

Islam on Racism

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Racism

- What is racism?
- **Racism**: Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior.
- The term first appeared in 1902 and was coined by Richard Henry Pratt.

Racism

- The phenomenon described by the term “racism” is much older than the history of the expression itself.
- The term “racism” was during the middle ages or the ancient world but there is no denying that there were perceptions of “otherness” and a strong rejection of the foreign.

Racism

- From a Quranic perspective, the problem of racism actually predates the human experience.
- The Quran presents Iblees as the first racist as he contended that the human race was inferior to the race of jinn.
- Imam Ali refers to him as **إمام المتعصين**

Racism

قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلَّا تَسْجُدَ إِذْ أَمَرْتُكَ قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِّنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِنْ نَّارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ

[God] said, "What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?" [Satan] said, "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay." Quran 7:12

Racism

- Supremacy based on arbitrary traits detrimental to our spirituality.
- In sermon 192 of Nahjul Balagha we read:
 - فاعتبروا بما كان من فعل الله بإبليس، إذ أحبط عمله الطويل وجهده الجهد عن كبر ساعة واحدة! فمن ذا بعد إبليس يسلم على الله بمثل معصيته؟!

Racism

- “You should take a lesson from what God did with Satan; namely He nullified his great acts and extensive efforts on account of the vanity of one moment, although Satan had worshipped God for six thousand years - whether by the reckoning of this world or of the next world is not known. Who now can remain safe from God after Satan by committing a similar disobedience?”

Racism

- Many who discuss the topic of racism have a reductionist approach whereby they equate racism with the oppression of blacks.
- We have a tendency of placing skin color and complexion at the center of this discourse.
- In the pre-modern era, race and group membership were determined largely by cultural traits, especially language and shared customs, rather than by skin color

Racism

- One of the companions, a black Arab, once insulted Bilal ibn Rabah.

• يا ابن السوداء.

• فلما شكى بلال إلى رسول الله

قال له: شتمت بلالا وعيرته بسواد أمه؟

قال: حسبت إنه بقي فيك شيء من كبر الجاهلية

Racism

- Examples of how the Holy Prophet and his Ahlul Bayt counteracted institutionalized racism.
 - Appointing Bilal ibn Rabaah as official caller to prayer
 - Revelation of entire chapters which were named after black slaves
 - Prophet's adopted son was black.
 - Facilitating interracial marriages in the Muslim community
 - Imam Ali reformed the distribution of wealth from the Islamic treasury after his predecessors introduced policies that gave preferential treatment to Arabs.

Racism

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ
لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

O mankind, indeed We have created you from a single male and female and made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you. Indeed, God is Knowing and Acquainted.” Quran 49:13

Racism

- Prophetic warning:

من كان في قلبه حبة من خردل من عصبية بعثه الله يوم القيامة مع
أعراب الجاهلية

“He who has a mustard seed of tribalism in his heart will be resurrected on the Day of Judgment with the pre-Islamic Arabs.”

Racism

- Dehumanization is typically the precursor for much of the oppression against marginalized populations.
- Islam seeks to remedy the source of the problem.

Racism

- Wanting good for your own people, your قوم is not discouraged as long as it is not to the detriment of others.
- Wanting good for your people is not necessarily a call for privilege but a call to live up to the best of our ideals and values.

Racism

- Prophet never renounced his affiliation to Qurasysh or Bani Hashim.
- The Holy Prophet was proud to be Hashimite but he did not look down on other tribes
- During the battles, the Prophet allowed people to fight alongside their family and tribesmen

Racism

- God mentioned many prophets referring to their people as **يا قوم**

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ يَا قَوْمِ إِنَّكُمْ ظَلَمْتُمْ أَنفُسَكُمْ بِاتِّخَاذِكُمُ الْعِجْلَ

And [recall] when Moses said to his people, "O *my people*, indeed you have wronged yourselves by your taking of the calf [for worship]. Quran 2:54

Racism

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ فَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنِّ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ

“We had certainly sent Noah to his people, and he said, "O my people, worship Allah ; you have no deity other than Him.” Quran 7:59

Racism

وَإِلَىٰ مَدْيَنَ أَخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ إِلَٰهٍ غَيْرُهُ

“And to [the people of] Madyan [We sent] *their brother* Shu'ayb. He said, "O my people, worship God ; you have no deity other than Him.” Quran
7:85

Racism

- Many of these prophets refer to their people as يَا قَوْمِ despite them not accepting monotheism.
- The prophets validated the identities of their people and expressed a cultural/racial affinity to them.

Racism

- A hadith from Imam Ali about patriotism

عَمُرَتِ الْبِلْدَانَ بِحُبِّ الْوَطَنِ

“Countries are built through patriotism.”

Racism

- Blameworthy tribalism and nationalism
- “Blameworthy nationalism/tribalism is when a person considers the evil people of his community to be better and prefers them over the good people of another community.” - Imam Ali ibn al-Hussein