

(SUP)R(EM)ACISM AND ISLAM

Supremacism

According to the entry in the online resource, Wikipedia,

"Supremacism is the belief that a particular race, religion, gender, belief system or culture is superior to others and entitles those who identify with it to dominate, control or rule those who do not. Examples include supremacism based on ethnic or anthropological origins (white supremacy, black supremacy, ethnocentrism), sexuality (male supremacy, female supremacy) and religion."

However, it might be argued that this definition is incomplete because (1) it defines supremacism as a *belief* (or theory) and ignores the possibility that it might also be a *practice*; (2) it fails to distinguish *systemic*¹ from *non-systemic* forms (types and kinds) of supremacism; and (3) it fails to distinguish *functional*² from *non-functional* forms of supremacism.

On the basis of this more complete understanding of supremacism, it is possible – in fact, *necessary* – to state that "Black Supremacy" and/or "Muslim Supremacy" do not *exist* since they do not function systemically in the contemporary world. These forms of supremacism are mere *possibilities*, *beliefs* held by certain individuals and/or groups. In this sense, "Black Supremacy" and/or "Muslim Supremacy" are not *real* forms of supremacism unlike White Supremacy (Racism), the dominant functional system of power-relations in the contemporary world.

The Meaning of "White"

According to Bonnett (2000), "white" is not a fixed ahistorical category (or classification) that is uniquely associated with Europeans (and their descendants), but rather a dynamic historical category that has been appropriated for exclusive use by Europeans. For example, 'white' identities were present in Ancient China and 'The Middle East'. However, it is important to note that such identities were never formulated in *racial* terms, that is, 'whiteness' was not defined in terms of **RACE**.

Religious, Scientific and Cultural Racism

According to Mills (1997), the concept of 'race' has an evolutionary history marked by three distinct phases – (i) *religious* (Western Christianity in the Medieval period), (ii) *scientific* (beginning in the so-called 'Enlightenment' period through to the 19th and early 20th centuries), and (iii) *cultural/moral* (the contemporary global socio-political context). A detailed examination of the historical record shows that the concept was originally defined in terms of *colour* and/or factors associated with colour, and that this definition was constructed – that is, *invented* – by Europeans who classified themselves as 'white' and saw themselves as superior to other 'non-white' people. The legacy of this approach to differentiating among human beings on the basis of colour classification lives on in the contemporary world, where those who *self-classify* as 'white' are generally considered superior to – and, materially-speaking, *are actually* superior to – those 'others' who *they* classify as 'non-white' and/or 'coloured'³.

The Social Construction of "Whiteness"

It cannot be stressed enough that "whiteness" (or "white privilege") is not something that is *naturally-given*. Rather, it is something that is *socio-politically constructed*. Furthermore, according to Mills (1997) and Bonnett (2000), whiteness is a "permeable category" with an evolving criteria for membership, that is, inclusion (and exclusion). For example, at one time, European Jews and the Irish were considered non-white. More recently, there have been moves (in the US) toward promoting notions of "off-" and/or "near-"whiteness

¹ A *system* is a whole made up of a collection of parts that interact with each other in order to perform a specified goal or function.

² A system is *functional* if it performs properly, that is, if it does what it is intended to do.

³ If non-white people are coloured, then it would seem that white people must be without colour or colourless.

among Hispanic and Asian communities. Whiteness is, in the spirit of the maxim, *E Pluribus Unum* ("From the Many, One"), simultaneously both a one *and* a many: From the outside, all whites are equally white; however, from the inside, some whites are whiter than others, a "whiter shade of pale".

From "Whiteness" to Racism (White Supremacy)

When "whiteness" (or "white privilege") transforms from a belief and/or practice of a few individuals or groups into a *functional system of power-relations* that is global in scope, it becomes White Supremacy. Furthermore, given the *racial* basis of European "whiteness", it is both necessary and correct to identify White Supremacy with Racism; hence, the compound term used to classify this system – **Racism (White Supremacy)**.

White Supremacy (Racism)

According to pioneering counter-Racist analyst, Neely Fuller Jr. (1984), White Supremacy (Racism) is "a system of thought, speech, and action, operated by people who classify themselves as 'white', and who use deceit, violence, and/or the threat of violence, to subjugate, use, and/or abuse people classified as 'non-white', under conditions that promote the practice of falsehood, non-justice, and incorrectness, in one or more areas of activity [including economics, education, entertainment, language, labour, law, politics, religion, sex and war], for the ultimate purpose of maintaining, expanding, and/or refining the practice of White Supremacy (Racism)."

White Supremacy (Racism) is the dominant functional system of power-relations in the contemporary world. It is structured as a hierarchy (or pyramid) with White Supremacists (Racists) at the top, 'white' people at the next level down, 'black' people at the bottom, and other non-white people occupying, and jostling for 'position' in, the 'space' between 'white' people and 'black' people⁴.

Under contemporary conditions of White Supremacy (Racism), there are only three kinds of people in the known universe: (1) white people, (2) non-white people, and (3) White Supremacist (Racists). The relation between white people and White Supremacy (Racism) may be summarised as follows: **Every White Supremacist (Racist) is a white person, but not every white person is a White Supremacist (Racist)**. Nonetheless, and following Mills (1997), it must also be recognised that although *all* white people are *not* signatories to "The Racial Contract" of White Supremacy (Racism), *all* white people are its beneficiaries. In short, "whiteness" is a club, and if you are "white", you are a member of the club by default. This does not preclude, of course, the possibility of a white person *refusing* or *rejecting* the system of White Supremacy (Racism) and becoming a "race traitor". It is crucial to appreciate that *all* non-white people are the *victims* of Racism (White Supremacy), irrespective of whether it appears, to themselves or to those classified as white, that they benefit from this system. It is not possible to be non-white and to benefit from the existence of White Supremacy (Racism) since this system has the subjugation of non-white people and their domination by white people as its goal⁵.

Islam and Colour

White Supremacists (Racists) have historically maintained that they alone are human and that other non-white people are either sub-human or non-human. As stated previously, their classifications were/are based on *colour* (Arabic *laun*) and/or factors associated with colour. According to The Qur'an, however, *all* human beings are coloured, that is, possess a colour or hue (30:22) (35:28), and Kaamil (1982) has shown that, although The Qur'an makes reference to

⁴ Such "jostling for position" generally takes the form of *complexionism* or *colourism* which may be defined as discrimination based on colour and/or factors of colour practiced by non-white people.

⁵ It is important not to confuse crude manifestations of 'white supremacism', associated with the KKK, Aryan Nations, National Front and British National Party (BNP), with the refined operations of the global system of White Supremacy (Racism). The former are included in the latter.

colour (or hue) in various contexts, nowhere is colour used for the purpose of privileging one group of people over another.

From an Islamic counter-Racist perspective, it might be argued that by distancing themselves from non-white coloured people – and thereby identifying themselves as *colourless* people – White Supremacists (Racists) are, in fact, identifying themselves as non-human. To the extent that White Supremacy (Racism) is indeed an unjust, exploitative and *inhumane* system, it truly is a non-human system and those who practice it are rightly described as being non-human.

Racism and Alienation (Satanism)

By setting themselves off against or 'distancing' themselves from 'coloured' people, White Supremacists (Racists) are rejecting their God-given colouring. In this connection, it is significant to note that the Arabic verb, *sha-th'a-na*, from which is derived the noun, *ash-Shay'th'aan* ('The Satan'), means "to become distant" and "to flare up". On this basis, and using more contemporary language, it might be said that *ash-Shay'th'aan* refers to an aggressive, alienated and alienating (or 'distancing') personality type, and that White Supremacists (Racists) are people who manifest this type and who have established a globally-operating system in the contemporary world.

However, the aggressive, alienated and alienating personality type – or *ash-Shay'th'aan* - is not the *source* of the supremacist outlook which in the contemporary world manifests in *systemic* form as Racism (White Supremacy). According to The Qur'an, the roots of supremacism – and, thereby, Racism (White Supremacy) – is *pre-historical* and lies in the arrogant refusal of *Iblees* to bow down before 'Adam when commanded to do so by God (15:28-31). From an Islamic counter-Racist perspective, supremacism has its origins in what might be described as the "Ibleesian personality type".

The Ibleesian Roots of Supremacism

The noun, *Iblees*, is derived from the Arabic verb, *ba-la-sa*, which means "he became wrapped up in grief" - frustrated, desperate and dejected. It appears from The Qur'an that *Iblees*, a *jinn*, became frustrated and could not accept that 'Adam, who had been created from clay (*teen*), was to become a successor (*khalifah*) in the earth, rather than he (*Iblees*), who had been created from fire (*naar*) and who was, therefore, according to his (*Iblees*) own view, clearly superior (7:12). By focusing on the different types of stuff (or matter) from which he and 'Adam were created, *Iblees* becomes the first *materialist*. Racism (White Supremacy) is a type of *materialism* because its system of classification is based on a physical (or material) marker – *colour* and/or factors associated with colour.

In psychological language, it might be said that *Iblees* was non-compliant, externalized or blamed others for his failings, that he needed a scapegoat to project his anxieties and weaknesses on to, and was in denial of the truth. Among his other pathologies, *Iblees* suffered from a neurotic condition known as a superiority complex which masks feelings of inferiority. (The superiority complex may be defined as a compulsive drive to overcome anxiety and feelings of inferiority by exalting one's self (or group) above humankind.) *Iblees* also suffered from delusions of grandeur which may be defined as false beliefs resting upon self-aggrandizement, boastfulness, pride, and self-assertiveness and manifests in making extravagant and impossible claims and plans. The Qur'an provides support for this interpretation in associating the traits of *kufr* (ingratitude/rejection), *ibaa* (scorn/refusal) and *kibr/istakbar* (pride/the pursuit of greatness) with the personality and behaviour of *Iblees*, and records his stated plan to wage relentless war against humanity (4:119) (17:63-65).

Islam, Supremacism and Racism (White Supremacy)

It should be clear from the above that, according to The Qur'an, the cause of supremacism is *arrogance* not ignorance. Like 'The First Supremacist', who was also simultaneously 'The First Materialist', all supremacists desire to position themselves as 'superiors' based on materialistic criteria. For the dominant group of supremacists in the contemporary world, that is, for Racists (White Supremacists), it is colour (and/or factors associated with colour) that serves as the definitive criterion by which to afford worth and value, with white people being worth more and non-white people being worth less (or

worthless). However, The Qur'an (49:13) provides the basis for a radical, non-materialistic and categorical rejection of this position in asserting that it is God/Allah Who created all human beings (*an-naas*) from a single male and a single female, and that He made them into groupings based on tribal association (*sh'ab*) and genealogy (*qabeelah*). Although Hardy (2002) has argued that "because race calls upon kinship, [the difference between the two] may seem a distinction without a difference" (p.3), this conflation of genealogy with 'race' is deeply problematic since while it is indeed true that the physical marker(s) used in racial classification – colour and/or factors associated with colour – are phenomena that are biologically-propagated, and hence, genealogical, in nature, this does not mean that 'race' is thereby something biological and genealogical. On the contrary, 'race' refers to the *socio-political use* of such a marker in order to establish, maintain, expand and/or refine a system of power-relations, that is, relations of domination and subjugation. Furthermore, (49:13) goes on to state that worth and value – or nobility (*karam*) – with God/Allah, that is, according to Divine (as opposed to secular) criteria, is not tied to membership in any such tribal and/or genealogical grouping. On the contrary, worth and value are tied to the possession of TAQWA (49:13), that is, self-preservation through God/Allah-consciousness.

Islamic Counter-Racism and Self-Development

It is crucial to appreciate that The Qur'an mandates opposition to *all* forms of man-made supremacism, including "Muslim Supremacy". This is because the supremacy of *Al-Islam* as a DEEN (that is, system of power-relations between the human being and God/Allah) does not entail the legitimacy (or correctness) of a "Muslim supremacist" ideology. In fact, the very concept of "Muslim Supremacy" is oxymoronic and contrary to *Al-Islam* since *human-embodiments* of supremacism have a basis in *kibr* (pride) and *istakbar* (pursuit of greatness) which are condemned by God/Allah in The Qur'an since God/Allah alone is The Supreme (*Al Mutakabbir*).

Islamic counter-Racism⁶ is informed by the understanding that opposition to Racism (White Supremacy) - and supremacism in general - is both consistent with and necessary for the attainment of TAQWA, which is, in turn, a necessary condition for attaining success (*falaah*) in the next world (*aakhirah*) by cultivating the 'self' (*nafs*) through a process of continued self-reflection and action involving the removal – or 'pruning' (*zakka*) – of its negative traits. Thus, Islamic counter-Racism is both an end in itself – since opposition to injustice is mandated by The Qur'an (5:8) – as well as being a means to a higher end – entry into The Garden (*Al-Jannah*) and The Pleasure of God/Allah.

References

1. Bonnett, A. (2000) *White Identities: Historical and International Perspectives*.
2. Fuller, N. (1984) *The United Independent Compensatory Code/System/Concept: a textbook/workbook for thought, speech and/or actions for victims of racism (white supremacy)*.
3. Hardy, P. (2002) *Islam and The Race Question*.
4. Kaamil, A. (1982) *Islam and The Race Question*.
5. Mills, C.W. (1997) *The Racial Contract*.

Bibliography

1. Alexander, T. (1996) *Unravelling Global Apartheid*.
2. Furedi, F. (1998) *The Silent War*.
3. Hamid, E. (2004) *The Qur'an & Politics: A Study of Political Thought in the Makkah Qur'an*.
4. Jackson, S.A. (2005) *Islam and The Blackamerican*.
5. Mills, C.W. (1998) *From Class to Race*.

Further Information and Contact

For further information, visit the Bandung2 website (bandung2.co.uk). To discuss any of the issues presented in this leaflet, contact the Bandung2 movement by sending email to the following address:

fieldmuslim@bandung2.co.uk.

⁶ Islamic counter-Racism is not equivalent to "anti-racism" since the latter is 'dialectical', 'reactive' (or reactionary) and 'oppositional' in nature whereas Islamic counter-Racism is non-dialectical and active, motivated by a positive agenda of spiritual self-development (*tazkiyyat-an-nafs*).