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Slavery, Theology, and Anti-Blackness in the Arab World

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As a historian, I am interested in accounting for origins and sources. Accordingly, for me, it is important that any effort to understand or explain contemporary anti-Black racism in the Arab world is faithful to the historical processes that produced and normalized that racism. Fortunately, there are sources that we can consult to yield evidence for such historical accounting.

On the weight of historical evidence documented in both primary and secondary sources, we can say authoritatively that the enslavement of Black Africans across the Sahara and the Indian Ocean corridors is the bedrock of Arab anti-Blackness. Saharan and Indian Ocean slavery produced and legitimized the constellation of discriminatory attitudes, devaluing epithets, and institutional exclusions we now describe under the analytic rubric of anti-Blackness in the Arab world and in the Sahelian borderlands. Slavery established baselines for intergroup relations and sociological norms. It also shaped a significant aspect of Islamic exegetical practice, inflecting the direction and meaning of jurisprudential consensus that remain in place as authoritative legal codes in the Muslim societies of the Middle East and the Sahel.

These slave trades, one overland and the other seaborne, predated the Atlantic slave trade by several centuries. Therefore, by the basic law of chronological historical causality, neither the trades themselves nor the anti-Blackness that they authorized and democratized in the Arab world could have resulted from Euro-American Atlantic enslavement, colonial racism, and the resulting global entwinement of white supremacy and capitalism. This fact challenges the increasingly prevalent argument that anti-Blackness in the Arab world maps onto and overlapped with the global ascent of white supremacy along with the rise of mercantile and industrial capitalism and colonization. There is a tendency nowadays to analytically conflate European colonization in the Arab world with the rise of anti-Blackness and ideas of Arab superiority. And this is done in a manner that places the blame for anti-Black racism as much on colonialism as on historical, sociological, and theological processes within Arab Muslim society; ones that predated nineteenth century European colonization in the Arab world by many centuries.

So widespread has this explanatory template become in certain scholarly circles that conferences and workshops are framed around it as if its verity has been established by scholarly consensus. One recent example is a workshop organized by the Qatar campus of Northwestern University, which framed its November 17, 2020, workshop as a conversation on “Slavery, Colonialism, and Race in the Muslim World.” Furthermore, the workshop’s electronic poster/announcement invited scholars to register to listen to “panelists [who] will address how processes of enslavement, colonialism, and contemporary prejudice in Muslim societies have racialized “non-white” Arabs and other Muslims, and perhaps even interiorized imported notions

of white supremacy”

(https://planitpurple.northwestern.edu/event/570129?fbclid=IwAR3rkpbJI5FtbuPVEj4yK55cQV2FJ4tcT04UVmNPq_11JVuYXNUK34d0DnA). The notion that European colonialism in the Arab world is a causal referent in discussions of Arab slavery and anti-Black prejudices is taken for granted in some circles and leads to the debatable claim that “white supremacy” and anti-Blackness were “imported” and then “*perhaps* interiorized” (emphasis mine) by Arabs.

Historian Eric Williams’ argument in *Capitalism and Slavery* that Atlantic slavery produced racism and not the other way around is now axiomatic in Atlantic slavery studies, and was amplified by Edmund Morgan’s 1975 work, *American Slavery, American Freedom*. The simple meaning of this postulation is that, from the perspective of enslavers, once the Atlantic slave trade commenced, enslavement authorized and necessitated a justificatory ideology and associated statutory instruments for enslaving Africans. Racism, anchored in religious claims and on the production of devaluing sociological and ethnological knowledge about Africans, provided that justification; a defense that was then codified in law and bureaucratic practice. Ideas of racial superiority and inferiority were invented and enunciated and over time became part of the social and intellectual fabric of the enslaving societies. Social attitudes of anti-Blackness followed as this slavery-induced racism became normalized and as people growing up in those societies became socialized into the popular anti-Black racist tropes of their societies.

I would argue that this explanation for the historical evolution of racism applies to anti-Blackness in the Arab world as well. Much like in the Euro-Atlantic context, the contention is not that Arabs have always been racist against Black Africans. The point rather is that, once the Saharan and Indian Ocean slave trades took root along with their economic benefits and complementing sociological norms, there was a persistent need not just for generating but also for reinforcing the racial justifications for them. This, as in the later Atlantic case, required the production of religious, sociological, and ethnological knowledge on a vast scale to bolster claims of Arab superiority and Black inferiority.

Anti-Black Ideational Production in the Arab World

Long before the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade and its imbrication in post-Enlightenment white supremacy, Arab philosophers, geographers, and travelers wrote extensive commentaries on Black African societies and kingdoms they observed. These writings are filled with the casual, normalized anti-Black racism that are today commonplace in the Arab world.

Ibn Khaldun was arguably the most respected and influential Arab philosopher and scholar of the Middle Ages. Yet his (reference) characterization of African societies repeated the prevalent popular Arab descriptions of Africans as excitable, emotional, dirty, morally unclean, childlike, and, to use his own words, “worse than dogs.” His many racist views on Africans are distilled in this one excerpt from his magnum opus, *The Muqaddimah*:

We have seen that Negroes are in general characterized by levity, excitability, and great emotionalism. They are found eager to dance whenever they hear a melody. They are everywhere described as stupid. . . . Beyond [the Sahel] to the south there is no civilization in the proper sense. There are only humans who are closer to dumb animals than to rational beings. They live in thickets and caves, and eat herbs and unprepared grain. They frequently eat each other. They cannot be considered human beings.

Ibn Khaldun (exact reference) saw the enslavement of Africans as a logical outgrowth of their childlike docility. Africans, he argued, were suited to slavery:

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

Other Arab and Persian writers with intellectual influence in the Arab world spewed racist characterizations of Africans that mirrored the popularly held views in their own societies about Africans as savages and sub-human entities. Here are a few samples from this menu of Arab racist intellectual production on Africa:

Of the neighbors of the Bujja, Maqdisi had heard that “there is no marriage among them; the child does not know his father, and they eat people—but God knows best. As for the Zanj, they are people of black color, flat noses, kinky hair, and little understanding or intelligence (Maqdisi, also known as Al-Muqaddasi (fl. 966 CE), *Kitab al-Bad’ wa-Tarikh*, vol. 4)

If (all types of men) are taken, from the first, and one placed after another, like the Negro from Zanzibar, in the southernmost countries, the Negro does not differ from an animal in anything except the fact that his hands have been lifted from the earth—in no other peculiarity or property—except for what God wished. Many have seen that the ape is more capable of being trained than the Negro, and more intelligent. (Philosopher-theologian Nasir al-Din Tusi (1201–74), *Tasawwurat (Rawdat al-Taslim)*)

What we see in these textual anti-Black racisms is that they reflected and reinforced existing anti-Black attitudes in the natal societies of the writers. Institutions and structures in those societies policed this racial hierarchy and reinforced anti-Blackness. There is another point worth making as a way of further situating these texts in the anti-Blackness idioms that were either entrenched or ascendant in the Arab world at the time that these writings were produced. Like the anti-Blackness contained in European travelers’ texts on African societies, Arab textual anti-Blackness was ambivalent. On one hand, the writings remarked positively on African natural resources such as gold. On the other hand, they unleashed a maelstrom of textual dehumanization on Africans. Africans emerge in these texts as rich in natural resources but culturally deficient. The trope of backward, primitive, childlike but naturally endowed Africans did not begin with European racists. It began with racist Arab writers. This ambivalent bromide of dehumanization and resource-focused backhanded compliment was amplified to new decibels in the period of the European encounter with Africa, beginning in the fifteenth century.

There is a related point worth making here. the Hamitic myth, which holds that Black Africans are a cursed race and that any civilizational accomplishments recorded in Africa south of the Sahara were spearheaded by light-skinned people from North Africa and the Greater Middle East; this idea was first developed in pre-Islamic Middle East and thereafter the Islamic Middle East before it made its way to European Christian and secular colonial racist thought. William McKee Evans’ excellent article in the *American Historical Review* on the mobile and malleable myth of the “sons of Ham” compellingly illustrates this point. Published in 1980, the article traces the complicated genealogy and convoluted and resurgent lives of the Hamitic myth in the Middle East in both pre-Islamic Jewish traditions and Arabo-Islamic narratives of selfhood and the Other.

The article is an invaluable pedagogical resource, but it retains its enduring expository usefulness in explorations of the origins of anti-Blackness in the Middle East.

The chain of ideational transmission led from Arab Muslim sources to European Christian ones, not the other way around. In fact, in the Middle Ages, there was a discernible philosophical and ideational borrowing and secular scriptural seepage from Arab worldviews into European philosophical works. The massive translations of Arabic theological, philosophical, and other texts into Latin and the popularity of Arab philosophers such as al-Fārābī among European thinkers resulted in a dynamic in which ideas and ways of understanding the world beyond Europe flowed from Arabs to Europeans. The myth of Black inferiority and claims about Africans' congenital backwardness made its way, as Evans shows, from Jewish texts to Arab Muslim ones, acquiring, as it traveled, multiple new racist strands. As a long entry on the subject in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arabic-islamic-influence/>), Dag Nikolaus Hasse demonstrates that Arabic philosophical treatises about the Arab self and the Other eventually made their way, along with other Arabo-Islamic philosophical postulations, to the theological and philosophical repertoires of Europe; these, then, inflected the works of some of Europe's most iconic and influential philosophers, including Hegel.

The Theological Dimension

The search for the origins of anti-Blackness in the Arab world cannot be complete without exploring the theological roots of anti-Black prejudice in the Arab world. A few caveats are in order here: Canons in and of themselves or in their immanent, inherent quality, do not shape ideologies. Rather, theological claims and ideologies emanate from the realm of exegesis and interpretation — in the domain of theological production and claim-making. This entails intense, agenda-laden interpretational interventions in scripture; an endeavor that is never neutral. In this respect, the strategic interpretation and invocation of certain Qur'anic verses, authenticated hadiths, and texts of Islamic histories have for centuries underpinned; and, in some contexts, they sacralized the racism of self-identified Arabs towards Black people.

The Qur'an contains at least fifteen verses that, interpreted literally and in narrow contexts, strip certain people of their independent moral agency and freedom, subordinating them to the will and whims of others. This is precisely the condition we call slavery. Furthermore, the Qur'anic description of enslaved people as *Mā malakat aymānukum* (translated literally as "what your right hands possess" and more precisely as "whom you own") articulates a notion of one human being owning and determining the fate of another human being, subject, of course, to established scriptural precepts and prescriptions of appropriate treatment of the enslaved. These prescribed modalities of enslavement are as detailed as they are paradigmatic, and they encompass the gamut of issues and questions that have to be navigated in the process of enslaving another human: questions such as whom Muslims can legitimately enslave, how enslaved people should be treated, what weight the testimony of the enslaved carries in relation to that of the free, whether enslaved people can inherit, whether the sexual violation of an enslaved female constitute rape, and others.

The slavery that the Qur'an accommodates and regulates is not specifically racial. However, because religious texts often do not have a life of their own outside the socioeconomic context and milieu, and because scriptures possess multiple semiotic properties, the prevalence of the Indian Ocean and Saharan slave trades and their devaluation of Black lives in the Arab Islamic world gradually came to inflect exegetical commentaries and sociolinguistic extrapolations from the aforementioned Qur'anic pronouncement on slavery. Furthermore, because Muslims have a relationship to the Qur'an, not as an inspired word of God as Christians consider the Bible, but

rather as the directly transmitted words of God, the acceptance and regulation of slavery in the Qur'an opened the door to interpretive and extrapolative possibilities that were moored to anti-Black attitudes and practices that emerged out of Arab enslavement of Black Africans and were gradually normalized in the Arab and larger Islamic world.

When it comes to Sunni Islam, the hadiths, especially those considered to be the most credible ones, carry almost as much weight as Qur'anic injunctions and prohibitions. There are several hadiths that lend credibility to the Arab social economy of enslaving Black people and to the belief that Black people were/are being uniquely suitable for enslavement, a potential basis for plausible justification of anti-Blackness. Of these hadiths, the most authoritative is this one from Sahih Al-Bukhari (provide reference), a companion of the Prophet:

"Jabir (Allah be pleased with him) reported: There came a slave [who] pledged allegiance to Allah's Apostle on migration; he (the Holy Prophet did not know that he was a slave. Then there came his master [who] demanded him back, whereupon Allah's Apostle said: Sell him to me. **And he bought him for two black slaves**, and he did not afterwards take allegiance from anyone until he had asked him whether he was a slave (or a free man)."

Here, the Prophetic example of purchasing a Black slave and then freeing him, is articulated by a hadith of the highest credibility. The interpretive possibility here is wide-ranging, as this hadith can plausibly be read in a liberal humanitarian direction; those interpretive possibilities would, however, not have appealed to Arabs who, from about the ninth century CE, began to import Black slaves on the Indian Ocean and the Sahara frontier and, like European enslavers centuries later, embraced any available plausible theological trajectory that could provide religious endorsement for their trade in Africans. Moreover, this hadith and others like it constitute a timeless, unchallenged theological paradigm that are codified in the most authoritative Islamic referential legal and theological libraries across West and North-western Africa.

The realm of *fiqh* (jurisprudential) rulings and theological consensus is where paradigms and attitudes are established and upheld over time and space. To this end, Arab theological productions have played a critical role in normalizing anti-Blackness and notions of Arab supremacy and the acceptability of enslavement for Black people. The theological commentaries of Imam Malik have become authoritative bedrocks for adjudicating in matters relating to transactions in slaves. His iconic work, *Muwatta*, is an elaborate theological manual for transacting in slaves and profiting from trafficking in slaves. It has informed and spawned multiple derivative commentaries set within the same Maliki jurisprudential tradition. These theological discourses have given new, multiple, and mobile lives to the *Muwatta*'s central work of legitimizing trading in slaves.

Malik's other writings reinforce this normalization of slave transaction as a divinely sanctioned endeavor, but it is the *Muwatta* which remains an influential signpost for the theological permissibility of enslavement. *Muwatta* may not have an explicitly racialized overtone in its vast commentary endorsing and prescribing procedures for slave transaction but it was written into a sociological space that, less than three hundred years after the death of Prophet Muhammad, would be saturated with practices and ideas that equated the condition of enslavement with the Black body. Thus, whether he intended it or not, the text became a paradigmatic theological reference for hundreds of years and up to this moment for Arab and even many African Muslims for the normalcy and acceptance of slavery in Islamic culture.

Moreover, because most slaves in the Arab world were Black, it was easy for *Muwatta's* extensive theological commentaries on slave transactions to become a manual for a wide variety of anti-Black racism associated with enslavement. The enduring influence of *Muwatta* as a pivotal theological text of anti-Blackness inheres in the fact that it remains unchallenged as an authoritative, theologically prescriptive intervention in matters of transacting in enslaved humans. As long as its theological authority is not impeached by an equally powerful legal treatise or a *fiqh* ruling, it will continue to shape the attitude of Arab Muslims towards the enslavement of Black people and towards the anti-Blackness that has emerged from that enslavement.

In a 2005 article published in *African Economic History*, Historian, Ghislaine Lydon points us to two other legal texts within the Maliki tradition that were written by Abu Muhammad Abdullah ibn Abi Zayd and Khalil ibn Ishaq al-Jundi. These are canonical texts that helped in inscribing notions of Arab supremacy and the transactional legitimacy of slave trading and slavery in quotidian commercial and jurisprudential practice in many Muslim societies, including those of the Sahel. Islamic legal texts and paradigmatic legal theories developed over centuries served as referents in commercial slave transactions, Lydon demonstrates. She argues that these referential texts enjoyed wide geographic currency, circulated widely among the Sahelian *Ulama*, especially in Mali and Mauritania, her areas of focus. These Islamic sources, rulings, and theories remain in use as guiding jurisprudential texts for many clerics and scholars in their own commentaries and reflections on the question of the legitimacy of enslavement and transacting in slaves.

Additionally, in *Black Morocco*, Chouki El Hamel makes two cross-historical arguments that point to the theological trajectories of slavery in the Arab world. He argues that theological idioms and claims circulating in Morocco in the age of the Saharan slave trade not only justified slavery but also sought to explain concubinage, a prevalent component of the trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean slave trades, as an institution within Islam. Although El Hamel shows that this coupling of concubinage and Islam provoked theological disputation, his overarching argument is that this claim about the nexus of slavery and the theological parameters of permissible and legitimate conducts in Islam remained fairly normative (see pp. 17-59). El Hamel's second argument is that, although scholars of Islam and slavery often focus on the Qur'anic incentives for manumission as an abolitionist and anti-slavery moral template that was meant to ultimately produce a world free of slavery, the reality of slavery in Morocco and other parts of the Arab world was that the stipulated rewards of manumission in the Islamic canon actually had the opposite, unintended effect of encouraging the strategic manumission of slaves and their replacement by new captives from Africa, a system of shrewd theological invocation that sustained and prolonged the slave trade.

To reiterate, it is in the *fatwas*, the theological polemics, and the *fiqh* jurisprudential treatises that religiously sanctioned anti-Blackness and the idea that Blacks are suitable or destined by providence for enslavement emerges. The intersectionality of theology, faith, race, and sociological verities produced a powerful economy of anti-Blackness. Of course, no particular reading or interpretation is fixed to particular canonical texts, and in Sunni Islam, especially in Sufi circles, it has long been a paradigmatic principle of Qur'an exegesis that any given verse has an infinite number of interpretational possibilities. Therefore, the fact that for centuries, Arab (and non-Arab) theologians and commentators, already immersed in their societies' anti-Blackness, have written in defense of enslaving Africans and to make the case that Blackness is coterminous with slavery and inferiority should be a matter of logic. Anti-Blackness, in the age of slavery, was, after all, not a politically or economically neutral attitude. On the contrary, it was a lucrative social enterprise, with high stakes involved. Thus, the incentive to privilege a self-interested justificatory

reading of a particular canonical provision over a more liberal, humanitarian interpretation is self-evident in the context of what was at stake.

Of Theology, Jurisprudence, and the Anti-Black Present

After the communal prayer on April 28 2012, Mauritanian Biram Ould Abeid, a Black anti-slavery, anti-racism and human rights campaigner and his fellow activists stormed a mosque repository housing medieval Islamic texts of the Maliki School of jurisprudence, burning *Hashiyah al-Dusuqi 'ala Al-sharh al-kabir li al-Dardayr* and several other texts in the collection that they claimed permitted slavery and invariably the enslavement of Black people (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/09/08/freedom-fighter>). Because slavery and Blackness in Mauritania, like in other parts of the Arab and Arabized Muslim worlds, were and are coterminous, and with Blackness considered a condition for enslavement, Abeid and his fellow anti-slavery campaigners in the *Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement in Mauritania* were striking a blow both against the equation of Blackness with slavery and the theological and jurisprudential permission of the continuous enslavement of descendants of Black African slaves; they are called in modern Mauritania 'Haratins' (<https://www.resetdoc.org/story/biram-ould-abeid-and-slavery-in-mauritania/>).

Abeid is the latest in a long line of anti-slavery campaigners in Mauritania and elsewhere in the Arab world. He and others clearly see a nexus between influential and dominant theological canons on one side and the continuous enslavement of Black people and racist attitudes on the other. It would amount to what, in our current lexicon, is known as gaslighting to insist on decoupling Islamic theology on one side, and anti-Blackness and slavery on the other. Such an insistence would also be questioning the embodied knowledge, trauma, and experiential personal archives of Abeid and others like him who rightly locate the source of their plight in the power that authoritative jurisprudential and theological archives continue to exert over self-identified Arab Muslims in terms of their perceptions of and relations with Black people.

Exploring the theological justificatory rationales for anti-Blackness in the Arab world should not exculpate other religious canons, written or oral, performed, or internalized, that similarly authorize anti-Blackness, slavery, and the dehumanization of Black bodies. An insistence on recognizing the ways in which self-identified Arab Muslim theologians have appealed to the canonical works of their faith to justify slavery and anti-Blackness is not an argument for Islamic exceptionalism or uniqueness. That would be an Orientalist perspective that is both passé and dangerous. All religious texts are malleable, and the current analysis merely insists on bringing the Islamic canon and their social utilities and sociopolitical lives in the realm of relations and attitudes in alignment with trends towards the long-acknowledged interpretive exploitation and appropriation of the salience, elasticity, and polyvalence of religious texts for economic and political projects.

It is common knowledge that Christian theological claims, including paradigmatic ones, were deployed to justify the enslavement of Africans; and they were subsequently invoked to justify racism and discrimination against the descendants of the enslaved and free black populations in the Americas. Similarly, European Christian colonizers and ideologues of the non-pretentiously racist apartheid system found Christian theology to be a productive site for mining both moralistic and religious idioms for justifying their ideology.

In India, Hindu texts are replete with and provide virulent scripts of othering, negative differentiation, and dehumanization whose primary targets are so-called untouchables, Black citizens. South Asian anti-Blackness derives from Hindu (and some Muslim) theological

wellsprings with a deep ideological genealogy. In the Hindu canon, the Rg Veda, one of the oldest of the Puranic texts birthed the Varna system, out of which emerged aspects of the racialized practice of untouchability (<https://thelogicalindian.com/story-feed/awareness/caste-system-and-untouchability-in-india/>).

Some ideologies of negative differentiation and devaluation have roots in traditional African religious texts that are unwritten but are no less potent as conveyors of processes of oppression and harmful exclusion. Since I study Nigeria, let me advance two examples of traditional religious ideologies of othering and inferiorization from that country. The first example is the Osu caste system among the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria. As Elijah Obinna (2012) shows, this system is rooted in the Igbo traditional religious idea of certain people being inadmissible to mainstream society because they or their ancestors were offered up as servants and guardians to deities.

The second example comes from the Higi of Northeastern Nigeria. There, blacksmiths and their descendants are treated as outcasts and second-class citizens, marginal to mainstream society. This mechanism of devaluation is rooted in Higi traditional religion, which regards blacksmithing as a sacred, esoteric, and dangerous vocation whose practitioners should not contaminate members of Higi society. The belief in the uncleanness of blacksmiths emanates from their vocation's active existence at the complementary intersections of the spiritual and the artisanal (Podlweski, 1985; Vaughan 1970; van Beek 1992).

I have engaged in this analogizing analysis in order to illustrate how Islam was not and could not have been an outlier in the ubiquitous production of religiously-legitimized rhetoric and practices of racism, dehumanization, and othering.

Historical Accounting and Anti-Blackness

We cannot over-stress the polyvalent importance of rendering a full historical accounting for anti-Blackness in the Arab world. However, in order to accomplish the purpose of such reckoning, the terms of analysis have to be all-encompassing. Such a historical reconstruction must display fidelity to the entwined aftermaths and the legacies of slavery and theological mobilizations to justify claims of Black inferiority and Arab superiority. My main concern is to ensure that in trying to understand anti-Blackness in the Arab world, we account for its **two** main origins: practices of enslavement and their legacies, and theological claims about a divinely ordained racial slavery and its associated and derivative practices of racial subordination. Any explanation or designation that erases the self-identity of culpable and complicit agents and the religious claims they mobilize to promote anti-Blackness is for me intellectually dishonest, escapist, and unacceptable.

Secondly, at a time of increasing gestures towards South-South intellectual and political alliances, the lingering racist legacies of enslavement across the Sahara and the Indian Ocean stand in the way of true solidarity. Only an honest, unfettered conversation will remove this obstacle. Thirdly, this is the age of decoloniality in the social sciences and the humanities. Our efforts to decolonize Africanist and non-Western knowledge entail dissolving historical processes and hierarchies of oppression, superiority, and devaluation. If this is the premise of decolonial epistemology, then there is no intelligible reason why Arab enslavement of Africans and its legacy of anti-Blackness should not be subjected to the microscope of decolonial critique.

Fourthly, as the African Union reimagines itself, through the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, as a bulwark against the ravages of neoliberal globalization, any historical practices and modes of hierarchical differentiation that undermine the intra-African mobility of bodies and commodities must be challenged in intellectual and political realms. Clearly practices

of anti-Blackness and the constraints they place on freedom and mobility within an increasingly wider Afro-Arab sphere of action and transaction should be in the discursive menu.

Fifthly, #BlackLivesMatter and the important dialogues it has provoked on racial matters should, as a matter of intellectual honesty, be extended to other geographic and temporal arenas where Black lives have not mattered, have been devalued and rendered invisible, and where complaints about this invisibility is often met with denial and deflection.

I close with two interrelated cautionary notes: critiques of anti-Blackness in the Arab world should neither reproduce nor amplify orientalist and Islamophobic themes. Additionally, even as we challenge the historical and contemporary foundations of anti-Blackness in the Arab world, we should not do so in ways that complicate and undermine the long-running struggles of internal Black populations in the Arab world for equality and acceptance.

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