

RETHINKING RACISM: TOWARD HAMKA'S (1908-1981) PERSPECTIVES IN *TAFSIR AL-AZHAR*

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DOI:
[https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.
vol26no2.2](https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol26no2.2)

Abstract

Racism is an ideological belief that considers one's race to be more civilized, advanced, intelligent, and moral than others. Race as an ideology, masked as a scientific and natural fact, is frequently used to justify inequality and the domination of one group over another. However, in the teachings of Islam, the concept of the division of people or human beings based on race, gender, skin color, rank, or descent is unacceptable. Currently, a person may comfortably and ignorantly use specific untrue terms to show that they are the 'chosen race' preferred by God as an honorable race compared to others. Given the use of race to justify social systems and behaviors are anathemas to Islam, the current article analyses the issue of racism using the views of a famous scholar from Indonesia, Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, popularly known as Hamka, in his exegetical work *Tafsir al-Azhar*. Using the content analysis method, this article found that Hamka strongly emphasizes racial unity because humans are descended from one ancestry. In Hamka's perspective, there is no difference between one or another group of people except *taqwa* (piety). There is no need to leverage differences but remain aware of the similarities of lineage.

Article History:

Acceptance
date: 12
August 2024
Available
Online: 30 Dec
2024

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing interest: The author(s) have declared that no competing interest exist.



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Keywords: Racism; Hamka; *Tafsir al-Azhar*; Society; Ethnicity; Indonesia.

Khulasah

Rasisme merupakan satu kepercayaan yang menganggap bangsa sendiri lebih mulia, lebih beradab, maju, cerdas dan berakhlak tinggi daripada kaum lain. Ajaran Islam tidak mengajar konsep perpecahan umat atau manusia berdasarkan kaum, jantina, warna kulit, darjat dan keturunan. Namun begitu, mutakhir ini seseorang dengan mudah dan secara jahil menggunakan istilah-istilah tertentu yang tidak benar untuk menunjukkan bahawa mereka adalah 'kaum pilihan' yang dipilih oleh Tuhan sebagai kaum yang terhormat berbanding dengan yang lain. Justeru itu, artikel ini mengulas isu rasisme dengan merujuk kepada ulasan mufasir tersohor Nusantara, Hamka dalam karyanya *Tafsir al-Azhar* menggunakan kaedah analisis dokumen. Kajian ini merumuskan bahawa Hamka amat menekankan konsep perpaduan kaum kerana hakikatnya manusia adalah berasal daripada keturunan yang satu. Tiada perbezaan di antara satu dengan yang lain melainkan ketakwaan, lantaran itu isu perbezaan tidak perlu diungkitkan kerana adanya persamaan dari aspek keturunan.

Kata kunci: Rasisme; Hamka; *Tafsir al-Azhar*; Masyarakat; Etnik; Indonesia.

Introduction

Racism has become a global concern and struggle, and the current influx of immigrants and refugees into Europe and America has brought this issue to the international spotlight. Racism has reached explosive proportions in South Africa, highlighting the critical need for religious authorities to become more intimately involved in building racial harmony and peace as they work toward the fullness

of life for all people.¹ Thus, racism or acts of insulting and humiliating others because of ethnicity, skin color, language, or national differences is contrary to the Islamic concept of *fitrah* (the primordial state of human beings - our natural condition and disposition - which Muslims see as being intrinsically 'good'). Furthermore, societies that institutionalize oppression, racism, and inequality obstruct human people from attaining their inherent spiritual potential.²

Racial issues are still found in many parts of the world, and of course, such things are very worrying.³ However, the pure teachings of Islam have eliminated and prevented this from happening to humanity.⁴ Each individual has an equal position and cannot be differentiated based on tribal and clan differences.⁵ Strong references relate to this matter by quoting lessons from the story of Bilal ibn Rabah, the noble companion of the Prophet PBUH and the first *mu'adhdhin*

¹ Jerry Pillay, "Racism and Xenophobia: The Role of the Church in South Africa," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38(3) (2017), 3–17, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v38i3.1655>.

² Salma Yaqoob, "Muslim Women and War on Terror," *Feminist Review* 88(1) (2008), 150–61, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400382>.

³ Donaldo Macedo & Panayota Gounari, *Globalization of Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315634388>.

⁴ Richard S. Balkin, Richard E. Watts & Saba R. Ali, "A Conversation About the Intersection of Faith, Sexual Orientation and Gender: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Perspectives," *Journal of Counseling & Development* 92(2) (2014), 187–93, <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00147.x>.

⁵ Toby Rollo, "The Color of Childhood: The Role of the Child/Human Binary in the Production of Anti-Black Racism," *Journal of Black Studies* 49(4) (2018), 307–29, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934718760769>; M. H. Segall, "Why Is There Still Racism If There Is No Such Thing as 'Race'?", in *Merging Past, Present, and Future in Cross-Cultural Psychology*, eds. Walter J. Lonner et al. (London, UK: Garland Science, 2020), 14–26, <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003077473>; Kum-Kum Bhavnani, "Talking Racism and the Editing of Women's Studies," in *Introducing Women's Studies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1993), 27–48, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-22595-8_2.

(caller to prayers) in Islam.⁶ Despite the background of an enslaved person, his position was very high among the companions. Throughout his life, he was recognized as a man of obedience and diligence known for responsibility, sincerity, trust, courage, perseverance, and willingness to take risks to defend the truth.⁷ This noble individual was witnessed by the Prophet PBUH as one of the inhabitants of paradise, as mentioned in the authentic *hadith* narrated by Abu Hurayrah:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ
لِبِلَالٍ عِنْدَ صَلَاةِ الْعَدَاةِ: يَا بِلَالُ حَدِّثْنِي بِأَرْجَى عَمَلٍ
عَمِلْتَهُ عِنْدَكَ فِي الْإِسْلَامِ مَنْفَعَةً فَإِنِّي سَمِعْتُ اللَّيْلَةَ حَشْفَ
نَعْلَيْكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ فِي الْجَنَّةِ. قَالَ بِلَالٌ: مَا عَمَلْتُ عَمَلًا فِي
الْإِسْلَامِ أَرْجَى عِنْدِي مَنْفَعَةً مِنْ أَنِّي لَا أَتَطَهَّرُ طُهُورًا تَامًّا
فِي سَاعَةٍ مِنْ لَيْلٍ وَلَا نَهَارٍ إِلَّا صَلَّيْتُ بِذَلِكَ الطُّهُورِ مَا
كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لِي أَنْ أُصَلِّيَ.⁸

Meaning: The Prophet PBUH said, "O Bilal, tell me what action you perform in Islam you feel yields the greatest benefit, for last night I heard the sound of your sandals in front of me in Heaven." Bilal submitted, "I have not performed any action in Islam carrying

⁶ Dereje Feyissa & Bruce B. Lawrence, "Muslims Renegotiating Marginality in Contemporary Ethiopia," *The Muslim World* 104(3) (2014): 281–305, <https://doi.org/10.1111/muw.12056>.

⁷ Bernard K. Freamon, "4. Straight, No Chaser: Slavery, Abolition, and Modern Islamic Thought," in *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2017), 61–80, <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300166460-005>.

⁸ Muslim bin al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab Fada'il al-Sahabah, Bab min Fada'il Bilal ibn Rabah, *hadith* no. 4504, <https://dorar.net/hadith/sharh/1872>.

advantage in my sight, except that every time I perform a complete and perfect ablution at any time during the night or day, I perform as much prayer Allah decrees for me with that ablution."

Although this article does not pretend to comprehensively address the literature and nuance by which race and racism have been studied and used, suffice it to say for contextual purposes that racism by general interpretation is a perception and action that denies a person or group the right to obtain services, opportunities or assistance because they are not in the same orientation in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, and culture.⁹ Though Muslims are not a race in its commonly (incorrect) biological construct, Islam and Muslims have become public objects of racial demonization in terms of using race-like categories to justify oppression, inequality, and domination.¹⁰ Meer and Modood,¹¹ examined why there may be a lack of compassion for the notion that Muslim minorities face racism as a result of their actual or perceived 'Muslimness' (in the same way that Jewish minorities face racism as a result of their actual or perceived 'Jewishness').

They concluded that there are four causes behind this. First, there is a definition of racism that implies that the protections accorded to conventionally defined racial minorities as involuntarily formed should not be granted to

⁹ Malcolm D. Brown, "'Conceptualising Racism and Islamophobia,'" in *Comparative Perspectives on Racism*, eds. Jessika ter Wal & Maykel Verkuyten (New York: Routledge, 2019), 73–90, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315196374>.

¹⁰ Mustafa Malik, "Islam in Europe: Quest for a Paradigm," *Middle East Policy* 8(2) (2001): 100–115, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-4967.00021>; Junaid Rana, "Anthropology and the Riddle of White Supremacy," *American Anthropologist* 122(1) (2020), 99–111, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13355>.

¹¹ Nasar Meer & Tariq Modood, "Refutations of Racism in the 'Muslim Question,'" *Patterns of Prejudice* 43(3–4) (2009), 335–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220903109250>.

Muslims because their religious identity is actively chosen. One prominent discursive cliché pertinent to this perspective criticizes Muslim minorities adopting a 'victim mentality.' Second, the way contemporary intellectuals view religion leads one to believe that mocking Muslims is a sign of healthy intellectual discourse and, hence, not a problem of discrimination. Third, while ethnic identities are tolerated in public spaces, religious minorities face much greater hostility. This implies that some critics who may otherwise sympathize with Muslim communities believe that it is impossible to consider Muslims as victims when they may be future oppressors themselves. Finally, some find it difficult to empathize with a minority believed to be disloyal or involved with terrorism, making Muslims a perceived threat rather than a marginalized minority susceptible to increasingly toxic racial discourses.

Nonetheless, Rodney Sadler, as reported by Stinchcomb,¹² observes that 'racial thought' is a forerunner to racism. Sadler argues, through a chronological examination of Hebrew writing from the Iron Age to the Rabbinic period, that biblical writings do not reflect racial thought, that they do not make an essential and inherent connection between, for example, negative behavioral patterns, bodily characteristics, group ontological differences, and legitimizing ideology. While Sadler's monograph does not purport to be a comprehensive statement regarding racial thought in all kinds of biblical literature, his study reveals that biblical texts do not always represent racial thought directly and that racial associations with biblical individuals originate outside of biblical texts.

¹² Jillian Stinchcomb, "Race, Racism and the Hebrew Bible: The Case of the Queen of Sheba," *Religions* 12(10) (2021), 795, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12100795>.

Therefore, the term racist needs to be comprehensively understood.¹³ Due to diversity, it is not only a reality of life that we must accept; it is part of God's wisdom.¹⁴ Even wrong statements or actions about racism can result in various undesirable things, such as fights, murders, and wars.¹⁵ However, racism is structurally rooted in society and is reflected in mainstream speech.¹⁶ In this vein, this article focuses on the discussion of racism from the perspective of the famous Indonesian scholar Hamka in his work, *Tafsir al-Azhar*. This exegetical book is one of the objects of study in the archipelago that continues to receive perfect attention from the community and academics. This is because the language is easy to understand, especially in Malay-speaking countries. In addition, Hamka's Qur'anic commentaries that highlight the social angle become an added value in line with his interpretation methodology and socio-cultural approach.

Methodology

In general, this article is based on qualitative data found in library-based texts, and results were obtained from content analysis of Qur'anic texts that discuss racism. The study was done inductively¹⁷ on Hamka's *Tafsir al-Azhar* work. This Qur'anic exegetical book is the primary reference

¹³ Laurie Jo Moore, "Psychiatric Contributions to Understanding Racism," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 37(2) (2000), 147–83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/136346150003700201>.

¹⁴ David L. Johnston, "Islam and Human Rights: A Growing Rapprochement?" *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 74(1) (2015), 113–48, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajes.12085>.

¹⁵ Binyam Mogessie, "Seeing is Believing: Representation as a Powerful Tool in the Fight against Racism in Science," *Cell Stem Cell* 28(5) (2021), 793–95, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stem.2021.04.017>.

¹⁶ Terry Ngarritjan Kessar, "About Being Mununga (Whitefulla): Making Covert Group Racism Visible," *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 16(5) (2006), 347–62, <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.880>.

¹⁷ W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1994).

apart from other secondary reading materials such as Hamka's work *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup*, journal articles, books, and manuscripts found in research libraries. In *Tafsir al-Azhar*, Hamka discusses concepts, thoughts and matters related to racism. His perspectives were analysed where the analysis focuses on the views of the Qur'anic exegetes, whether past or contemporary scholars, because of their authority in the field of Qur'anic interpretation. However, the study also takes advantage of the views of Western scholars, especially those related to history. Hence, this study seeks to present the complete form of racism expressed in the Qur'an based on Hamka's perspectives.

The Notion of Racism from Islamic Discourse

Humans were created with various tribes and clans to know each other. Thus, what distinguishes one from the other is piety. God emphasises this factor that the noblest in His sight are the most pious in carrying out His commands and avoiding His prohibitions, not the wealthiest or the most numerous of his descendants or how people looked.¹⁸

Etymologically, racism or racist means biased services or hostile attitude towards someone based on their ethnicity. The term may refer to how a specific race gets more special assistance than another race such as in college admissions, job hiring, and the like.¹⁹ This term also explains that only a particular tribe is the most superior.²⁰ As such, racism is a combination of prejudice and power articulated through discrimination based on skin color and biological-physical characteristics.

¹⁸ Jarir al-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Tabari*, vol. 22 (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 2011).

¹⁹ Eve L. Ewing, *Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

²⁰ Noresah Baharom, ed., *Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 2005), 1292.

In terms of terminology, racism is a doctrine or belief that one group is superior to another group based on ethnic factors.²¹ This belief, in turn, allowed the concept of inferiority and racial superiority. This is particularly true during the Age of European Colonialism, where whites considered themselves superior or 'better' than other races, especially blacks, and used it to justify enslaving non-whites and taking their resources. What is worrying is that racism can be an activity that involves violence, discrimination, segregation and other adverse actions against a particular racial group.

Racism may also occur systematically within individuals and institutions.²² Racism is systemic when ingrained in the systems that define our society, whether legal, political, military, health, or educational.²³ At the individual level, racism exists in personal beliefs and attitudes. Institutional-level racism involves discriminatory policies and practices, creating inequalities in racially/ethnically plural communities. At the institutional level of racism, it can be seen implicitly in the social structure of South Africa's former apartheid system or in the arrest and incarceration statistics in the United States. Unfortunately, some races that discriminate and negatively evaluate these other races (usually, though not constantly) do not consider themselves racist ideologically²⁴ because

²¹ Gokhan Savas, "Understanding Critical Race Theory as a Framework in Higher Educational Research," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 35(4) (2014), 506–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2013.777211>.

²² Phia S. Salter, Glenn Adams & Michael J. Perez, "Racism in the Structure of Everyday Worlds: A Cultural-Psychological Perspective," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 27(3) (2018), 150–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417724239>.

²³ Ebony O. McGee, "Addressing Systemic Racism as the Cancer of Black People: Equity Ethic-Driven Research," *Nature Reviews Cancer* 21(8) (2021), 477–78, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41568-021-00368-8>.

²⁴ Robert Miles & Malcolm Brown, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 2003).

they hold the belief that a particular race is naturally of higher status while other races are of lower value.

Thus, Van Dijk²⁵ defines racism as a social system of inequality composed of two major subsystems: a social system characterized by discriminatory actions at the micro-level and group dominance at the macro level, and a cognitive system distinguished by racist ideologies that shape specific ethnic or racial attitudes (prejudices). This cognitive system of skewed social views is the foundation for the dominant group's racist social practices. Discourse is one of these social practices. Additionally, discourse is critical in disseminating racist ideas inside the ingroup.

Similarly, Wieviorka, as cited by Cheng,²⁶ argues for a distinction between two types of racism: 'universalist racism,' which postulates essential differences between human 'races' to justify prejudices based on unequal practices, and 'differential' or 'cultural racism,' in which racial differences result in irreconcilable cultural divisions in which the 'other' is a threat.

Racism is distinct from nationalism and patriotism. Nationalism involves citizens forming a shared identity to uphold their nation's autonomy. Patriotism is sacrificing one's soul, body, or possessions to defend a country's sovereignty.²⁷ Some critics believe that patriotism may be hazardous and a serious offense when it is manipulated for destructive political purposes and utilized by the state to

²⁵ Teun A. van Dijk, "The Reality of Racism," in *Festschrift Für Die Wirklichkeit* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2000), 211–25, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-322-87330-9_23.

²⁶ Jennifer E Cheng, "Islamophobia, Muslimophobia or Racism? Parliamentary Discourses on Islam and Muslims in Debates on the Minaret Ban in Switzerland," *Discourse & Society* 26(5) (2015), 562–86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926515581157>.

²⁷ David Archard, "Should We Teach Patriotism?," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 18(3) (1999), 157–73, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1005138406380>.

compel citizens to comply. Consequently, a hegemonic power will be established.

Wars have led to destruction and the rise of racism, as some nations perceive themselves as superior, giving rise to extremist nationalist movements like Nazi racism, anti-semitism, and apartheid in South Africa, where black people were sold and enslaved in America. During World War II in Japan, a group of patriotic citizens gained dominance, leading to a deterioration of the war situation. They used nationalism to justify the war, causing even those who desired peace to have to back the war effort.²⁸ Racism can be viewed through the lens of social solidarity (*'asabiyyah*), highlighting a notable distinction, which enhances the human role as caliph and in the reconstruction of Islamic civilization. This spirit is a crucial aspect that requires attention.²⁹

From this point, Islam strictly forbids any form of bigotry that the Qur'an and *hadith* do not guide. Islam condemns any opposing views, thoughts or beliefs by a social group or its members towards another group based on physical-biological or racial facial differences alone and is shown clearly through open behavior or action. Thus, any action or regulation that can lead to racial hostility or unfriendliness based on race and ethnicity leads to an element of injustice rejected by Islam's basic principles. No race can consider them 'more masters' in the sense of racial supremacy.

As for the authentic *hadith* of the Prophet (PBUH): "The rulers are from Quraysh"³⁰ cannot be used as an

²⁸ R. Samidi & Wahyu Jati Kusuma, "Analisis Kritis Eksistensi Nilai Patriotisme dalam Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan," *Harmony: Jurnal Pembelajaran IPS Dan PKN* 5(1) (2020), 30–39, <https://doi.org/10.15294/harmony.v5i1.40284>.

²⁹ Khalif Muammar, "Faktor Kegemilangan Tamadun Islam: Pengajaran Dari Masa Lalu," *Jurnal Hadhari* 1(2) (2009), 15–31.

³⁰ Narrated by Ahmad bin Hanbal, Musnad Ahmad, Bab Awwal Musnad al-Basriyyin, *hadith* no. 19283.

argument for the supremacy of a nation. This *hadith* is not a matter of supremacy but relates to the ability and influence of politics taken into account in the appointment of leaders. Since the Quraysh had political influence and ability among the Arabs at that time, they were the most deserving. The Prophet selected a leader based on the *'asabiyyah* instinct, as mentioned in this *hadith*. If the public's consensus shifts towards favoring elections over traditional leadership by the Quraysh tribe, there would be no restriction on appointing leaders from other groups like the Ottoman Caliphate, etc.³¹ At the same time, the Prophet said: "You should listen to and obey your ruler even if he was an Ethiopian (black) slave whose head looks like a raisin."³² This *hadith* also denies the supremacy of certain races.

Indeed, the presence of harsh expressions about blackness in Islamic literature does not necessarily imply that such attitudes were reflected in or significantly influenced the lived experiences of black people under Islamic rule. Additionally, such attitudes may not always adhere to the same intellectual structures as white supremacists in the West. For example, Ibn Khaldun's (d. 808/1406) derogatory remarks about 'blacks' and their 'lack of intellect' are frequently interpreted as clear examples of 'Arab racism'; however, there is little evidence that Ibn Khaldun's discussion of color was motivated by any notion of genetically preserved characteristics, as he links intelligence to culture and climate in other sections of his work and makes similar arguments about 'white Slavic peoples.'³³

³¹ Wahbah al-Zuhayli, *al-Fiqh al-Islami wa Adillatuh*, vol. 6 (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Fikr al-Mu'asir, 2012).

³² Narrated by al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Ahkam, Bab al-Sam' wa al-Ta'ah li al-Imam ma lam takun Ma'siyah, *hadith* no. 6723.

³³ Haroon Bashir, "Black Excellence and the Curse of Ham: Debating Race and Slavery in the Islamic Tradition," *ReOrient* 5(1) (2019), <https://doi.org/10.13169/reorient.5.1.0092>; 'Abd al-Rahman Abu

Therefore, the Prophet PBUH advised his companions to leave the call to the companions in the pre-Islamic style (*jahiliyyah*): "O the Ansari/O the emigrants," because such matters include dishonourable things, as narrated by Jabir ibn 'Abdillah:

عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ يَقُولُ كُنَّا فِي عَزَاةٍ قَالَ سُفْيَانُ يَرَوْنَ
أُمَّهَا عَزْوَةً بَنِي الْمُصْطَلِقِ فَكَسَعَ رَجُلٌ مِنْ الْمُهَاجِرِينَ رَجُلًا
مِنَ الْأَنْصَارِ فَقَالَ الْمُهَاجِرِيُّ يَا لِّلْمُهَاجِرِينَ وَقَالَ
الْأَنْصَارِيُّ يَا لِّلْأَنْصَارِ فَسَمِعَ ذَلِكَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
وَسَلَّمَ فَقَالَ مَا بَأْسُ دَعْوَى الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ قَالُوا رَجُلٌ مِنْ
الْمُهَاجِرِينَ كَسَعَ رَجُلًا مِنَ الْأَنْصَارِ فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى
اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ دَعْوَاهَا فَإِنَّهَا مُنْتَبَهَةٌ³⁴ ...

Meaning: "We were in a war, and a man from the emigrants kicked an Ansari (on the buttocks with his foot). The Ansari man said, "O the Ansari! (Help!)" The emigrant said, "O the emigrants! (Help)." When Allah's Apostle heard that he said, "What is that?" They said, "A man from the emigrants kicked a man from the Ansar (on the buttocks of his foot). On that, the Ansar said, "O the Ansar!" and the emigrant said, "O the emigrants!" The Prophet said, "Leave it (that call) for it is a detestable thing..."

Yasmin and Bagguley described racism and Islamophobia as theoretically distinct but frequently

Zayd Ibn Khaldun, *Tarikh Ibn Khaldun* ('Amman: Bayt al-Afkar al-Dawliyyah, n.d.).

³⁴ Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Kitab Tafsir al-Qur'an, Bab wa min Surah al-Munafiqin, *hadith* no. 3315, *hasan sahih*.

empirically related issues.³⁵ Racism comprises the demeaning or cultural construction of biological or bodily features, and it serves as a meaningful description and explanation of the social constructs. When religious belief is essentialized and perceived as a function of birth, Islamophobia becomes racialized. Unlike racism, Islamophobia establishes the uniqueness of Islam and its adherents - Muslims - via their beliefs and practices rather than through any biological or somatic features.³⁶ Thus, only pre-Islamic chauvinistic inclinations such as racism, tribalism, and uncivil nationalism are seen as abominable or the devil's work.³⁷ Thus, attempts to culturally expand the idea of racism³⁸ would be rejected by Miles & Brown as inappropriate inflations of the concept, robbing it of its individuality and empirical referents.³⁹

Agbaria and Statman⁴⁰ argued that cultivating openness, reflexivity, and dialogue by studying foundational texts from diverse religious traditions can help develop culturally responsive pedagogies and intercultural capacities at the school and community levels, particularly in conflict-ridden societies. Additionally, they proposed a new civil society project called the *From the Wells* (FTW), which seeks to restore the moment when traditions

³⁵ Yasmin Hussain & Paul Bagguley, "Securitized Citizens: Islamophobia, Racism and the 7/7 London Bombings," *The Sociological Review* 60(4) (2012), 715-34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2012.02130.x>.

³⁶ Miles & Brown, *Racism*, 164.

³⁷ Tim Jacoby & Hüsrev Tabak, "Islam, Nationalism, and Kurdish Ethnopolitics in Turkey," *Peace Review* 27(3) (2015), 346-53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2015.1063379>.

³⁸ Tariq Modood, *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

³⁹ Miles & Brown, *Racism*, 58.

⁴⁰ Ayman K. Agbaria & Daniel Statman, "'From the Wells': Teaching Openness in Judaism and Islam towards a Shared Society in Israel?" *British Journal of Religious Education* 44(1) (2022), 87-97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2021.1879016>.

communicate with one another from within. This approach appears to be a worthwhile endeavor in multicultural countries confronted with increasing racism, segregation, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia.

In light of these efforts, the Qur'an remains relevant and seeks to eradicate all racially-based oppression forms.⁴¹ Humans are created with different appearances and skin colors, and each has its language and culture. All of these are signs from the Creator for those with the knowledge to contemplate⁴². The diversity of race and ethnicity should encourage people to know, respect, and protect each other⁴³, work together and help each other in achieving happiness and overcoming problems together⁴⁴. In addition, a person's glory is not determined by the race or lineage of his ancestors but by the volume of his piety⁴⁵. Thus, it is not allowed to mock, harass or bring down each other. It is also advised not to suspect each other and find faults or weaknesses in others⁴⁶. Also, this last verse lays the foundation for anti-defamation. In addition, the Qur'an further emphasizes the need to be fair and reasonable to human beings regardless of race and not commit injustices, evil, abomination or transgression⁴⁷.

There are numerous mandates related to this, and among them are: Do not let hatred, prejudice or group fanaticism influence us to act unjustly⁴⁸. It is unlawful to kill humans without a justified reason (*bi ghayr haqq*). It is

⁴¹ Stephen J. King, "Black Arabs and African Migrants: Between Slavery and Racism in North Africa," *The Journal of North African Studies* 26(1) (2021), 8-50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2019.1670645>.

⁴² Al-Rum 30: 22.

⁴³ Al-Hujurat 49: 13.

⁴⁴ Al-Ma'idah 5: 2.

⁴⁵ Al-Hujurat 49: 13.

⁴⁶ Al-Hujurat 49: 11 & 12.

⁴⁷ Al-Nahl 16: 90.

⁴⁸ Al-Ma'idah 5: 8.

not permissible to kill weak people (women, children, the elderly), innocent people, and people who have surrendered. Killing a human being who is neither a murderer (*bi ghayr nafs*) nor a destroyer is the same as killing all humankind⁴⁹. Even being arrogant or superstitious is condemned⁵⁰. The only reason to feel justified pride is when we truly have faith⁵¹, regardless of race, ancestry, skin color, or appearance⁵². Given the numerous examples from the Qur'an against racism and racist ideologies, knowing more about how the Qur'an was systematically studied by exegetes is warranted to obtain greater insight.

Hamka: A Sketch of the Life of Archipelago Exegete

Hamka was a famous commentator in the Malay Archipelago, especially Indonesia.⁵³ He was a modernist Muslim scholar, writer, historian, and poet.⁵⁴ Hamka is an abbreviation for the original name, Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah. The process of shortening the name is due to his activities in writing, which aimed to make it easier for the community to recognise him.⁵⁵ His father, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (1879-1945), was given the name of his teacher's son, Shaykh Ahmad Khatib, in Mecca.

⁴⁹ Al-Ma'idah 5: 32.

⁵⁰ Al-Isra' 17: 38.

⁵¹ Ali 'Imran 3: 139.

⁵² Al-Nisa' 4: 36.

⁵³ C.W. Watson, "A Popular Indonesian Preacher: The Significance of AA Gymnastiar," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11(4) (2005), 773-92, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2005.00261.x>.

⁵⁴ David Hanan, "Approaches to Islam in the Indonesian Cinema 1970s-1990s," in *Moments in Indonesian Film History* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 109-64, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-72613-3_4.

⁵⁵ Sirry Mun'im, "What's Modern about Modern Tafsir? A Closer Look at Hamka's Tafsir al-Azhar," in *The Qur'an in the Malay-Indonesian World*, ed. Daneshgar Majid, Peter G. Riddell & Andrew Rippin (London: Routledge, 2016), 212-25.

Hamka was born on the night of Monday 14 Muharram 1326AH. equivalent to 17 February 1908 in Kampung Tanah Sirah, Sungai Batang Maninjau, Minangkabau, West Sumatra, Indonesia. His stature as a scholar was inherited from his father, a pioneer of the Islamic youth movement in Minangkabau beginning in 1906. His father was known for the title of Haji Rasul in his youth, he firmly opposed the teachings of *Rabitah* (a Sufi convent), which had a system passed by the followers of the sect when they wanted to do *suluk* (the Sufi path).⁵⁶

On January 27, 1964, while Hamka was delivering a lecture in the al-Azhar Mosque, he was arrested and put in prison by the ruler of the Old Order, Sukarno's reign.⁵⁷ Thus began Hamka's life as a political prisoner and a full-time writer of exegetical works that had begun before. While in prison, he wrote his famous book, *Tafsir al-Azhar*. After the fall of the Old Order and the shift to Suharto's leadership, Hamka was acquitted on January 21, 1966, after more than two years in prison and being under house arrest for two months and city prisoner for two months.⁵⁸ Hamka died in Jakarta on July 24, 1981.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Hamka, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1966), 2-45.

⁵⁷ Delmus Puneri Salim, "Islam, Politics and Identity," in *The Transnational and the Local in the Politics of Islam* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 21–51, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-15413-8_2; Karel Steenbrink, "Qur'ān Interpretations of Hamzah Fansuri (CA. 1600) and Hamka (1908-1982): A Comparison," *Studia Islamika* 2(2) (2014), <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v2i2.835>.

⁵⁸ Fauzan Saleh, "The Belief of al-Qaḍā and al-Qadr in Islamic Theological Discourse," *Studia Islamika* 8(3) (2014), <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v8i3.682>.

⁵⁹ Karel Steenbrink, "Indonesian Muslims and the North-American West," in *Fullness of Life for All*, ed. Inus Daneel, Charles Van Engen, & Hendrik M. Vroom (New York: Brill, 2000), 261–77, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004494312019>.

Hamka's *Tafsir al-Azhar* shows the breadth of his knowledge, covering almost all disciplines that are full of information. The production of *Tafsir al-Azhar* at the age of twilight raised his name in the eyes of Muslims. It comes from a series of dawn lectures delivered by Hamka at the al-Azhar Mosque located in Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta beginning in 1959.⁶⁰ The name al-Azhar for the mosque was given by Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut (1893-1963), the former Rector of al-Azhar University, during his visit to Indonesia in December 1960 and hoped to become the second al-Azhar in Jakarta. The naming of Hamka's exegetical work with the name *Tafsir al-Azhar* is in conjunction with the birthplace of this book, which is the Great Mosque of al-Azhar, Indonesia.⁶¹

This *tafsir* was produced to meet the needs of Indonesian Muslims who are very interested in understanding the contents of the Qur'an but have not mastered the Arabic language. In addition, the book is meant to help the preachers who can speak Arabic but do not yet have the breadth of knowledge in conveying messages.⁶² The presence of *Tafsir al-Azhar* certainly adds to the wealth of Islamic intellectual treasures in the field of Qur'anic exegesis in general and written by Indonesian exegetes in particular.

Racism: Hamka's Intellectual Discourse

The issue of racism is indeed inevitable when there are groups of people who have some similar characteristics, such as biology or culture, trying to defend their respective

⁶⁰ Khairudin Aljunied, "Introduction: Hamka's Cosmopolitan Reform", in *Hamka and Islam* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2018), 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501724589-003>.

⁶¹ Hamka, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup*, 2-45.

⁶² Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, vol. 1 (Jakarta: Yayasan Nurul Islam, 1984), 4.

groups and at the same time oppress other races.⁶³ Racism, if left unchecked however, can threaten political stability and national peace. For example, there have also been bloody events resulting from racial riots in Malaysia's May 13, 1969, incident, so a state of emergency had to be declared throughout the country.⁶⁴

Racial conflict can also result in the segregation of certain groups in terms of education, housing and employment. Racism can also result in violence and mass murder, as has happened to Jews in Germany during Hitler's rule.⁶⁵ To curb this matter, the Prophet Muhammad PBUH has warned in his words:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ
اِثْنَتَانِ فِي النَّاسِ هُمَا كُفْرٌ الطَّعْنُ فِي النَّسَبِ
وَالْيَبَاحَةُ عَلَى الْمَيِّتِ⁶⁶

Meaning: "Two matters are signs of disbelief on the part of those who indulge in them: Defaming and speaking evil of a person's lineage and wailing over the dead."

⁶³ Edouard Machery, Luc Faucher & Daniel R. Kelly, "On the Alleged Inadequacies of Psychological Explanations of Racism," *Monist* 93(2) (2010): 228–54, <https://doi.org/10.5840/monist201093214>; Graziella Moraes D. Silva, "Folk Conceptualizations of Racism and Antiracism in Brazil and South Africa," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35(3) (2012), 506–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.589523>.

⁶⁴ Songjian Zhang, "In Search of a Home (Land)," *South East Asia Research* 26(3) (2018), 299–312, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967828X18794694>.

⁶⁵ Simon Stow, "To Kill a Mockingbird: What Maycomb Knew about Hitler (and Why It Matters)," *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 34(2) (2021), 162–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0895769X.2019.1652795>.

⁶⁶ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Iman, Bab Ithlaq Isma al-Kufr 'ala al-Ta'n fi al-Nasb wa al-Nihayah, *hadith* no. 67.

Degrading the lineage of others meant in this *hadith* is to disgrace their ancestry with the motive of disparaging and denouncing. Al-Nawawi, in full Abu Zakariyya Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi (631-676 AH/1234-1277), was a Sunni Shafiite jurist and *hadith* scholar, and explained the meaning of this *hadith* by quoting several opinions, among the most authentic thoughts is degrading the descendants of others, meaning one of the actions of the disbelievers and the practices of the ignorant. It is strictly forbidden to humiliate descendants and mourn the dead.⁶⁷

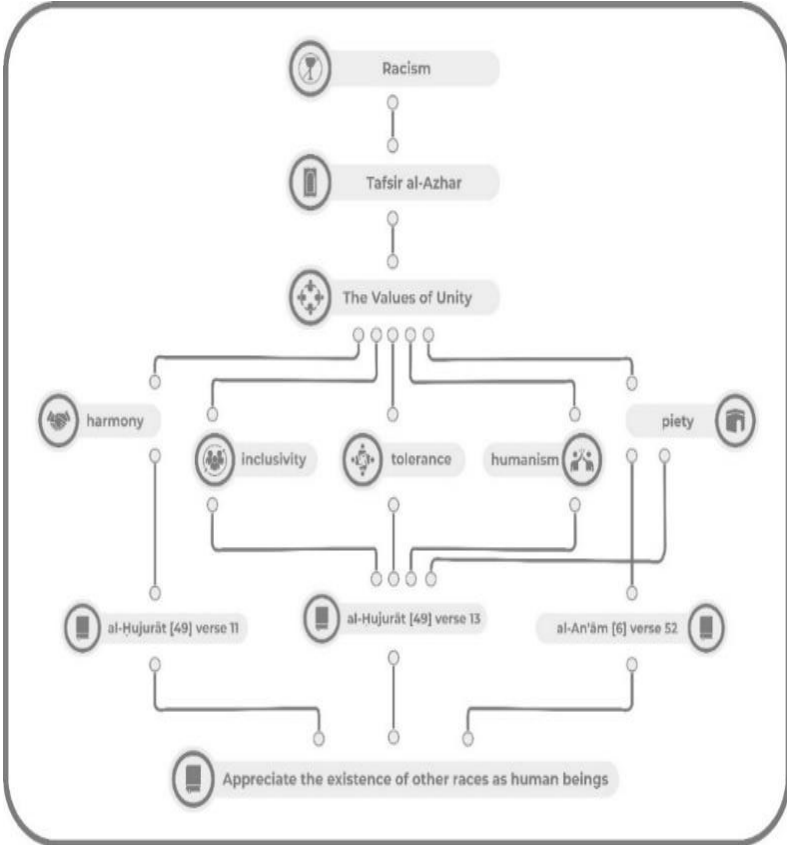
Concerning this *hadith*, one thing that needs to be purified, as it has become a habit in Muslim society today, is to be racist by insulting or degrading the lineage of others, such as the words "Budak Indon/Indonesian boy," "Bangla betul la/Truely Bangla," "India Paria/Indian Paraiyar," and so on as has happened in Malaysia. This racism is not always based on biological assertions. For example, stereotypes about British South Asians have rarely been linked to biological inferiority, preferring to focus on their cultural alienation.⁶⁸ Such caricatures are correctly viewed as racist in the United Kingdom, if only because they have been used to excuse physical attacks (Paki-bashing). Muslims have been subjected to similar non-biological stereotypes (terrorists, sexual predators) and accompanying maltreatment.⁶⁹ In this regard, the study found the value of unity which had a positive impact on Hamka's interpretation of *Tafsir al-Azhar* that highlighted the issue of racism as shown in Figure 1.

⁶⁷ Abu Zakariyya Yahya al-Nawawi, *Sharh al-Nawawi 'ala Muslim*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Dar al-Khayr, 1996), 243.

⁶⁸ Tariq Modood, "'Difference', Cultural Racism and Anti-Racism," in *Debating Cultural Hybridity* (London: Zed Books, 1997), 154–72.

⁶⁹ Stephen H. Jones et al., "'That's How Muslims Are Required to View the World': Race, Culture and Belief in Non-Muslims' Descriptions of Islam and Science," *The Sociological Review* 67(1) (2019), 161–77, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026118778174>.

Figure 1. The value of unity which had a positive impact on Hamka's interpretation of *Tafsir al-Azhar* that highlighted the issue of racism



i. The Harmony Values

Hamka guides readers to avoid racism and uphold the value of harmony in social life when interpreting the words of Allah in surah al-Hujurat 49:11:

“O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them, nor let women ridicule [other]

women; perhaps they may be better than them. Furthermore, do not insult one another and do not call each other by [offensive] nicknames..."

In this verse, Hamka describes the reminders and advice of manners in the association of believers⁷⁰. They should not commit acts of racism, such as mocking, insulting, ridiculing and demeaning other races or categories of people. This is because the true believer will always see their shortcomings, and at the same time also differentiate themselves from anyone who is only busy looking for other people's weaknesses but forgets one's own shortcomings. Behaving in such a way can cause one to forget one's faults and shame.

Therefore, Abu al-Fida' 'Imad al-Din Isma'il ibn 'Umar ibn Kathir (701-774 AH), the prominent exegete who authored the book *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim* said that this verse is a prohibition to harass and belittle others and that this attitude is included in the category of arrogance, as the Prophet (PBUH) said:

الْكِبْرُ بَطْرُ الْحَقِّ وَغَمَطُ النَّاسِ⁷¹

Meaning: "... Pride amounts to disclaiming truth out of self-esteem and despising people."

This *hadith* means the prohibition to belittle and consider others to be of lesser value and disparaging others is forbidden because it may be that being despised is more honourable in the sight of God, as mentioned in surah al-Hujurat 49:11.⁷² According to Hamka, the message of this verse is not only addressed to men but women as well.⁷³ On

⁷⁰ Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, vol. 26 (Jakarta, Indonesia: Yayasan Nurul Islam, 1982), 241.

⁷¹ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Iman, Bab Tahrim al-Kibr wa Bayanah, *hadith* no. 91.

⁷² Abu al-Fida' Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, vol. 6 (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Tayyibah, 2002), 386.

⁷³ Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, 242.

the other hand, everyone must practice the nature of *al-tawadu'* (humility) and realize their shortcomings.

The rejection of racism is followed by a verse phrase, "And do not insult one another and do not call each other by [offensive] nicknames." (Surah al-Hujurat 49:11). The prohibition of calling someone a wrong title/nickname that is bad and disliked (labeling), and replacing the pejorative term with a better name is required. Hamka, in his commentary, includes a narration of how the Prophet gave an example of changing the call of a companion to a better call, from *al-khayl* (the horse) to *al-khayr* (the good). Thus, the act of calling someone with an undesirable title must be stopped and replaced with a better one because even the calling of a good name also affects the soul.⁷⁴ Therefore, the application of the values of harmony in today's plural society can be made by not mocking and feeling self-sufficient and arrogant from others, as well as eliminating the culture of racist labeling/nicknames that lead to quarrels and divisions and the loss of peace and harmony in life.

ii. The Values of Inclusivity

Hamka also discusses the value of inclusivity in the words of God in surah al-Hujurat 49:13, which recognizes the equality of rank of all people (aside from the degree of piety):

"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Aware."

Based on this verse, Hamka conveys the message to associate with fellow human beings with a firm call used by God that is "O Mankind" and then continues with a treatise on the fact of human creation that contains egalitarian

⁷⁴ Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, 243.

values/equality of degrees, derived from matter and through the same process of occurrence.⁷⁵ Thus, the rejection of racism, as well as gender bias, should be avoided.⁷⁶

Furthermore, Hamka⁷⁷ interprets the above verse by asserting that all human beings were created in the beginning from a man, namely the Prophet Adam and his wife, Eve.⁷⁸ This argument was also stated by Frederick K. C. Price, as quoted by MacGregor⁷⁹ that embracing the Nation teaching that Original Man was created as an exact duplicate of God, but without the racist overtones, Price maintained that God created the primal ancestors of the human race, Adam and Eve, as exact duplicates of himself, or 'little gods.' Both were first created in this world.⁸⁰ From ancient times to the present, all these human beings result from a man and a woman, namely the mother. So, there is no human being in this universe that was created except for the mixing between men and women. Sexual intercourse that causes the gathering of two groups of sperm (*khama*) to unite for 40 days is called *nutfah* (zygote).⁸¹ Then 40 days will be blood, and forty days will

⁷⁵ Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, 244.

⁷⁶ Shahid Alvi & Arshia Zaidi, "'My Existence is Not Haram': Intersectional Lives in LGBTQ Muslims Living in Canada," *Journal of Homosexuality* 68(6) (2021), 993–1014, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1695422>.

⁷⁷ Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, 244.

⁷⁸ Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali, Nur Hidayah Mohd Paudzi & Abdul Nasser Sultan Mohsen Sallam, "Islamic Perspective on the Concepts of Interaction among Multicultural Society," *AFKAR: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 23(2) (2021), 249–74, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol23no2.7>.

⁷⁹ Kirk R. MacGregor, "The Word-Faith Movement: A Theological Conflation of the Nation of Islam and Mormonism?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75(1) (2007), 87–120, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfl063>.

⁸⁰ M. Abdel Haleem, "Adam and Eve in the Qur'an and the Bible," *Islamic Quarterly* 41(4) (1997): 255–69.

⁸¹ Daud Abdul-Fattah Batchelor, "Adam and Eve's Origin: A Theory Harmonising Scientific Evidence with the Qur'anic Text," *Theology*

be flesh (*'alaqah*). After three times in the count of forty days, *nutfah*, *'alaqah* and *mudghah* (chewed substance), be the man whose life is blown into him and be born into the world. Sometimes there is a mixture between blacks and whites or Africans and Europeans who, at the beginning of the union of the sperm, have not yet seen the difference in color and nature.⁸²

Based on that interpretation, Hamka has emphasized the value of inclusivism or openness in understanding diversity as a universal truth. The value of inclusivism makes a field of inter-diversity dialogue that aims to avoid misunderstandings, does not precede suspicion of differences, and refrains from claims of absolute justification in the extreme.

The interpretation of Hamka is also stated by Ibn Kathir when interpreting the phrase, "The noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you" that verily humankind races with one another in matters of glory in the sight of God on the factor of piety and not because of descent.⁸³ Similarly, al-Tabari stated that the most honorable in the sight of your God is the most pious in carrying out the commandments and avoiding immorality, not the most prominent house or family.⁸⁴ In this regard, the Prophet PBUH once instructed his beloved companion, Abu Dhar:

عَنْ أَبِي ذَرٍّ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ لَهُ انظُرْ
فَإِنَّكَ لَيْسَ بِخَيْرٍ مِنْ أَحْمَرَ وَلَا أَسْوَدَ إِلَّا أَنْ تَفْضُلَهُ بِتَقْوَى⁸⁵

and Science 15(4) (2017), 490–508,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2017.1369762>.

⁸² Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, 245.

⁸³ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, 386.

⁸⁴ Al-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Tabari*, 310.

⁸⁵ Ahmad bin Hanbal, Musnad Ahmad, al-'Asharah al-Mubashshirin bi al-Jannah, Musnad al-Ansar, *hadith* no. 20898, *Hasan*.

Meaning: "Behold! Verily, you have no virtue over one with white skin or black skin except in favor of righteousness."

Because language and skin color are considered signs of God, the globe's nations cannot be denied the opportunity to freely express their cultures and communal rights.⁸⁶

iii. The Tolerance Values

Hamka explains the value of tolerance that needs to exist in a multiracial society, as his interpretation of the phrase "Indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another." Hamka says:

"In the verse, it is emphasized that there are various races and tribes to the particular details, not for them to grow farther away, but for them to know each other. Get to know the origin, ancestral base, and lineage origin."⁸⁷

Hamka's interpretation above elucidates that human beings are, by nature, made by God in different forms, groups, and cultures. All must accept and respect that diversity and difference are norms and laws of nature that will continue to apply. Such diversity and difference are not a factor for division and hostility.⁸⁸ Consequently, in verse 13, the value of tolerance is also conveyed by Hamka. He interpreted the diversity that God created as *sunnatullah* (God's natural law) and became an undeniable certainty. God created human beings with various languages, skin colors, tribes, and races to know each other and accept differences. Thus, the value of tolerance grows fertile in daily human life. Tolerance does not mean following all the beliefs and convictions in the diversity that God has

⁸⁶ Jacoby & Tabak, "Islam, Nationalism, and Kurdish," 346.

⁸⁷ Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, 244.

⁸⁸ Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, 245.

created. However, tolerance is defined as an open value to acknowledge other beliefs and convictions outside of oneself in acknowledging diversity as a *sunnatullah* that God bestows on His creatures.

Tolerance, defined as respect and readiness to accept diverse ideas, is relevant in interactions across multi-religious societies. Many religious doctrines prioritize the values of tolerance and respect for others.⁸⁹ Religious tolerance does not entail being imposed upon by the beliefs of other faiths or compelling adherents to embrace a certain religion. It involves showing respect for different religions and gaining insight into their teachings and beliefs through debates, dialogues, and reading. It has the potential to form a strong and enduring bond among many religions globally. Islam promotes tolerance of diversity. Tolerance can prevent conflicts between religions and promote harmony and togetherness in a pluralistic community.⁹⁰

iv. Humanism Values

In the phrase of surah al-Hujurat 49:13: "Indeed, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you," Hamka clarified the order of human values in societal life. Hamka interprets that the true glory that God considers valuable is the glory of heart, virtue, character, and obedience to Him.⁹¹ God puts this forward in this verse to remove the feeling of half a man who wants to declare that

⁸⁹ Michael Kerestes & James E. Youniss, "Rediscovering the Importance of Religion in Adolescent Development," in *Handbook of Applied Developmental Science: Promoting Positive Child, Adolescent, and Family Development Through Research, Policies, and Programs* (California: SAGE Publications Inc., 2003), 165–84, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452233642.n8>.

⁹⁰ Abur Hamdi Usman, Mohd. Farid Ravi Abdullah & Azwar Azwar, "Does Islam Tolerate Other Religions? A Qur'anic Perspective," *Al-Irsyad: Journal of Islamic and Contemporary Issues* 8(1) (2023), 1003–13, <https://doi.org/10.53840/alirsyad.v8i1.354>.

⁹¹ Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, 245.

he is superior to others or a descendant of a noble king while others are slaves.

Based on Hamka's interpretation, it can be understood that it is forbidden to boast and feel proud of the origin of the existing lineage. Some people in society are so proud and conceited of being of aristocratic descent, scholars, rich people, and so on. It is better to beautify and adorn the lineage if it is decorated with good deeds. All behavior, manners, ethics, virtues, and morals of a person thus reflect the noble nature that makes his descendants highly regarded, splendid, and precious. In this way, Hamka implicitly expounds on the value of humanism in the verse's meaning of righteousness.⁹² The value of humanism is meant to eliminate the feelings of a handful of people who claim themselves to be better than others due to factors of descent, tribe and race. In this regard, God reminds His servants to accept each other and excel the human soul among each other. The interpretation of the meaning of *taqwā* in this verse proves that the best human beings have devotion, reflecting the superiority of the religious teachings they adhere to. Nobility and purity of heart are naturally in line with human nature, so this value will increase the quality and dignity of a person.

v. The Piety Values

In the phrase of verse 13 of surah al-Hujurat, "Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Aware," Hamka closes the interpretation with his emphasis on the importance of the value of piety and rejecting racism. Hamka says:

"The end of this verse, if observed, is a deeper warning for people who are dazzled because they are fascinated by national and tribal affairs. They forget that the two do not boast of one race to another. We in this world are not to be hostile but to get acquainted. Moreover, living in

⁹² Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, 245.

nations, tribes are vulnerable to enmity and war because people have forgotten the value of piety."⁹³

Based on that interpretation, Hamka's advice can be understood as a stern warning to people who are fascinated by national and tribal fanatics. The emergence of all hostility and damage in daily life stems from the erosion of the sacred value of equality (impartiality) in human beings. They have forgotten the importance of piety and are willing to pawn the blessings of peace and prosperity by acting racially, which only incites hostility and war.

In another verse, Hamka also reinforces Islam's rejection of racism and discrimination and emphasizes the value of piety. An example is when Hamka interprets surah al-An'am 6: 52. According to Hamka, this verse rebuked the arrogant polytheists for their request to the Prophet PBUH to expel the companions (whom they considered to be low-ranking people) who were then sitting with the Prophet PBUH. Nevertheless, this verse recognizes the height of the rank of the companions. In addition, due to the position of the companions who diligently worship God, 'expelling' them to follow the request of the polytheists is considered an act of tyranny.

According to Hamka, the situation is terrible if the companions who are genuine believers and willing to sacrifice for the faith are expelled, just because the Prophet PBUH wants to give space to arrogant people and enable them to feel superior. Necessarily, arrogance proves the existence of a barrier for the truth to enter their hearts. Thus, defending someone sincere and willing to sacrifice, even if they are poor, is more important than inviting idolaters despite their wealth and social standing. Moreover, the essential teaching of this verse emphasizes that Islam rejects all forms of racism and discrimination. One does not

⁹³ Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, 245.

have an advantage over another, and a group of people cannot be explicitly treated because of their property capabilities and wealth.⁹⁴

The study found that Hamka's interpretation is in line with the *asbab al-Nuzul* (the reasons of revelation) regarding the verse explaining that the Quraish delegations had said to the Prophet PBUH, "We are not content to sit with them (the believers who are considered low and poor by the Quraish, such as Salman, Suhayb, Bilal and Khabbab) then drive them out."⁹⁵ Finally, there is no reason to exalt oneself and place one lineage nobler than others. It is clear that racism, self-admiration and pride are accursed. It is not oneself who has to praise oneself, and there is no need to say oneself is of greater descent than others.

On the other hand, the more people praise, the humbler they should be as a result of their piety. Thus, Muslims must emulate the guidance of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (traditions) of the Prophet PBUH, a leader who is too perfect to follow and emulate. He was never arrogant or boastful about his dignity and status in the sight of God. No one among human beings can match the Prophet PBUH in terms of glory, lineage or deeds of worship. The Prophet PBUH is the noblest human being in this world and the hereafter, but he remained humble, not racist, and cultivated shame and shyness with God.

Conclusion

Muslims are responsible for conveying the correct teachings of Islam among other religions in general and Malaysia in particular. Muslims need to have a solid foundation to reject the perversion of Islam, which tends to be narrowly racist and seen as inconsistent with the demands of the actual values of Islamic teachings. Muslims

⁹⁴ Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, 2039.

⁹⁵ Abu 'Abdillah Muhammad al-Qurtubi, *al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an wa al-Mubayyin lima Tadammannah min al-Sunnah wa Ayi al-Furqan*, vol. 8 (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 2006), 387.

should grieve and reject any racial sentiments and prejudices perpetrated upon specific races or religions in this country with the same spirit. The practice of racism, if not stopped, will breed the symptoms of extremism to the detriment of all groups. The struggle to defend race and religion should be sown towards strengthening the principles demanded by Islam, such as social justice, trust, integrity, unity of the people and in accordance with the demands of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* (the objective and purpose of the Islamic law). Muslims should present Islam's true face and image as a religion of universal mercy. Islamic racism is a despicable attempt to legitimize racism over religious justification.

The Malay region has carried out this imaging trust throughout history by displaying a friendly, polite and caring Islamic face. The region's unique historical record of tolerance must be preserved and mobilized as a unifying force of various racial domains. Therefore, as a dignified nation, Muslims must uphold the principle of human dignity guaranteed by God on all children of Adam regardless of race and religion. Through an understanding of this principle, one will appreciate the existence of other races as human beings who also have dignity and self-glorification. In doing so, Hamka emphasizes the obligation to be humble with all the advantages it possesses. This is due to the strict prohibition of underestimating other nations, as in surah al-Hujurat 49:13. The study found pure values implicit and explicit through his interpretation of this verse, such as harmony, inclusiveness, tolerance, humanism, and piety.

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