meaningless in your oaths, but He will impose blame upon you for [breaking] what you intended of oaths. So its expiation is the feeding of ten needy people from the average of that which you feed your [own] families or clothing them or the freeing of a slave. But whoever cannot find [or afford it] then a fast of three days [is required]" (Q.S. al-Ma'idah [5]: 89). Although the freeing of a slave in this verse is mentioned in the third position, scholars seem to be in agreement that this is not a hierarchy; the person who breaks his oath may choose any of the three options.¹⁵ This is because the article used to state the choices is *aw* (or) which indicates a free choice, whereas in the other two verses it states clearly, "And whoever does not find [a slave or cannot afford to

¹⁴*Zihar* is form of separation between married couple in which the husband would say to his wife that she is like his mother's back (*zhahr*) to him, meaning that he would not have intimate relationship with her. It was used in pre-Islamic days and prohibited by Islam. Q.S. al-Mujadalah [58]: 2 states, "Those of you who estrange their wives by equating them with their mothers—they are not their mothers. Their mothers are none else but those who gave birth to them. What they say is evil, and a blatant lie."

¹⁵Muhammad ibn Jarir ath-Thabari, *Tafsir ath-Thabari* (Beirut: Mu'ssasah ar-Risalah, 1994), 3: 159.

buy one] then [instead].” Al-Qurthubi (d. 671 H/1273 M), while agreeing with other exegetes that it is a free choice, believe that the verse mentions the feeding first because at the time it was revealed the people of Hijaz needed food.¹⁶ In contrast, ar-Razi (d. 606 H/1210 M) and Ibn Kathir (d. 774 H/1373 M) believe the feeding is mentioned first because it is the easiest to do.¹⁷ In my opinion their analysis is more sustainable. Apparently the mistake in this verse is not as grave as in the other two verses, hence its expiation is much easier; and it starts with the easiest (also see below).

The slave in Q.S. al-Ma'idah [5]: 89 and Q.S. al-Mujadalah [58]: 3 is not qualified as believing, however, nearly all prominent classical scholars, with the exception of Abu Hanifah (d. 150 H/767 M), Sufyan ath-Thawri (d. 161 H/778 M), and Ibn Jarir ath-Thabari (d. 310 H/923 M),¹⁸ believe that it should be a believing slave by analogy to Q.S. an-Nisa' [4]: 92. The analogy is possible because Q.S. an-Nisa' [4]: 92 is the first of the three verses to be revealed; in my view if the qualification “believing” is necessary for the other expiations it would have been stated in each of the verses. Moreover, this qualification is repeated three times in verse Q.S. an-Nisa' [4]: 92, “And whoever kills a believer by mistake—then the freeing of a *believing* slave and a compensation payment presented to the deceased’s family [is required] unless they give [up their right as] charity. But if the deceased was from a people at war with you and he was a believer—then [only] the freeing of a *believing* slave; and if he was from a people with whom you have a treaty—then a compensation payment presented to his family and the freeing of a *believing* slave.” If we were to use analogy, it would have been

¹⁶Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurthubi, *al-Jami' li Ahkam Al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Mu'assasah ar-Risalah, 2006), 8: 140-41.

¹⁷Muhammad ibn 'Umar Fakhr ad-Din ar-Razi, *at-Tafsir al-Kabir* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1981), 12: 82; Abu al-Fida Ismail ibn Kathir, *Mukhtashar Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (Beirut: Dar Al-Qur'an Al-Karim, 1981), 1: 543.

¹⁸Muhammad ibn Jarir ath-Thabari, *Tafsir ath-Thabari* (Beirut: Mu'assasah ar-Risalah, 1994), 3: 159; al-Husain ibn Mas'ud al-Bagawi, *Tafsir al-Bagawi* (Riyadh: Dar Thaibah, 1989), 3: 92.

more appropriate to use it in the same verse. The fact that the qualification "believing" is repeated three times in one verse and left out in two verse indicates its importance to expiation of the mistake stated in that verse only, while in the other two verses the person is free to choose a believing or non-believing slave.

Noticeably, the value of the slave in Q.S. al-Ma'idah [5]: 89 is much less than in the other two verses if we were to evaluate the slave by the alternative expiation offered. There is a vast difference between fasting two month consecutively and fasting only three days not necessarily consecutively.¹⁹ None of the classical exegetes seem to have tried to explain why is the alternative of the freeing of a slave very hard in two verses whereas in the third verse surprisingly easy. But, also noticeably, the mistakes stated in Q.S. an-Nisa' [4]: 92 and Q.S. al-Mujadalah [58]: 3 involve other persons; these are the person who is mistakenly killed or his family and the wife who will suffer from lack of intimate relationship. The penalty for such cases is hard so as to safeguard members of society from harm. In the third verse (Q.S. al-Ma'idah [5]: 89), the case of breaking a solemn oath is between the person and his Creator. Taking an oath is very common; and it happens often that a person takes an oath that he or she later regrets, hence the penalty is mitigated. Al-Bukhari reports the Prophet saying, "If I ever take an oath to do something and then I find something else better than the first, I will make expiation for my oath and do the thing which is better." In case the oath taken is harmful to others, breaking it is recommended as the Prophet advises, "Anyone who takes an oath through which his family may be harmed, and insists on keeping it, he surely commits a sin greater (than that of dissolving his oath). He should rather compensate for that oath by making expiation."²⁰

¹⁹There is difference of opinions between jurists with regards to this issue. Jurists of the Hanafi and Hanbali schools believe that the three days should be fasted consecutively, whereas the Jurists of the Maliki and Shafi'i schools believe that a person has the choice to fast consecutively or at breaks. Abu al-Fida Ismail ibn Kathir, *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (Beirut: Dar Al-Qur'an Al-Karim, 1981), 1: 543-4.

²⁰Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Shahih al-Bukhari*, transl. Muhammad Muhsin

This explains why the penalty of breaking an oath is easier but does not explain the difference in the value of the slave.

As noted, classical scholars did not pay much attention to the issue of the value of the slave according to the three verses of our discussion. I tried to solve the mystery by considering the time of revelation of the three chapters involved. These are: Q.S. an-Nisa' [4], Q.S. al-Ma'idah [5], and Q.S. al-Mujadalah [58]. The three chapters were revealed in Madinah. The first of the three chapters to be revealed was Q.S. an-Nisa' [4]. It was the sixth chapter to be revealed in Madinah out of twenty-nine chapters that are Madinah revelation. Q.S. al-Mujadalah [58] was revealed after Q.S. an-Nisa' [4] by fourteen chapters. Q.S. al-Mujadalah [58] was not only the last of three verses to be revealed but also the last of all revelations; which means it was revealed towards the end of Prophet Muhammad's life and settlement of all fundamental Islamic legal rules, pertaining to Muslims' religious and social affairs.

Az-Zarkashi (d. 794 H/1392 M) reports that the Prophet read Q.S. al-Ma'idah [5] in his Farewell Sermon when he performed his last Hajj (Islamic pilgrimage) and preached into Muslims, "Q.S. al-Ma'idah [5] is the last of Al-Qur'an to be revealed, so whatever is *halal* (lawful) in it abide with, and whatever is *haram* (forbidden) in it abide with."²¹ The chapter itself asserts this. In the third verse Allah addresses Muslims, "This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion" (Q.S. al-Ma'idah [5]: 3). It is very well known when Prophet Muhammad settled in Madinah Islam became a polity and the revelation started to incline towards rules that regulate affair of the nascent Islamic nation, whereas in Mecca revelation was about dogma and assertion of God's existence and oneness. Chapter 4

Khan (Riyadh: Darussalam Publisher and Distributer, 1997), hadith 6623, 6626, 8: 330-31.

²¹Muhammad ibn Abd Allah ibn Bahadir az-Zarkashi, *al-Burhan fi 'Ulum Al-Qur'an* (Kairo: Maktabah Dar at-Turath, n.d.), 1: 194.

was revealed at the beginning of the Madinah period, although Islam is settled as a nation, there are still many tribes who did not accept it and slaves who might have been persecuted for accepting Islam, hence Q.S. an-Nisa' [4]: 92 states that the slave who is to be manumitted as expiation must be a believing slave, in order to save them from persecution and make them masters of themselves so they practice their religious duties to the best they can. If we are to assume that chapter 58 was revealed by the mid of the Madinah period, Islam must have become more popular and most of Muslim slaves were manumitted. There are historical reports to the effect that the wealthy of the Companions of the Prophet used to buy Muslim slaves and set them free. Even if they were not manumitted they were not tortured or persecuted; attention now is to end slavery whether the slaves are believers or not; hence Q.S. al-Mujadalah [58]: 3 does not qualify the manumitted slave as believing. By the time Q.S. al-Ma'idah [5]: 89 was revealed Islam was well established; people would come in great numbers to Prophet Muhammad to accept Islam and ask allegiance. This is attested by one of the last chapters to be revealed, "When there comes God's victory, and conquest. And you see the people entering God's religion in multitudes. Then celebrate the praise of your Lord, and seek His forgiveness. He is the Acceptor of Repentance" (Q.S. an-Nasr [110]: 1-3).

There must have been signs that slavery is diminishing, therefore to encourage people to continue into manumitting slaves, whether believing or not, the slave value is dropped and now is better than fasting only three days. It is also noticeable that at the start of Madinah period, Q.S. an-Nisa' [4]: 92 offers only one alternative to freeing a slave, which is the fast of two consecutive months; no alternative that has a pecuniary value is offered. This is to encourage manumission. By the mid of the Madinah period, Q.S. al-Mujadalah [58]: 3-4 offer a third option from which we can estimate the monetary value of the slave, that is the feeding of sixty poor persons. By the end of the Madinah

period, manumission, instead of being a priority, is put in the same footing as feeding only ten poor persons or clothing them.

2. Islam's Combat of Racism

Ending slavery is one of the aspects on the process of achieving equality among mankind and creating healthy societies. There are Qur'anic verses and Prophetic hadith that advise Muslim against racism. Chapter four begins with the verse, "O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women." A perusal of the whole chapter reveals that it includes most of the Qur'anic rules and exhortations of leading an ideal social life. Although most of these rules are also found in other chapters at random, and although the chapter refers briefly to other themes, such as discussions about dogma and about Peoples of the Book (the Jews and the Christian), the general theme of this chapter is Muslims' social life. The chapter takes care of the relationships and dealings between Muslims in the body of the smaller family—husband, wife and children—and the larger family, the Muslim community as a whole. After the initial verse, the chapter discusses vulnerable members of the society who need attention the most: the orphans (*al-yatama*), the foolish or those who are not able to manage their own business (*as-sufaha*), and orphan girls as a particular type of women. These three groups, being the most susceptible to injustice, the chapter established rules for protecting them as members of the society who contribute to its prosperity and integrity (verse 2-10). The chapter also discusses other important issues pertaining to the smaller family, such as: rules of inheritance (verses 7, 11, 12, 176), and specifying female relatives to whom marriage is prohibited (22-25). It also discusses fundamental issues pertaining to the larger family, the Muslim community, such as: Prohibition of unlawful sexual

intercourse (verses 15-18), protecting women's rights (19-21, 25-28, 127-30), commercial or financial dealing (29-33), group solidarity (36-40), the bases of the Islamic government (58-70, 135), and defending the community (71-100).

It is significant that the chapter which discusses all fundamental issues of building a healthy society starts with a verse the implication of which condemns racism. As mentioned, the chapter starts with calling attention by the expression "O mankind". It is agreed between Muslim scholars that, with few exceptions, Meccan revelations call attention by the expression "O mankind" or "O children of Adam", whereas in Madinah the expression has changed to "O you who believe".²² The first verse of chapter four uses the expression "O mankind" although it is a Madinah revelation because the subject of the verse is a universal issue that concerns all societies in all times and places. After calling peoples' attention the verse states the two most important facts of life: That there is only a single deity to be worshipped and that mankind came from a single origin. This is a constant reminder to Muslims that they are a part of a larger community and that other communities are equal to them as they are all brothers and sisters by Adam and Eve. God chose to create a single human being and, according to exegeses, took a part from that human to create a partner for him. The message seems to be: You are not only created by the one God; you are all brothers and sisters because you descend from a single soul. If people would remember this fact all times there would be no inequality between mankind on bases of race, nationality, wealth, skin color, etc. not even faith, as faith is a matter between a person and his Creator, hence the start of the verse by "O mankind" instead of "O you who believe". Yet the importance

²²Jalaluddin as-Suyuthi, *al-Itqan fi 'Ulum Al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Mu'ssahah ar-Risalah, 2008), 47-8.

of faith manifests in ordering mankind to be mindful of God; a person who does not observe his duty towards his Creator, will not observe his duty towards the created, his equal.

Another verse that speaks of equality between mankind is Q.S. al-Hujurat [49]: 13. Similar to verse Q.S. an-Nisa' [4]: 1, it calls for attention by the expression "O people" although it is a Madinah revelation. The theme of the chapter is politeness and good manners. It starts by five verses advising Muslims to respect the Prophet. Verse two states, "Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet or be loud to him in speech like the loudness of some of you to others." Classical exegetes say this verse means respect should be observed to the Prophet even after his death, i.e. when near and around his tomb. In my opinion the rule in this verse can be extended analogically to include all religious leaders and erudite persons (*ulama*), especially those who are the educators or leaders of the community. In the following verses the chapter advises the Muslim community to ward off what might lead to its breakdown, verse six states, "If there comes to you a *fasq* (a person who does not care for religious duties) with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful." The chapter addresses the Muslim community as one family, as it states in verse ten: "the believers are brothers" and advises members of this family by that which leads to its integrity and prosperity such as: Not to ridicule or insult one another, not to call each other by offensive nicknames (verse 11), to avoid making negative assumption about each other, and not to spy or backbite each other (verse 12).

Having advised the community by what maintains its solidarity, the chapter then advises this family/community to get to know other families/communities and take them as brothers

and sisters. Verse thirteen states, "O people, indeed We²³ have created you from a male and a female and made you nations and tribes that you may know one another." The verses that discuss subjects pertaining to integrity and prosperity of the Muslim community start by "O you who believe"; whereas in the verse that involves other communities the call has changed to "O people". So communities are reminded that they belong to the one God and they are descendant of the same pair of parents. As they are brothers and sisters, they are supposed to befriend each other regardless of rank, race or faith. I support my contention that different beliefs should not lead to inter or intra community discrimination by two other Qur'anic verses. In chapter two, verse 126, when Prophet Abraham asked Almighty God, "My Lord, make this a secure city and provide its people with fruits—whoever of them believes in Allah and the Last Day." The Almighty answered, "And whoever disbelieves—I will grant him enjoyment for a little; then I will force him to the punishment of the Fire." This is a clear statement that all mankind are supposed to enjoy the goodness of this life equally. It is emphasized by verse seventy of chapter seventeen, "We have honored the Children of Adam, and carried them on land and sea, and provided them with good things, and greatly favored them over many of those We created." So, in this world, the Almighty honors all "children of Adam" without any discrimination on bases of race or ethnicity and regardless of whether they believe in Him or not. If it were to be argued that the Almighty says, "And it is He who has made you successors upon the earth and has *raised some of you above others in degrees [of rank]* (Q.S. al-An'am [6]: 165), the answer comes from the same verse, He did this, "That He may test you through what He has given you." Those who will observe their

²³In Al-Qur'an, God often refers to Himself by majestic first person plural.

duties towards their Lord and towards other members of the society, feed the hungry, help those who need help, and work for the progress and prosperity of the community, are the ones who will pass the test.

Many Prophetic hadiths also condemn racism. Perhaps the best hadith to present in this article is that which was preached by Prophet Muhammad in his last sermon known in the Islamic tradition as the Farewell Sermon. One of the fundamental rules the Prophet mentioned in that sermon is, "O people, your Lord is One and your father is one. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab; and a non-Arab has no superiority over an Arab. A white person has no superiority over a black person, and a black person has no superiority over a white person except by piety and good action."²⁴ The Prophet delivered this sermon during his last Hajj, shortly after which he died. Thus this sermon includes a code of conduct Muslims are supposed to follow for eternity. Moreover, Muslim scholars believe that one of the virtues of performing Hajj is reminding people that they are equal. Hajj brings millions of Muslims together from all over the world. People of all colors, ranging from blonde white to black, participate in the same ritual displaying a spirit of unity and brotherhood.

C. Conclusion

From what has followed it is clear that Islam unequivocally condemns racism. No person is above another by virtue of race or ethnicity. As mentioned, Prophet Muhammad identified racism as arrogance. In his *Shahih*, Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (d. 261 H/875 M), narrates on the authority of the Companion Abdullah ibn Mas'ud that the Prophet said, "None shall enter Paradise who has in his

²⁴Abu Abdullah Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad al-Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal* (Beirut: Mu'assasah ar-Risalah, 2001), hadith no. 23489, 38: 474.

heart the weight of a mustard seed of arrogance.”²⁵ As our world becomes more and more diverse and connected, it is imperative to follow the teaching of Islam and dismantle racism in all its forms, opened or concealed. If people are to be distinguished it should be by quality of character and conduct rather than by race or ethnicity.

²⁵Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj ibn Muslim al-Qushairi, *Shahih Muslim* (n.p.: Dar Taybah, 2006), hadith no. 91, 55.

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