

Fawaz Turki in the Gulf News

by Hugh Fitzgerald



One of the favorite themes of apologists for Islam is that the faith is open to people of all races and ethnicities, and that they are, within the umma, treated equally. The figure of Bilal, an Ethiopian born in 580 A.D., who became a slave in Mecca and then, after his conversion to Islam, was set free, is central to this narrative. For Bilal was not only one of the Companions of the Prophet, but was the very first muezzin, calling Muslims to prayer with his deep, melodious voice.

The story, as told by Fawaz Turki in the Gulf News, is [HERE](#):

“Adhan, the call summoning the faithful to prayer, delivered by a muezzin, has rang [sic] out from atop the minarets of mosques around the world for the last 15 centuries, ever since the Islamic commonwealth of nations began in the seventh century to spread its wings to the West and East – where, indeed, the twain did actually meet, and meet in a communal sense of reference and devout compliance to [sic] a

shared faith.

Comment:

It is inaccurate to describe the peoples and lands conquered by the forces of Islam as a “commonwealth of nations,” an anachronism that does not adequately describe the Islamic state in which conquered nations are not joined as equals in a “commonwealth” but subsumed in a caliphate.

“At no time on the Muslim calendar does the adhan cohere [sic] Muslims together more than during Ramadan, when even unobservant or lax Muslims find themselves, through fasting and prayer, truly close to the divine in their lives. It is with the muezzin’s call to prayer, heralding the advent of dawn, that they begin their fast, and with it, at sunset, that they end it.

“And here you cannot reflect on the genesis of adhan without evoking the name of Bilal Bin Rabah, or simply Bilal, as he is often referred to when his legacy as the first muezzin in Islam is evoked, a figure with an honoured place in modern Islamic Studies and, more recently, in the imagination of African-American Muslims.”

“The story of Bilal does not only fascinate us, it also points by implication to how Islam as a faith is steadfast in its refusal to attach significance to a human being’s skin color.

“Bilal, a former slave born in Makkah to Ethiopian (then known as Abyssinian) parents in 580AD, was freed soon after he embraced the Message, and from there on it was as if salvation imbued his bruised spirit, and the hero in him stepped towards grace out of the shadow of damnation. He went on to become one of the Companions of the Prophet (PBUH), engaging with him in every major military expedition launched by the then emergent faith, including the Battle of Badr in

630, where Muslims defeated an army three times the size of their own.

'It was at that battle that Bilal reportedly faced his former slave master and put him to the sword. In the immediate aftermath of the liberation of Makkah, Bilal, who had long before been chosen by the Prophet (PBUH) to become the first muezzin, ascended to the top of the Ka'aba, in Islam's holiest city, and called the Muslim faithful to prayer. Makkah would henceforth become the focal point of Islam's new, zestful tense [sic] of reality.

"And Bilal, we are told, had an extraordinarily melodious, deep-bass voice.

"Muezzins are venerate [sic] in Islam, but the first in it to become one, in this case an African Arab, is held in special regard because he is viewed as a symbol of how Islam does not define human beings by their national, ethnic, racial or class background, but by their taqwa, or piety. Don't dig deep into the Holy Texts for proof of that. Just read The Farewell Sermon. delivered by the Prophet (PBUH) at Mount Ararat in March 632. Various versions of it have been published (all thematically, though not textually the same), but I choose that of Imam Al Bukhari (d. 870): "Oh people/ your God is one and you share the same father/ There is no preference for Arabs over non-Arabs/nor for non-Arabs over Arabs/ Neither is there preference for white people over black people/ nor for black people over white people."

Comment:

Let's limit ourselves here to discussing this first claim by Turki the "there is no preference for Arabs over non-Arabs" in Islam. This claim is flatly contradicted by the behavior of Muslims themselves, including both the Arabs, with their sense of superiority, and the non-Arabs, who keenly felt their lesser worth, with some falsely claiming an Arab lineage. It's

not hard to see why the late scholar of Islam, Anwar Shaikh, described Islam as the “vehicle for Arab supremacism.” Consider all the reasons why that should be so. The message of Allah was delivered to a 7th century Arab, and in his language, Arabic. The Qur’an should ideally be read, and recited, only in Arabic. Muslims all over the world, prostrate in prayer, face turn several times a day toward Mecca, in western Arabia. Muslims are supposed to go on hajj, at least once in their lives, again to Mecca, in Arabia. Many non-Arab Muslims long ago took Arab names, as many converts do today, so great is the prestige of the Arabs within Islam. Some non-Arabs, especially in Pakistan, assume false Arab lineages; there are many who call themselves “Sayyids,” signifying descent from the tribe of the Prophet.

Arab supremacism is also confirmed in statements by many Arabs, including the most reliable compilers of hadith (Al-Bukhari and Muslim), the most celebrated historians, and the most respected Qur’anic commentators.

First, there is the claim of Arab superiority to all non-Arabs:

“Arabs are the most noble people in lineage, the most prominent, and the best in deeds. We were the first to respond to the call of the Prophet. We are Allah’s helpers and the viziers of His Messenger. We fight people until they believe in Allah. He who believes in Allah and His Messenger has protected his life and possessions from us. As for one who disbelieves, we will fight him forever in Allah’s Cause. Killing him is a small matter to us.” (Al-Tabari, Vol. 9, p. 69)

“A man married a maid-slave who bore him a child. Would that child be free or would he be an owned slave?” “Her child whom she bore from him would be the property of her master according to all the Imams (heads of the four Islamic schools of law) because the child follows the (status) of his mother

in freedom or slavery. If the child is not of the race of Arabs, then he is definitely an owned slave according to the scholars, but the scholars disputed (his status) among themselves if he was from the Arabs – whether he must be enslaved or not because when A'isha (Muhammad's wife) had a maid-slave who was an Arab, Muhammad said to A'isha, 'Set this maid free because she is from the children of Ishmael.'" (Ibn Timiyya, Vol. 31, pp. 376-377)

"The fact that Allah Most High has chosen the Arabs over other nations is affirmed in rigorously authenticated hadiths of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and give him peace; related by Bukhari and Muslim in their "Sahih" in the beginning of the chapter of merits, # 5897, on the authority of Wathilah ibn al-Asqa` who said, "I heard the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, say, 'Verily Allah has chosen Kinanah from the son of Isma`il, and He has chosen Quraysh from among Kinanah and He has chosen Has-him from among Quraysh and He has chosen me from the Bani Hashim.'" [These are all Arab tribes.]

"So this hadith [though not according to Fawaz Turki] is a primary text about the preference of Arabs over others and the preference of some Arabs over other Arabs.

"It is obligatory on a Muslim to believe that Arabs are preferred over other nations because there is a proof for it... But if one does reject this, one has sinned for not believing in it because it is an affirmed matter according to a clear rigorously authenticated hadith. Also, this issue is not something that is commonly known among most Muslims, so for this, one should not hasten to blame one who disagrees with it. It is necessary, rather, to tell him about the issue.

There are many similar hadith that describe the superiority of the Arabs over all non-Arabs. Fawaz Turki needs to brush up on his knowledge of these hadith before claiming that there is no

distinction made between Arabs and non-Arabs in Islam; as Berbers and Kurds have been treated by Arabs, who have suppressed the linguistic and cultural expressions of the former in North Africa, and massacred outright nearly 200,000 of the latter in Iraq.

While there is ample evidence for the belief among Muslims that Arabs are superior to non-Arabs, there is also a great deal of evidence that in Islam, whites are considered to be superior to blacks, who are described shamelessly in deeply racist terms. That discussion will come in the next installment.

Fawzi Turki claims that in Islam there is no distinction made among people, whether on the basis of ethnicity, culture, race, or language:

“Thus, Islam’s transnational, transcultural, transracial and translinguistic ethos, throughout history, never differentiated between black and white, African and Afghan, Levantine and Oriental, seeing all Muslims as equal denizens of the umma, is today a subject of special interest in African-American Studies, and certainly to African-Americans as a whole.”

“One such, Edward Curtis, the Millennium Chair of liberal Arts and Professor of Religious Studies at Indiana University, dwells, in his book, The Call of Bilal: Islam in the African Diaspora (2016) on “the historical figure” that became the first muezzin in Islam, whose rise from slavery “inspires Muslims of African descent to reclaim their heritage and to play a legitimate role as moral leaders for Muslims worldwide.”

Comment:

But if Islam has always been indifferent to the nation, ethnicity, race of Believers, as Fawaz Turki claims, then why

would there be any need to use the tale of Bilal in order to “inspire Muslims of African descent to reclaim their heritage and to play a legitimate role as moral leaders for Muslims”? What had happened, over the centuries, to cause them to need to “reclaim their heritage”? What led them to lose it in the first place? And why haven’t they played “a legitimate role as moral leaders for Muslims”? If there really is this “indifference” to race, as Turki claims, there should never have been a problem for Muslim blacks to “play” their “legitimate role” as moral leaders.”

“Never in Islamic history had an adhan recital given to us such a full yield of meaning [as] that delivered by Bilal Bin Sabah – Companion of the Prophet (PBUH), consummate warrior and an enchanting muezzin.

So Islam, Fawaz Turki insists, is completely lacking in racism. He offers exactly one example of a black man who had a favored position – Bilal, who became the first muezzin.

Let’s take a look to see if Islam really is as lacking in racism as Turki claims.

The evidence, I’m afraid, goes the other way. There are three hadith in Al-Bukhari where Muslims are told to obey a ruler, even if he were a black man, as here: “Narrated Anas bin Malik: Allah’s Apostle said, “You should listen to and obey, your ruler even if he was an Ethiopian (black) slave whose head looks like a raisin.” In another, Ahmad ibn Abi Sulayman, the companion of Sahnun said, “Anyone who says that the Prophet was black should be killed.” (Ibn Musa al-Yahsubi, Qadi ‘Iyad, p.375).

And there is this from the celebrated historian Al-Tabari: “Noah prayed that the hair of Ham’s descendants [Africans] would not grow beyond their ears, and that whenever his [Ham’s] descendants met Shem’s, the latter would enslave them.” (Al-Tabari, Vol. 2, p. 21, p. 21)

Why was it so terrible for the Prophet to be called “black”? Because for the Arabs, blacks were unquestionably inferior. Such misidentification, according to Ahmad ibn Abi Sulayman, was an insult to the Prophet, and deserved death. And blacks, as descendants of Ham, were fit only to be slaves (Shem’s descendants “would enslave them”).

Many of the most famous Arab writers and Islamic scholars were unambiguously “racists” in the full meaning of that word.

Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) was, among other things, an Islamic jurist, Islamic lawyer, Islamic scholar, Islamic theologian, and hafiz (one who has memorized the entire Qur’an). He is one of the most important figures in Islamic history. Here are two disparaging remarks, among so many that he makes about black Africans in his Muqaddimah:

“Therefore, the Negro nation are, as a rule, submissive to slavery, because [Negroes] have little [that is essentially] human and have attributes that are quite similar to those of dumb animals, as we have stated.”

“Beyond [known peoples of black West Africa] to the south there is no civilization in the proper sense. There are only humans who are closer to dumb animals than to rational beings. They live in thickets and caves, and eat herbs and unprepared grain. They frequently eat each other. They cannot be considered human beings.”

Ibn Sina or Avicenna (980-1037), was another celebrated figure in Islamic history: a Hafiz, an Islamic psychologist, scholar, and theologian and, by our lights, a racist: “[Blacks are] people who are by their very nature slaves.”

Ibn Qutaybah (828-889), was a renowned Islamic scholar from Kufa, Iraq: “[Blacks] are ugly and misshapen, because they live in a hot country.”

Nas?r al-D?n al-T?s? (1201-1274), was a Shia Muslim Scholar and Grand Ayatollah:

“If (all types of men) are taken, from the first, and one placed after another, like the Negro from Zanzibar, in the Southern-most countries, the Negro does not differ from an animal in anything except the fact that his hands have been lifted from the earth –In no other peculiarity or property – except for what God wished. Many have seen that the ape is more capable of being trained than the Negro, and more intelligent.”

“[The Zanj (African) differ from animals only in that] their two hands are lifted above the ground,... Many have observed that the ape is more teachable and more intelligent than the Zanj.”

Al-Muqaddasi (945/946-1000) was a medieval Muslim geographer:

Of the neighbors of the Bujja, Al-Muqaddasi had heard that “there is no marriage among them; the child does not know his father, and they eat people – but God knows best. As for the Zanj, they are people of black color, flat noses, kinky hair, and little understanding or intelligence.” [Kitab al-Bad’ wah-tarikh, vol.4]

Al-Masudi (896-956), was a Muslim historian and geographer, known as the “Herodotus of the Arabs”:

“Galen says that merriment dominates the black man because of his defective brain, whence also the weakness of his intelligence.” (Al-Masudi, Muruj al-dhahab)

Ibn al-Faqih was a Muslim historian and geographer:

“A man of discernment said: The people of Iraq ... do not come out with something between blonde, buff and blanched coloring, such as the infants dropped from the wombs of the

women of the Slavs and others of similar light complexion; nor are they overdone in the womb until they are burned, so that the child comes out something between black, murky, malodorous, stinking, and crinkly-haired, with uneven limbs, deficient minds, and depraved passions, such as the Zanj, the Somali, and other blacks who resemble them. The Iraqis are neither half-baked dough nor burned crust but between the two.” (from his Mukhtasar Kitab al-Buldan, 903 AD)

These are just a tiny sample of the hair-raising racist remarks made by noted figures in Islamic intellectual history. All of these remarks have apparently escaped the notice of Fawaz Turki. I have the feeling that even were he to be made aware of these passages, he would prefer to pass over them in silence, and certainly would wish that they not be brought to the notice of Unbelievers, lest they think ill of his beloved Islam.

Nor does Turki take any notice of the Arab slave trade in black Africans, that began earlier, and lasted longer, and claimed millions more victims, than did the Atlantic slave trade of the Europeans. Slavery lasted longer because it was sanctioned by the practice of Muhammad himself, who bought, sold, and traded slaves. That is why there never was a Muslim William Wilberforce. Slavery was formally abolished in Saudi Arabia very late, in 1962, and only under pressure from Great Britain. In the same year it was abolished in Yemen, and in Oman, slavery ended only in 1970. And even now, despite the formal abolition of slavery, there are hundreds of thousands of black slaves, with Arab masters, in Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. In Libya slave markets, with black African slaves, have sprung up in the last few years; those for sale are black Africans who came to Libya hoping to make it to Europe, but instead found themselves stranded for lack of funds,, and subsequently were enslaved by local Arabs. In Sudan, during the long civil war, northern Arabs enslaved hundreds of thousands of black Africans from the south. The continuation

of this practice – Arab masters, black African slaves – right up to the present, in several Arab-dominated countries (Mali, Mauritania, Niger), confirms the racist view of blacks among Arabs, a view promoted in so many Arab texts, from several hadith in Al-Bukhari, to passages in Ibn Khaldun, Al-Tabari, Ibn Sina, Al-Masudi, Al-Qutaybah, and many others.

Fawaz Turki praises Islam for what he claims is its equal treatment of Believers – Arab and non-Arab, white and black. The evidence is overwhelmingly against both claims.

First, Arabs are considered, by other Muslims, as well as by themselves, as superior to non-Arab Muslims, for a host of reasons:

1. The message of Allah was delivered to a 7th century Arab and in his language, Arabic;
2. All Muslims must turn toward Mecca, in Arabia, whenever they pray;
3. They must make the hajj, if financially able, again to Mecca, once in their lives;
4. They must ideally read and recite the Qur'an in Arabic;
5. Many non-Arab converts take Arab names;
6. Some Muslims even claim false Arab lineages, as self-described "Sayyids," signifying that they descend from the tribe of the Prophet.

All this confirms Anwar Sheikh's lapidary description of Islam as "the vehicle for Arab supremacism." Recent Arab mistreatment of non-Arab Muslims – ranging from the linguistic and cultural suppression of Berbers in North Africa, to the mass murder by Saddam Hussein of 182,000 Kurds in Iraq, to which no Arabs anywhere objected (as Kanan Makiya pointed out), and the deliberate "arabization" of their lands – offer further evidence of Arab supremacism.

Second, Turki offers as evidence of racial equality in Islam the single example of Bilal, the Ethiopian who became a Muslim

and was designated by Muhammad to be the first muezzin. But as against that example are such Hadith as that which insists a ruler should be obeyed "even if he was an Ethiopian (black) slave whose head looks like a raisin." And another says that "anyone who says that the Prophet was black should be killed." (Ibn Musa al-Yahsubi, Qadi 'Iyad, p.375). Then there are the racist remarks about blacks, repeatedly described as "dumb animals," "deficient in intelligence," "not to be regarded as humans," naturally "fit only to be slaves" – observations offered not by tangential figures, but by the most famous Arab scholars, jurists, Qur'anic commentators, and historians, such as Ibn Khaldun, Al-Tabari, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Ibn Qutaibah, Nas'r al-D?n al-T?s?, Al-Muqaddasi, and Ibn Al-Faqih.

Can Nawaz Turki explain how these comments by the most celebrated of Muslim scholars and thinkers support his claim of a total absence of racism in his faith? Does he dare to discuss the devastating passages assembled above? He can neither call into question the prestige of those who made these racist observations, nor can he plausibly argue that these passages have been misunderstood.

Islam is the most successful imperialism in world history. It has conquered many lands and many peoples. And those Muslim conquerors have converted many people to Islam, convincing them not to oppose, but to identify completely with their conquerors, and to find fault with their own pre-Islamic pasts, considered to belong to the Jahiliyya, *the Time of Ignorance*. Some non-Arab Muslims wanted so much to identify with the Arabs that they claimed for themselves false family histories connecting them to the tribe of the Prophet Muhammad.

For those who, unlike Fawaz Turki, are interested in the truth, they will soon discover that Islam has a long history of favoring Arabs, their culture, and their language, over non-Arabs and their (inferior) cultures. Perhaps Fawaz Turki would deign to take a look at the evidence presented above, of

supremacist statements by Arabs, and the many ways in which the practice of Islam reinforces that supremacism. And far from being free of racism, as Turki claims, Islam is disturbingly replete with outrageous statements about black Africans – “dumb animals,” “scarcely human,” etc. – that would make Henrik Verwoerd blush.

Should Turki examine the evidence of both Arab supremacism and anti-black racism within Islam, he could post his reaction right here at Jihad Watch, as a comment to this very piece.

Fawaz Turki, our readers would be delighted to read your response. Now's your chance to engage in a little interfaith dialogue, based on the evidence presented in the three postings, including this one, that discuss your views. We hope to hear from you soon.

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