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## A Hadith-Based Analysis of Racial Equality in Jonathan A.C. Brown's Islam and Blackness

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### Abstract

*This study examines racism as explored by progressive Western Islamic scholar Jonathan A.C. Brown in his book Islam and Blackness. Racism is shaped by specific perceptions of race and blackness originating in the West, particularly in the United States, which have significantly influenced global discussions and debates. Distinctions between black and white remain stark in various social spheres. Employing qualitative research based on textual materials gathered through library research, this study utilizes a primary-source dialogue approach. The hadith analysis method applied is domain analysis, aiming to explore and analyze content. According to Brown, racial equality issues stem from varied ethnic preferences across regions, where culture plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions. The most malleable components of racial dynamics are those influenced by cultural conditioning. Within the framework of Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad, as the principal advocate for justice, explicitly called for dismantling severe social boundaries in his community. Consequently, the most effective solution lies in the commitment of individuals, communities, and communal leaders to transcend racial, socioeconomic, and cultural divides. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Islam, as interpreted by Brown, can provide novel perspectives for combating racism and racial discrimination. It underscores the importance of integrating textual, scientific, and transformative philosophical perspectives. The research also enriches the global discourse on racial equality by connecting social and religious issues while proposing Islamic-based solutions to dismantle prevailing social barriers.*

**Keywords:** Blackness, Hadith, Jonathan A.C. Brown, Racial Equality

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## INTRODUCTION

Reflecting on history, the West experienced a form of religious trauma. During the patristic intellectual era, scholars were “held hostage” by religious elites when attempting to advance knowledge. This led to a crisis of trust in religion, prompting scholars to produce ostensibly neutral information about faith (Aydin, 2022: 503–532; Daniel, 1997; Fikriyati, 2023: 253–284). The culmination of this phenomenon was the encounter between the West and Islam, which often produced a tendentious reading of Islam, particularly in academic discourse. Despite their significant contributions, such studies frequently perpetuate hegemonic-dominative attitudes in shaping the historical narrative of Islamic intellectual traditions (Hughes, 2020: 107–113).

In contemporary times, Islamic studies face the immense challenge of reconciling religion with scientific inquiry. The rapid social changes experienced by Muslims demand critical reflection on preunderstanding, *taqlid* (imitation), and deeply ingrained habits of thought. As both local and global citizens, Muslims navigate complex identity dynamics that necessitate a new synthesis accommodating these social changes (Abdullah, 2020:90). Among the pressing issues is upholding human dignity. On a micro scale, ensuring equality and equal treatment for all citizens has become a crucial societal concern.

One prominent figure in contemporary Western Islamic scholarship is Jonathan A.C. Brown. An American scholar, he approaches hadith studies with a multidisciplinary lens encompassing history, textual criticism, and social analysis. Brown’s contributions lie in his ability to critique traditional views while analyzing broader historical contexts. He addresses issues such as racism, particularly the allegation that Islam is inherently anti-Black due to its history of slavery. In *Islam and Blackness*, Brown examines these dynamics as a response to Western critiques of Islam.

This research adopts a descriptive-exploratory method and falls under the category of library research, utilizing books, articles, and relevant journals. Its urgency is grounded in two key aspects. First, Brown offers a novel approach to *fiqh al-hadith* through socio-historical methods, enriching hadith studies. In North America, hadith studies often employ historical-critical, philological, and hermeneutical methods that differ from traditional approaches in the Muslim world (Altıntaş, 2015). This approach explores hadith as products of the social, cultural, and historical contexts of early Muslim communities rather than solely as theological doctrines. It also examines hadith’s role in contemporary political and social discourses, including legitimizing religious and political authority.

Second, the involvement of Western Muslim scholars in hadith studies broadens the methodological and conceptual scope of this field. Jonathan A.C. Brown exemplifies this trend, integrating historical, philological, and anthropological analyses to interpret hadith. His conceptualization and interpretations demonstrate how progressive Western

Muslim scholars address the challenges of Islamic studies in the contemporary era. This research includes discussions on the authenticity of hadith, its application in Islamic law, and its implications for contemporary issues such as human rights, interpretive challenges, and racism.

The identified research gap lies in the lack of a comprehensive approach that integrates historical, philological, and anthropological dimensions in hadith studies, particularly in addressing the issue of racism. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing Brown's contributions to the discourse on racial equality in Islam. Thus, the research not only reflects scholarly developments in the West but also makes a significant contribution to cross-cultural dialogue in achieving a more holistic understanding of Islam.

## DISCUSSION

### Biographical and Intellectual Sketches of Jonathan A.C. Brown

Jonathan Andrew Cleveland Brown was born in United States of America, exactly in Washington DC on August 9, 1977. He is more well-known to be Jonathan A.C Brown. His father is Jonathan C. Brown and his mother is Ellen Clifton Patterson, an anthropologist. His spiritual journey until he decided to be a Muslim was cited from an exclusive session of interview with Brown in *lastprophet.info* site (Nafisah, 2022:103-118). Brown revealed his reason of converting. That started when he was interested in Islam since he attended a lecture along with his lecturer, a Muslimah (a Muslim woman). He thought that Islam is a compatible religion with mind idea and that was the thing he believed in. Religion should improve life, rather than makes difficulty and misery. Having made Islam his way of life, he wrote and spoke of Islam actively, for both academic and proselytization purposes (Amrulloh, 2016:4). The route of proselytization used was through writing. His high appreciation on the integrity of Prophet Muhammad SAW resulted in a work entitled *Muhammad: Very Short Introduction*. (Kholis, 2021:1)

Brown's higher education level started in Georgetown University in Washington DC. In 2000, he got Bachelor of Arts degree in History. The predicate of *magna cum laude* he assumed motivated him to continue his study. Having graduated, Brown studied Arabic for a year in Center for Arabic Study Abroad (CASA) —one of language center institutions in Cairo, Egypt. Having gotten the graduation certificate in Arabic in 2001, he continued his doctoral study for 5 years. Finally, in August 2006, Brown got Ph. D degree in Islamic Thought, with the with-honors predicate. His dissertation was entitled *The Canonization of al-Bukhari and Muslim* under guidance of Dr. Wadad Kadi (Brockopp, 2010:279-282).

Having completed his study, Brown worked in Near Eastern Language and Culture Institution under Washington University, where he got his bachelor degree. This, of course, got him closer to Islam world along with its scholarship tradition. Moreover, when he got

to know his dissertation promoter he called *excellent teacher*, Wadad Kadi. He was acquainted with American Muslim intellectuals he mentioned patiently one by one in his expression of gratitude to Tahera Qutbuddin, Heshmat Moayyad, Maysamal-Faruqi and Haifa Khalafallah. The names of Muslims he mentioned were those, according to him, engaging as the director of his research dissertation on canonization. His warm relation to Muslim people cannot be overridden in the development his world view on Islam intellectual tradition, particularly in the study of hadith he highly respects.

Brown's academic career started in 2006. Brown became a teaching staff in Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization di University of Washington until 2010, and he then successfully became Assistant Professor in Islamic Studies and Muslim-Christian Understanding fields in the School of Foreign Service, an Agency for the Harmony of Religious Communities in his alma mater, Georgetown University. He served as the director of Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim Christian Understanding in 2015. In addition, he was also a prominent member of The Council on Foreign Relations.

In addition to teaching actively, Jonathan A. C. Brown is an academician conducting research vigorously. Brown occupied the position of chief editor in Oxford Encyclopedia Of The Islamic World in 2005, then Advisory Editor in Oxford Online Islamic Studies Bibliography in 2008, and the same position in Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam & Law in the following year. Jonathan Brown is also a Muslim-Western scholar producing many works productively. Having completed his dissertation on the study of hadith, it can be seen that Brown – as seen in his works – paid high attention to the study of hadith. In addition, the topics of Islamic law, *sufism*, Arabic lexicography theory, pre-Islam poems are not escaped from the result of his scientific publications. Recently, his study focuses on historical critique and Islam civilization, and modern conflict between traditionalist-Sunni and *Salafism* in Islam thought.

Brown's monographic works written independently are *The Canonization of al-Bukhari and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunni Hadith Canon* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and modern World* (Oneworld, Foundations of Islam series, 2009); *Muhammad: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2011) and *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy* (Oneworld Publications, 2014); and *Slavery and Islam* (2019) and *Islam and Blackness* (2022). Arabic he studied in turn contributed considerably to supporting his productivity in both writing and analyzing in-depth the original literatures of Islamic studies (Budiman et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, his works in the form of journals and articles are, among others: 1) "Criticism of the Proto-Hadith Canon: al-Daraqutni's Adjustment of al-Bukhari and Muslim's *Sahibs*." *Oxford Journal of Islamic Studies* 15/1 (2004). 2) "Critical Rigor vs. Juridical Pragmatism: How Legal Theorists and Hadith Scholars Approached the Backgrowth of

Isnads,” in *Islamic Law and Society* 14, (2007). 3) How We Know early Hadith Critics Did Matn Criticism and Why It's So Hard to Find,” *Islamic Law and Society* 15(2008). 4) “Even if it’s not True it’s True: Using Unreliable Hadiths in Sunni Islam,” *Islamic Law and Society* 18 (2011). 5) “Even if it’s not True it’s True: Using Unreliable Hadiths in Sunni Islam,” *Islamic Law and Society* 18 (2011). 6) The Canonization of Ibn Majah: Authenticity vs. Utility in the Formation of the Sunni Hadith Canon,” *Revue des July* (2011). 7) “The Rules of Matn Criticism: There Are No Rules,” in *Islamic Law and Society* 19, (2012). *Review of The Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadith*,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 19 n. 3 (2008): 391-97. Through his research activities, Jonathan Brown engaged in several scholarship conferences and associations such as American Historian Association, Middle East Studies Association, American Academy of Religion.

Brown served as a research director along with Nazir Khan in Yaqeen Institute, an institution operating in research and humanity aid field. Concisely, this organization was established to ‘fight against’ Islamophobia on the one hand and extremism on the other hand. Islam has been considered as irrational, incompatible to modern civilization, and inherently associated with violence putting Islam community onto defensive position.

Yaqeen Institute site is a non-profit research portal with free accessible content to facilitate and to find an answer to the problems arising. The issue contained in the site is discussed by the experts in respective field. In addition to translating and analyzing classical works in various studies, this organization also aims to participate actively in actual discourse touching varying themes with faith-based construction. Besides, the resistance against fake idea underlying Islamophobia and extremism is struggled by Yaqeen Institute. This institute is aimed at being an accurate source of hot issue by producing attractive contents in varying formats, including journals, papers, articles, surveys, videos, conferences, and curriculum. It is understandable that the presence of research-based institutions and organizations have helped disseminate the scholarship of Jonathan A.C Brown. Fairer views can be found to fight against the hegemony of non-Muslim communities often injuring the Islam community’s image.

### **Islam Study Tradition Lens in the West**

In 19 AD communication and interaction occurred significantly among intellectuals from two worlds: West and Muslim worlds. In Western intellectual tradition, academic works were done in relatively long time to get understanding on Muslims. This attempt was created to follow the world view and to be oriented toward certain region, Middle East. Despite the recognition of the presence of Muslims in other region, in discussing Islam the

main focus is limited to “Middle East” region in academic discourse. Consequently, when the discussion of Islam occurs in the context of study on other region, Islam is often considered as a strange element. Therefore, in discussing Islam in the context of study on such regions as Sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia and South East Asia, the main attention is paid to how Islam spreads and interacts in the regions, sometimes considered as the paradoxical element to native culture. Local expressions reflecting Islam belief and practice are often viewed as the variation of “genuine” Islam, tending to be defined in the context of Arab-Middle Eastern practice and tradition. Because Middle East is considered as a typical region, Islam related to it is often viewed as something special and certain (Voll, 2012:28).

In the context of scholarship and intellectual, Marcia Hermansen defined difficultly the specific meaning of “America”. This is because the reality occurring is that several prominent scholars of study on Hadith were European immigrants post-second world war (Harmansen, 2007:24-25). It means that it should be confirmed that America serves not only as its ‘native’ identity but also as the existence of a scholar in the region. In American continent, the region most prominently producing scholars is North America (Altıntaş, 2015:66-84).

United States of America is one of countries with superpower and super-control. This country is popularly called a state upholding democracy and heterogeneous plural community background (El-Zein, 1977). The right to the freedom to adhere to any religion is so strong. Constitutionally, every citizen is protected for his/her right to adhere to a religion. A Muslim, for example, is allowed constitutionally to leave class or work to worship. If a Muslimah wants to wear headscarf (*jilbab*) but she is fired from her job due to this, she can file lawsuit for that reason (Connell, 2005).

However, the situation started to change due to the fear of terrorism. This occurred post-September 11, 2001 attack, destroying the building of World Trade Center in New York and Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Although the terrorist attack incidence at that time became a moment for the rise of resentment against Islam, but the phenomenon of Islamophobia in America has actually rooted long before the terrorism tragedy taking about 3,000 life tolls. An Islamic study expert, Carl Ernst, has explained well the historical roots and the contemporary development of Islamophobia in America in his book entitled *Islamophobia in America: The Anatomy of Intolerance* (Ernst, 2013).

Various writings about the negative side of Islam have long circulated among Americans. Unfortunately, many Americans still reluctantly explore the plurality of Muslims and are “blind” about the cultural geography of Islam community so that each time speaking of Islam, what arises in their mind is the type of Islam that is hard, intolerant, conservative, extreme, orthodox, and so on. Consequently, the government started to conduct some inquiries and investigations on Islam people excessively without real reason. The ruler thought that they

are the threat because they do not agree with foreign policy. Essentially, the dispute occurs because of sentiment rather than based on argument (Mu'in et al., 2023:51-62).

The reason the Islamophobia virus is endemic in America is due to ignorance. Particularly, the tendentious attitude toward the figure of Prophet Muhammad ends up in political matters. The reason why there is a conflict between Muslims and Western countries is because Western countries attacked or occupied Muslim countries. As an American Muslim and likewise an academician, of course, Jonathan A.C. Brown has a distinctive challenge. He said that Westerners depict Muslims as the symbol of violence because Muslims reacted to the invasion carried out by the West. Meanwhile, there was a long history of conflict between Western countries and Muslim countries, but the type of description on the Prophet today, such resentment and revenge, can be explained only as the product of political conflict. Brown shared his experience about Islamophobia climate making him disturbed. Muslim community was often underestimated in a fairly long time. As released by Al-Madina Institute, he told the "stressed" condition he developed because his religion kept being insulted and suspected (Brown, 2011:1-25).

Islamophobia still salient until today in America post 9/11 tragedy, according to Brown, continued with the rise of ISIS and the campaign for President in 2016. Brown suggested two factors causing the development of Islamophobia. Firstly, the intensity of criticism aimed at Islam communities is often related to political interest rather than moral substance problem or even real politics. Secondly, anti-Islam polemics is only an issue intentionally viralized and contributing nothing to solving the obvious problem (Brown, 2019). Apart from the condition, academic study is also contaminated. However, it is also noteworthy that Western researchers' theories, particularly in hadith field, are fairly complex, plural, and non-monolithic. The provisional result of scholars' researches reveals that they can result in objective and critical conclusions scientifically without the need for being accused of religious blasphemy. Therefore, it is impossible and it is unwise to attack the result of researches conducted by Western scientists with critiques generalizing their weaknesses excessively.

Islamic studies conducted in US and West in general are changing now. Researches and studies are carried out in the presence of subject they investigate and study. The more number of Western experts aware of the presence of Islam and Muslim world living and changing is not merely a past note. It is this improved appreciation of Islam among Western scholars that later generates what is called New Orientalism by some (Azra, n.d.). In a Congress of International Orientation held in 1928 in Oxford, not more than a dozen of Muslim intellectuals out of 750 participants present played a very little role in the process. Nowadays, the conference of Middle Eastern Study Association in North America

involves a great number of Muslim intellectuals; and some of them are the most active and prominent members.

Such development generates the shift of balance in several Islamic study disciplines among Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. Many Muslim scholars are so prominent that influence all other scholars in the study they carry out. The example is, among others, Halil Inalcik, whose work about Ottoman Dynasty created paradigm and influenced all specialists' views in "Ottoman" history. Another example is Fazlur Rahman, a professor originating from Pakistan teaching in University of Chicago, whose work becomes the important reference for scholars in both West and Muslim countries.

Azyumardi Azra stated that despite such positive development, it should be admitted that the critique against Islamic studies in US and the West keeps echoing in general. There are at least two critiques delivered fairly stringently from both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars (Azra, n.d.). In reality, Western studies on Islam indeed still becomes a threat in that although the word "Islam" is defined very carefully, it is still questioned whether or not it can be used as a category to explain the history of communities, the majority populations of which are Muslims. Jonathan Brown, as a historian, brings his own categories sourced from sociological culture and his own cultural life.

Considering the data and information found in various sources, Jonathan A.C Brown stays in United States of America with pluralistic community entity and Muslim minority. "Unfriendly" anti-Islam virus made Brown feel uncomfortable.

The solution is to produce works with wiser perspective on the scholarship in Islamic studies. Resistance and domination of conservative culture can be coped with successfully. The author thinks that Brown 'is smart' in selecting not-too prominent *ter* by not using typical technical language of Muslim scholars, particularly Middle Easterners. His writing is still packaged with Western scholars' culture using historical critical approach.

### **Islam and Blackness; Inclusive-Provocative Academic Work**

Brown's academic restlessness about anti-Black Islam issue departed from the previous book, *Slavery in Islam*. This work was written indirectly to complement the book. The discussion about slavery is very sensitive and present when ISIS tried to recover the slavery phenomenon. Discrimination and racial stereotype has been existing in Islamic history and among Islam communities for a fairly long time. The point considered as most important in this context is, among others, a view that the Black is considered as valueless and often associated with slavery, just like what was still witnessed in some Arabian cultures calling the Black the slave (*'abīd*) (Brown, 2019).

Islam and Blackness consists of ten section: (1) Introduction, (2) The Background of Race and Racism (3) Blackness Contested, (4) The Western Narrative of Islam The

Western Narrative of Islam, Slavery, and Anti-blackness (5) The Prophet, Arabia, and the Rise of Anti-blackness (6) Anti-blackness in the Qur'an and Sunna? (7) Anti-blackness, Sufism, and Veneration of the Prophet (9) What is the Point of the Law? Islamic Hierarchy or Islamic Egalitarianism and Conclusion.

The rise of anti-Black sentiment accused by those outside Islam is affected by some ideologies. The first ideology is that there is what is called Western Supremacy. He thought that a common stigma has occurred and been used as the basic parameter that “the West” as the main actor and even the world police for the better human future. The second ideology is afrocentrism, arguing that Africa has ever been once the place where the Black civilization laid the foundation for cultural heritage and human philosophy before facing invasion and exploitation by foreign power for centuries. The third is pro-Israel public diplomacy (called Hasbara), having served to protect the movement of Israel to Palestine and its apartheid policy from international critique. The implication of Western Supremacy becomes the main power in the competition for controlling the historical narration and identity in the countries, from America to Australia. Afrocentrism has inspired the cultural phenomenon. Meanwhile, the actor of pro-Israel public diplomacy is a political strategy has long been implemented and triggered and supported by ideological alliance between Western safety, Jewish Zionist (in religious aspect), and American Christian Zionist groups.

In his book, the intellectual having written many “best seller” books studied the claim that Islam is anti-black. He explained the reason why anti-blackness arouse in Islam world and is associated with normative tradition and explored the image “blackened face” in Qur'an and other examples in *Syariah* in which the Black is conceived as something “unwanted”. This book presents an in-depth study on the controversial knot between Islam and Black and identifies authoritative voices in Islam's past that were very important to fight against anti-Black racism today.

Brown stated that “whether anti-blackness is incidental or accepted as a social habit, somehow, the prominent voices in Muslim scholarship from medieval through modern centuries have declined it and supported the Prophet's teaching with full spirit that there is no race or tribe has more value than others do”.

Jonathan A.C. Brown is an American Muslim academician, a professor of Islamic studies in Georgetown University (Budiman & Handayana, 2022:247-261) appearing to counter the West's invasion concerning the racist phenomenon replete with negative controversy in the perspective of Islam civilization and theology history. Islam is inherently considered anti-blackness and slavery. Racial stereotype came not only from Greek-Rome but also from biblical narration. If there was anti-Blackness, this is incidental rather than essential in nature. This is provocative and inclusive intellectually. All revelations were

mediated by human experience. Brown unwrapped the reality using the history of stereotype considering that Islam is anti-Black and there is a paradigm in the appendix.

### **Blackness in Qur'an and Hadith Text; Substantive Reading**

Speaking of Qur'an and several well-authenticated hadiths, these discussions are often problematic. Hadiths delivered by the Prophet did not stand alone as a text. Historical situation underlying them plays an important role, meaning that hadith did not appear in the historical vacuum. Therefore, many hadiths were born as problem solving, and were local, particular, and temporal in nature. Hadith has more detailed coverage because it serves to detail the global aspect contained in the Qur'an (Budiman & Handayana, 2022; Helmy, 2020; Sanseverino, 2022).

Discussion on Islam and its view on Black, particularly related to Black African, often generates question about how this religion refers to them in Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad SAW's Hadith. However, it should be emphasized that most hadiths used by critics to support anti-Black perspective has long been the material of debate among Muslim Hadith expert. Many of those hadiths are considered unauthentic or unreliable according to the criteria standard of hadith ulamas (Akbaş, 2022:33-80; Budiman, 2022:247-261).

Brown stated that in Arabia during the Prophet time, black/white binary is often used as bad/good, ignoble/noble metaphor to represent the actual phenotype. For example, in the Qur'an, there are some verses containig reprimand against pre-Islam Arabs for the gloom they felt when delivering baby girls, making their face "blackened" (16:58). In addition, Qur'an tells the how the Judgment Day will uncover the fate of those denying God in contrast to that of those believing and doing good deeds. This is indicated with a sentence "That will be "a day when the face is whitened and the face is blackened" (QS. 3:106 and 39:60). Therefore, literal nuance of the *mufassir*'s interpretation is not far different. In the context of *'ulūm al-Qur'an*, the metaphorical context is included in the discussion of Qur'an proverb. It means that *uslub* used in Qur'an aims to explain the essence of verse, from the one with abstract description into the concrete one.

In contrast to the anti-black hadith discussed so far, either this hadith overall or specific narration with raisin parable has been legitimized by the prominent hadith-criticizing scholars in Islam. The version of raisin parable appears in the canonic collection of al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* Book (died in 256/870). It is noteworthy that this is the commonest and likely the most authoritative narrations – out of this Hadith (Tosun, 2012).

حَدَّثَنَا مُسَدَّدٌ حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ سَعِيدٍ عَنْ شُعْبَةَ عَنْ أَبِي التَّيَّاحِ عَنْ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ اسْمَعُوا وَأَطِيعُوا وَإِنْ اسْتُعْمِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ عَبْدٌ حَبَشِيٌّ كَأَنَّ رَأْسَهُ زَبِيْبَةٌ

(Al-Bukhārī, 2012)

*It has been narrated by Musaddad to us that Yahya bin Sa'id dari Syu'bah from Abu tayyah from Anas bin Malik radiallahu 'anhu saying that Rasulallah shallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam said: "You should listen to and obey, your ruler even if he was a habsyi (an Ethiopian or black) slave whose head looks like a raisin".*

'Hadith of Raisin' can be conceived in two points. Firstly, it is conceived at ethical-theological level, as explained briefly by Ibn Taimiyah, indicating that an individual's position is determined by piety and his piety. However, the meaning cited more frequently is practical. The straight context of this hadith shows the presence of specific obligation to obey the leader during campaigning, but the hadith is also understood to apply to the authority in civil government. The hadith of Raisin, of course, must be comprehended in the context of other hadiths in which the Prophet explained clearly that obedience should be performed "in what is right" and that a Muslim should obey him, could not obey the one instructing him not to obey the Creator. A narration of the Hadith of Raisin contains additional condition"... as long as he enforces Allah's Scripture amid you".

However, somehow, there was no scholar identifying something unacceptable concerning the hadith in general or the raisin parable in particular in pre-modern time. The simple meaning of this hadith is obvious and indisputable. Imagining the hyperbolic description of an individual at the lowest level of Arabian social hierarchy, the Prophet SAW clarified that an individual should obey the authorized commander although he is the lowest one out of the lowest. Another early report also used this hyperbole. When an early Basran ulama, Ibn Sirin (died in 110 H/728 AD) was asked by his pupils apparently frustrated about the one invited to narrate hadith, he answered that "although he is a man from Zanj, he will equivalent to him". To [my son] 'in this case, Abdullah'. Substantially, Brown classifies that there are three models of reading, comment, and interpretation of the hadith (Brown, 2022:247-261).

Firstly, the interpretation of early Muslim scholars, represented by al-Khaṭṭābī (al-Khaṭṭābī, n.d.) from Persia (died in 386 H/996 AD) and Ibn Baṭṭāl (Baṭṭāl, 2003) dari Andalusia (died in 449 H/1057 AD). The analogy of "raisin-like head" escaped from attention and was not commented on seriously. This is because it has been considered as a representation of Ethiopians (at least in the eyes of scholars coming from Andalusia and

South Asia). Ibn Hubayra (died in 560 H/1165 AD) argued that this parable is based on dark sky, Ethiopians' head and its smallness (*qamā'atibi*). Al-Nawawī (died in 676/1277) and an Iraqi scholar, al-Tībī (died in 743 H/1342 AD), argued that the raisin parables explicitly is underestimating in nature. In addition to the image of having small body, black skin, dense encircling hair, the comparison with raisin functions to “underestimate the position of slave” (*tahqīran li-sha'nihī*). A Baghdad scholar, al-Kirmānī (died in 786 H/1384 AD) in his comment on *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī as cite in Ibn Ḥajar (died in 852 H/1449 AD). Ibn Hajar included two discussions of Hadith in two different veins. In his interpretation (*tafsīr*) on hadith concerning the chapter of leading prayers (*shalat*), he focused on physical representation without mentioning the underestimating element. This is a parable based on “the small head and that was known by Ethiopians. And it was said that: because their color is black or hair was short and like pepper.

However, here our attention is paid to the description of darkness in this hadith, particularly the use of word *raisin* as the parable for Ethiopians' head. The Muslim intellectuals interpretation on this Hadith aspect seems to have two stages. Until the mid of 1200s AD, the parable of raisin was read as the direct description of appearance and after the mid of 1200s the comments on *raisin* parable seemed to be more insulting.

Secondly, the reading involves using the apparently trivializing and underestimating description. If an individual wants to compare someone's head with something, raisin is apparently not a complementary choice. An African-America Muslim intellectual, Dawud Walid, declined this impression and considered it as privileging modern Western sensibilities. He thought that raisin is not an object insulted specifically. Although some Muslim intellectuals understood that the raisin parable only delivered only color and texture description, but this also implied size to others.

Thirdly, this hadith was intended to create an obviously negative image. Post-1200s (AD), exegetes and hadith experts have understood the parable of raisin as the expression of Black Africans' inferiority and ugliness and have considered the parable as the part of broader representation of a slave's low status, a status equated with the phenotype of darkness in this reading. This reading unnecessarily assumes that there was a bad intention inside the Prophet (in fact, every Muslim intellectual almost surely felt horrified at the idea). In saying these words, the Prophet likely only wanted to refer to the well-known idiom in its context that a Black African slave stands on the lowest stair in the social hierarchy. The description was made not to underestimate some people but to confirm obviously the obedience to the leader. However, such reference confirms this social hierarchy, doesn't it? The comments on this hadith post-1200s only explain its hyperbolic social description

more clearly. However, referring to and explaining the brutal social reality, they have legitimized it, haven't they? (Brown, 2022:247-261)

### **An integrative-Interconnective Paradigm: Social Reality toward Racial Equality**

Amin Abdullah proposed an integrative-interconnective paradigm as the response to the challenge the people face in this modern era. This concept arises as the solution to the difference between Islam knowledge and general knowledge. This paradigm is based on a belief that that understanding the complexity of human life phenomena, including the scholarship aspect such as religious, social, humanity, and other sciences cannot be carried out separately; they are interconnected and interdependent. Interconnectedness and integration of various disciplines such as religious knowledge, science, and other knowledge can contribute to solving a variety of life problems. So, it can be said that this paradigm opens up new views for religious people and scientists to be more open and not blame each other between one science and another and between disciplines increasingly melting even though there are still boundaries or blocks in the scholarship (Owoyemi, 2016:145-164; Wimra et al., 2023:185-198).

The integrative-interconnective paradigm, according to Amin Abdullah, essentially wants to show that between various scientific fields, including between approaches used in studies, are actually interrelated because what is targeted by all scientific disciplines is the same reality and universe, only the dimensions and focus of attention seen by each scientific discipline are different (Ahmad Hilmi et al., 2023:159-178). Therefore, efforts to dichotomize scientific fields will only be detrimental to oneself. Therefore, studying a scientific field by utilizing other scientific fields is integration and seeing the interrelation between various scientific disciplines is interconnection (Abdullah, 2000: 90)

Amin Abdullah's integrative-interconnective concept is a middle way between the concept of Islamization of knowledge by Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi and the scientification of Islam by Kuntowijoyo. Amin Abdullah does not reject both views of these figures regarding the Islamization of Knowledge and the Scientification of Islam, but here Amin also has a dialogue related to issues surrounding the Islamization of Knowledge. On the other hand, he also took some theories from the Scientification of Islam. However, in the end Amin formulated his own paradigm called integrative-interconnective.

Thus, the problem, according to Amin Abdullah, is how every science that is developed must be within the framework of three perspectives, namely the perspective of text; *religion (badarat an-nas)*, the perspective of science; *sciences (badarat al-'ilm )* and the critical and transformative philosophical perspective (*badarat al-falsafah*).

Amin Abdullah's interconnective integration paradigm is greatly influenced by Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri. He divides Islamic epistemology into three aspects, namely

*burhani epistemology, irfani epistemology and bayani epistemology.* Muhammad abid al-Jabiri views that *'irfani epistemology* is not important in the development of Islamic thought, while according to Amin Abdullah, the three are very important and go hand in hand. A good relationship between these three is not in parallel or linear form but in circular form. Inspired by Ian G. Barbour, Holmes Rolston Abdolkarim Soroush, Nidhal Guessom and Jasser Auda, there are 3 keywords describing the relationship between religion and science that is integrative dialogical: Interpenetrating (*Semipermeable*), *Intersubjective testability* and Creative *imagination*. The three are related to Brown's work, in his review he appears to have presented a critical study with an interconnective integration paradigm (Suryadilaga et al., 2017).

In historical perspective, racism is a system that creates injustice. Historical facts show that black skin color means nothing if it does not indicate a 'non-native' status as can be seen in the case of individuals who adhere to the patrilineal tribal system in Arabia. If an Arab noble mother is black, it means nothing, because their ownership and even nobility are guaranteed by their father's position. Arab nobles from the Quraysh tribe such as Şafwān bin Umayya, 'Amr bin al-Āṣ, and 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb are described as black or of African descent. Safwān's mother was Ethiopian, while 'Amr and 'Umar's mothers were Arabs but black (*sawdā'*). 'Amr is even described as "short and colored with darkness (*sawād*)," and 'Umar 's paternal grandmother also originated from Ethiopia (Brown, 2022)

The Raisin Hadith ultimately raises important questions about the function and purpose of the book and its interpretation. Much like the differing schools of thought on defining racism today, the anti-black charge in this hadith seems to boil down to how one weighs the importance of three elements: the speaker's intent, their cultural context, and the substantive impact of their words. Reflecting the dominance of what I have described as the substantive definition of racism (i.e., that racism is anything that contributes to racial injustice), many people today would likely judge even the first and most innocuous reading of the raisin parable as a racist objectification of a black person by someone who is not racialized as black and in a position of power. As one critic of Clanchy's aforementioned book put it, "no one likes to be described as 'brown,' especially by someone from a racial class that has long objectified non-white bodies as his own."

In this regard, understanding the raisin metaphor as inoffensive requires accepting that one can inoffensively describe a person or a particular phenotype as having a very small head. This is what many Muslim scholars understood, even before the post-1200s shift to pejorative terms. Physiognomy books written by Muslims similar to their Greco-Roman predecessors show that a small head could be interpreted in several ways, both positive and negative (al- Asqalānī, 2003; Al-Asyrafī, 2012).

When examined scientifically, although a large head generally connotes intelligence and a small head the opposite, the true meaning of head size depends on its size relative to the rest of the body. A small head with a large chest and neck, for example, indicates courage and strength, while a large head with a small chest indicates clumsiness. That there is variation in somatic traits, such as average height, between regions is not controversial. However, investigating possible differences in skull size between regions or populations is highly controversial. In Western countries, the association of skull measurement (craniometry) with scientific racism, racist claims of superior and inferior intelligence, and discredited ‘sciences’ such as phrenology has made the issue dangerous for anyone (Brown, 2022).

But there is no reason to extend this understandable contemporary suspicion to readers and speakers of the past, especially to the Prophet and his immediate context. With the exception of al-Sindī, Muslim scholars did not seem to have taken the raisin metaphor as an allusion to stupidity. Muslim scholars’ readings before the 1200s simply understood it as a feature of a certain somatic type. It would have been taken as an uncontroversial fact by a seventh-century Arab that Ethiopians had smaller, darker heads and curlier hair than Arabs (Brown, 2022).

In Arabia in the beginning of Islam, the worst situation to face was that of an outsider, an outcast, whether a captive near Antioch or from Ethiopia. Blackness was seen as one potential marker. But we must not confuse the possible indication of a cause with the cause itself. The famous pre-Islamic warrior poet, ‘Antara ibn Shaddād, refers to his own black skin — he was the son of an Arab nobleman from the ‘Abs tribe and his African slave girl—and the humiliation he endured until he earned the respect of his father and his tribe through his deeds in battle. But ‘Antara was not treated with contempt because he was black. He was treated with contempt because he was the son of a slave girl (and therefore a slave himself) whose father had long refused to recognize him as his son. He was therefore a marginalized outsider.

Finally, this study proposes a socio-historical approach to the study of hadith as a response to the contemporary need for a more contextual and proportionate understanding. Amid modern dynamics involving different cultures and social realities, a literal understanding of hadith is often inadequate to answer the challenges of the times. This socio-historical approach allows for an exploration of the social, political, and cultural contexts surrounding the hadith, thereby minimizing the risk of narrow and extreme interpretations. In this regard, Jonathan AC Brown's contribution in *Islam and Blackness* is very relevant. Brown showed how the perception and interpretation of hadith texts can be shaped by social and political history, as seen in the narrative of the relationship between

Islam and the black community. Through this analysis, Brown underlined the importance of understanding the context behind religious texts to avoid bias and misinterpretation that can create injustice or social exclusion.

Therefore, this study not only focuses on understanding the hadith at the textual level, but also offers a more comprehensive approach by considering socio-historical factors. This approach is expected to contribute to the development of more inclusive thinking in the Islamic world, especially in facing the plurality of opinions and increasingly complex social realities.

## CONCLUSION

Jonathan A.C. Brown, an American Muslim academic and professor of Islamic studies at Georgetown University, rigorously and apologetically defends Islam against accusations that the religion—whether through its scriptures or normative traditions in law, theology, and spirituality—is inherently anti-Black. By asserting that “anti-Blackness is incidental, not essential, to Islam,” Brown investigates the historical contexts in which Islam emerged, shedding light on premodern Muslim writings about Black Africans. He observes that certain premodern Islamic texts reflect biases prevalent among Mediterranean and Middle Eastern communities toward East Africans, with Islam’s respect for regional customs contributing to the perpetuation of such prejudices. Brown’s nuanced analysis also highlights the egalitarian aspects of Islam, noting that the Quran promotes the equality of all humans before God and that Muhammad taught “no race or tribe is superior to another.”

Brown grapples with the challenges of interpreting centuries-old Muslim scholarship in light of modern understandings of race. He explores how the Abbasid-era use of “black” as a metaphor for sin did not evolve into “black” as a description of phenotypical traits. Brown’s extensive expertise on Muslim theological and legal thinkers is remarkable, and while his detailed interpretations are impressive, their complexity can blur the lines between explanation and justification. His careful and meticulous research fosters vigorous debate.

Muslims often speak of Islam in egalitarian terms—as a religion of peace, one that elevates humanity above base instincts and disregards racial or ethnic distinctions. Yet, despite Islam’s egalitarian spirit, the lived realities of many Muslims are starkly different, particularly in how Muslims engage with race and ethnicity. Europe, generally marked by religious trauma, contrasts with the Muslim world, where anti-Black racism in modern times manifests in two primary forms: enduring civilizational bias and the stigma associated with actual or perceived slave ancestry. Addressing these challenges, Brown emphasizes

that achieving racial equality ultimately requires leadership—individual, community-based, and collective—committed to transcending racial, social, and cultural boundaries.

The contributions of this study are significant in constructing a narrative of racial equality in Islam, particularly through the skillful integration of science and religion. Brown establishes scholarly interconnections spanning three main dimensions: textual analysis, scientific inquiry, and a transformative philosophical perspective. This approach not only elucidates Islamic history and theology but also offers practical solutions for combating prejudice and discrimination within modern Muslim societies.

This research excels through its multidimensional approach, which integrates historical, philological, and anthropological analyses. This methodology not only reveals the historical and textual contexts of Islam but also provides a more inclusive lens for examining issues of racism. The study has limitations, particularly regarding its geographical and cultural scope. To broaden the scope of this field, future research should explore the dynamics of racism within Muslim communities in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Muslim diaspora in the West. Moreover, incorporating empirical methods such as interviews and field studies could provide richer insights into the experiences and perspectives of contemporary Muslims on racial equality.

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