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Race, rebellion, and Arab Muslim slavery : the Zanj Rebellion in Iraq, 869 - 883 C.E.

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RACE, REBELLION, AND ARAB MUSLIM SLAVERY: THE ZANJ REBELLION IN
IRAQ, 869 - 883 C.E.

By

Nicholas C. McLeod
B.A., Bucknell University, 2011

A Thesis
Submitted to The Faculty of
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
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In
Pan-African Studies

Department of Pan-African Studies
University of Louisville
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A Thesis Approved on

April 15, 2016

By the following Thesis Committee

Dr. Theresa Rajack-Talley

Dr. Tyler Fleming

Dr. John McLeod

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents

Neville and Rosamond
in gratitude for your guidance, love, and sacrifice

and also to

Whitney
because of your love, patience, and support
I never felt alone during the writing of this thesis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my mentor and thesis director, Dr. Theresa Rajack-Talley for her patience, direction, and willingness to trust in me to carry out this unique study.

I also want to extend my deep appreciation to the other committee members, Dr. Tyler Fleming and Dr. John McLeod. The guidance and constructive criticism of these historians maintained the integrity of the discipline in this study.

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I must also give further thanks to Dr. Derrick Brooms whose mentorship and counsel made this thesis possible.

Truth be told, I had no intentions of writing this thesis on the Zanj Rebellion and the Arab trade; however, I must give a special thanks to Dr. Yvonne Jones for pushing me to move forward with this topic.

Finally, I must express my gratitude to the faculty and graduate students of the Department of Pan-African Studies for providing the environment of free flowing ideas, dialogue, and support in which this thesis was written.

ABSTRACT

RACE, REBELLION, AND ARAB MUSLIM SLAVERY: THE ZANJ REBELLION IN IRAQ, 869 - 883 C.E.

Nicholas C. McLeod

"

April 15, 2016

" In the ninth century, enslaved Africans from the east coast of Africa, called the
" Zanj, revolted for nearly fifteen years in southern Iraq against their Arab slave masters and
" challenged the social order of the Abbasid Empire. This thesis is a socio-historical
" investigation on the role that race played in starting the Zanj Rebellion of 869 C.E. It
" examines the Arab Islamic slave trade and the racial stratification experienced by blacks in
" the early centuries of Islamic history in conjunction with the Zanj Rebellion.
"

" The thesis applies a structural framework for analyzing race, to demonstrate the
" racialization process, prevalent racial ideologies in Arabic literature and Islamic doctrine,
" and the race consciousness and identities displayed by black poets and authors that lived
" in the Abbasid era. It utilizes translated Arabic literature and poetry written from the
" seventh to the ninth century to position the Zanj and other blacks from the period as
" autonomously motivated historical actors. This thesis argues that because of the racialized
" social structure, a racial contestation manifested in the form of one of the largest and
" longest lasting slave rebellions in world history, the Zanj Rebellion.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The coming of the European and Christianity is, for the majority of the time, seen as the beginning of the end of the African's autonomous existence in his/her land of origin; however, an event that is constantly neglected is the coming of the Arab and Islam. While it cannot be said that the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is a topic that has been thoroughly explored, the subject has no shortage of scholarly writings nor is it foreign to common knowledge. Surprisingly, what may be the most tragic and longest lasting form of slavery has received little to almost no attention. Today the Arab-Islamic Slave Trade stands as a nearly unexplored area of scholarship, as most still seem to be focused on the causes and effects of Europe's Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

Slavery has existed throughout history in various forms including domestic servitude, military slavery, debt bondage, and chattel slavery. An aspect inherent to the institution of slavery is slave resistance; however, the existence and frequency of slave rebellions have, until the mid-twentieth century, been an aspect of enslavement that have not garnered a significant amount of discussion. Recently, slave rebellion and resistance have been a topic of substantial scholarship; however, this was not the case when it came to slavery in the Middle East. During the Abbasid Caliphate in ninth century southern Iraq, the Zanj Rebellion lasted for nearly 15 years, and was the greatest protest movement by African slaves in the Islamic world. The Zanj were used for manual labor in the salt marshes of Basra. They worked in camps of 500 to 5,000 men under cruel and inhumane

conditions with only a few handfuls of food in return. In 869 C.E. these enslaved Africans, imported from the east coast of Africa, amass one of the most extraordinary yet under-discussed events in history. Although the Zanj were enslaved Africans living in one of the most racially diverse societies in medieval times, very few historians have considered the relevance of race in their studies of the Zanj Rebellion.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Traditionally historians have denied the relevancy of modern concepts of race and instead have relied on Marxist theory to concluded that the Zanj Rebellion was primarily a class struggle. When examining the causes of the Zanj Rebellion, the historiography demonstrates how scholars have neglected issues of race. For example, in al-Tabari's *The Revolt of the Zanj*, the essential primary document for this thesis, he makes no reference to the presence of any kind of racial ideology or racialized social structure. Similarly, in Suad Mustafa Muhammad's "The Zanj Revolt (869-883) In The Abbasid Era" (1981), the author analyzes the Zanj Rebellion from both social and economic historical perspectives while delivering no discussion of race. Muhammad concludes that the revolt was an uprising against ill-treatment and exploitation of feudalism sanctioned by the Turks who dominated the state of affairs in medieval Baghdad.

Few historians, however, suggest that race did play a role in the Arab slave trade. For example, Theodor Nöldeke, in his text *Sketches from Eastern History* (1892), provides the earliest modern scholarly account of the Zanj Rebellion and alludes to the existence of racial ideologies when he describes the great contempt with which "genuine Arabs" regarded blacks. However, he does not indicate that the Zanj rebelling

particularly in response to prevalent racial ideologies or the racially stratified social structure of ninth century Iraq.¹ Similarly, Alexander Popovic's *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3rd/9th Century* (1976), quotes Arab philosophers, poets, geographers, and historians, arguing that the Zanj were considered to have many flaws and were stereotyped as: stupid, evil, ugly, ignorant to Arabic, and the cheapest slaves in the market.² However, in spite of listing these negative stereotypes that cast the Zanj as inferior and even sub-human, Popovic cautions that race and racism, as understood in modern times, was never an important factor in the Muslim world of the middle ages.³

There is also the attempt to deflect attention from race by focusing on ethnicity. For example, Ghada Hashem Talhami's "The Zanj Rebellion Reconsidered" (1977) attempts to remove race and the prospect of a racial ideologies from the discussion of the Zanj Rebellion by focusing solely on contentions over the ethnic make up of the Zanj. Talhami also argues that the Zanj were not the primary actors in the rebellion and concludes the rebellion should not be portrayed as a slave revolt.⁴ Instead, she characterizes the Zanj as a minority group of African slaves that could not speak Arabic and argues that the Arab Bedouins, Bahranis, and certain number of enslaved Africans contributed more to the rebellion than the actual Zanj.

As such, she concludes that arguments claiming that huge numbers of slave participants in the Zanj Rebellion were trafficked from the Swahili coast cannot be sustained.⁵ Citing Arab and Persian geographers and historians from early Islamic

¹ Theodor Nöldeke, *Sketches from Eastern History* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), 159.

² Alexandre Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3rd/9th Century*. (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers), 21.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ghada Hashem Talhami, "The Zanj Rebellion Reconsidered." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* (1977): 460.

⁵ Ibid, 461.

history, Talhami argues that their silence on a thriving slave trade from the eastern coast of Africa before the tenth century indicated that there could not have been a large population of black slaves in Basra at the time of the rebellion.⁶ However, Alexander Popovic's text easily dispels this argument when he cites records of Muslim trade posts in East Africa in 720, over a century before the revolt of 869 in Basra.⁷ He disproves Talhami's claim once more in his discussion of two previous Zanj rebellions occurring in 689 and 694, both were considered solely African slave revolts.⁸ Both prove the existence of a slave trade importing Africans from the east coast of Africa prior to the ninth century.

Although many historians have largely dismissed race as a motivating factor of the Zanj Rebellion, some recent scholars have acknowledged that racial ideology and racialized social structure are important variable that must be considered in analyzing this event. Zakariyau Oseni's "The Revolt of Black Slaves in Iraq under the Abbasid Administration in 869-883 C.E." (1989) argues that both the socioeconomic and racial factors must be included in the analysis of the revolt. While Oseni makes references to the relevancy of racial ideology, he provides limited evidence to support his claim. Oseni acknowledges that blacks formed the "vanguard of the insurrection." He also suggests that the revolt was influenced by the resentment of hundreds of years of inhuman treatment from their Arab masters, but he fails to link this treatment to any racial ideologies or the racialized social structure.⁹

⁶ Ibid, 461.

⁷ Alexandre Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3rd/9th Century*. (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers), 20.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Zakariyau I. Oseni, "The Revolt of Black Slaves in Iraq under the 'Abbasid Administration in 869-883 C.E." *Hamdard Islamicus* 12:2 (1989), 59-60.

In contrast, Nigel D. Furlonge's "Revisiting the Zanj and Revisioning Revolt: Complexities of the Zanj Conflict (868-883 AD)" (1999) is the first to provide illustrations of racial ideologies in ninth century Iraq that may have influenced the Zanj rebellion. He uses the work of Bernard Lewis to illustrate that racial ideologies were held by Arabs during the medieval Arabic literature from Iraq. Furlonge quotes the ninth century Arabic scholar, al-Jahiz stating, "We know that the Zanj are the least intelligent and the least discerning of mankind, and the least capable of understanding the consequences of action."¹⁰ This ninth century text is quoted again stating: "Like the crow among mankind are the Zanj for they are the worst of men and most vicious of creatures un character and temperament."¹¹ While Furlonge cites a limited amount of these quotes, he nonetheless demonstrates the existence of racist ideologies during the ninth century that may have been contributing factors for the Zanj to revolt. This study will advance Furlonge's approach by highlighting several illustrations of racial ideologies and the creation of racialized social structures within the Arab slave trade which gave way to the Zanj Rebellion.

RESEARCH PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

Although social class is indeed a relevant factor, this study argues that one cannot thoroughly examine African slave rebellions, such as the Zanj Rebellion, without also examining the historical implications of the racialization process and the creation of a racialized social structure. This thesis examines slavery, slave resistance, and the

¹⁰ Nigel D. Furlonge, "Revisiting the Zanj and Revisioning Revolt: Complexities of the Zanj Conflict (868-883 AD)." *Negro History Bulletin*, 62:4 (1999): 14.

¹¹ Ibid.

intersection of race and class in the early Islamic world. Specifically, it 1) examines the racialization of the social structure of the early centuries of Islam and particularly the Arab slave trade in ninth century Iraq; 2) observes the social conditions that help to trigger the Zanj Rebellion of the ninth century; 3) determines whether the Zanj were racially stratified subjects of the Abbasid Caliphate's racialized social structure; and 4) draws analysis on the extent to which race was a factor in causing the Zanj Rebellion.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses an interdisciplinary approach using historical and sociological methodologies to analyze texts and articles that directly or indirectly relate to Arab-Islamic slavery, the Zanj Rebellion, and Racial Ideology. As such from a historical perspective, the fundamental intention of this study is to draw attention to key historical trends and facts that have received limited attention in Africa's relations with Arabs and the Islamic religious tradition. Rather than focusing on the Abbasid point of view in this account of the Zanj Rebellion, this study examines the early centuries of Islamic society through the lenses of blacks living in these societies. Adopting twenty-first century historian Joseph C. Miller's historical approach to slavery, this study takes into account the perceived worlds of the enslaved.¹² The Zanj are positioned as historical people that make realistic choices to act autonomously as historical actors. Using Miller's historical approach to slavery, this study draws attention to the Zanj's relations with the social, economic, political, and military conditions of ninth century Iraq.

¹² Joseph C. Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History: A Global Approach*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 32.

From a sociological perspective, the aim of this study is to challenge the notion that the early Islamic world was not afflicted by issues of race. Accordingly, this study adopts historical sociologist, Orlando Patterson's, definition of race as "the assumption of innate differences based on real or imagined physical or other characteristics."¹³ Race signifies the categorization and stratification of position and status within a hierarchal ranking order based on innate biological differences.¹⁴ As such, this study does not attempt to dismiss the belief that notions of race were shaped by Europeans in modern history. Rather, it demonstrates that race and racialization are the result of power relations within a hierarchal social structure. While the categorization of human beings according to race was not a common occurrence prior to European imperialist expansion in the fifteenth century, this study illustrates how the Arabs made distinctions among people based on race and ascribed worth and social status to social groups based on the darkness or lightness of their skin. In the same vein this study highlights displays of racialization, racial ideologies, and racial contestation in the form of the Zanj Rebellion.

Any research examining medieval Islamic societies will face a challenge in locating primary sources. Further shrinking the pool of available primary sources is the limited study of slavery, slave resistance, and the African presence in early Islamic history. A reason for this major limitation to my research, is primarily the fact the historians and scholars in medieval Islamic societies would not have considered the experiences of Africans and especially slaves to yield anything worth recording. Furthermore, slavery is not an aspect of early Islamic society that scholars have been

¹³ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1982), 176.

¹⁴ Audrey Smedley and Brian D. Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*. (Boulder: Westview Press. 2012), 31.

keen on discussing until recent times. Nonetheless, documents and scholarship are slowly emerging revealing the peculiar institution of slavery in the Arab Muslim context.

As such, the main source of data for this study was obtained from primary sources cited by other scholars (i.e. secondary sources). In addition, I have been able to locate three primary sources for this thesis. One invaluable primary document and the most vital source of information to my research comes from the ninth century historian, al-Tabari, in his text *The History of Prophets and Kings*. More specifically, I focus on, the 36th and 37th volumes of this collection, as they chronicle the events of the revolt from 869 to 883. Living in Iraq during the revolt, al-Tabari uses direct quotes and personal accounts from his sources to create a vivid narrative of the revolt, significant battles that took place in each year, as well as a discussion of the rebellion's implications.

This study searched for the existence of racial ideologies in early Islamic social structures by examining the literature and poetry written on the Arab slave trade and as such a second important primary document is provided by al-Jahiz, an Arabic author of African descent. Considered one of the most prolific Arabic prose writers in history, al-Jahiz authored *The Book of the Glory of the Black Race*. Although al-Jahiz died in 869C.E. in the months leading up to the Zanj Rebellion, his text delivers rare insights into the era's racial thinking from the point of view of an African living in Baghdad during the ninth century. In addition to making arguments for the equality of all races, al-Jahiz discusses topics of racial prejudice, discrimination, and negative stereotypes, which suggests the prevalence of racial thinking and racialized social structures in early Islamic society.

The third document was the Quran as any study that focuses on the influence of religion in the Medieval Middle East must consult this ultimate Islamic text. Arab societies during medieval times were heavily shaped by the belief in Islam and practices documented in the Quran. Because this present study primarily focuses on social structures, the Quran is used to examine the basis for the structuring of these Islamic societies during the period of this research. As it pertains to slavery, a focus of this study, the Quran provides justifications and parameters for the institution. Furthermore, the institution of slavery existed when the Quran was written and provides descriptions of how slavery was regulated, mitigated, and possibly abused. As such, several verses from the Quran are used to highlight Islamic doctrine and practices that manifest in the institution of slavery during the time of the Zanj. The Quran is very significant to this research as its teachings were the foundations of social thought in early Islamic society and provided a divine moral code that regulated interaction with enslaved populations.

In this process of investigation, there are a number of questions that my thesis must answer. First, clarifications must be made about how Arab Islamic slavery differs from other forms of slavery in other societies. For this I rely on the texts of John Alembillah Azumah (2001), Jere L. Bacharach (1981), William Gervase Clarence-Smith (2006), Eugene D. Genovese (1979), Matthew S. Gordon (2001), Murray Gordon (1989), Martin Klein (1992), Bernard Lewis (1992), Paul Lovejoy (2012), Patrick Manning (1990), Suliman Bashear (1997), Joseph C. Miller (2012), Orlando Patterson (1982), Daniel Pipes (1980), Alexandre Popovic (1999), Kenneth X. Robbins and John McLeod (2006), David Robinson (2004), and Ronald Segal (2001), Theresa Urbainczyk (2008), John Ralph Willis (1985).

Second, descriptions are given on exactly what and who constitutes an Arab and exactly who the Zanj were and where they came from. To accomplish this, I consult John D Baldwin (1869), Joel Carmichael (1967), Cheikh Anta Diop (1974), David M. Goldenberg (2013), Yusef Fadl Hasan (1967), Albert Hourani (1991), John O. Hunwick (1978, 2005), Maghan Keita (2005), Bernard Lewis (2002), Martin Meredith (2014), John Edward Phillips (1993), Ghada Hashem Talhami (1977), Marina Tolmacheve (1986), and J. Walker (1933).

Next, Arabic literature that illustrates the racialization process, stereotypes, negative attitudes and racial ideologies that shaped the racialized social structure in ninth century southern Iraq are discussed. This is important for the analysis on the social construction of race and how race and skin color were conceptualized and particularly how black skin came to be associated with negativity, inferiority, and slavery in early Islamic society. Additional selections from Arabic literature and Islamic doctrine (i.e. the Quran and Hadith) are used to further illustrate the existence of racial ideology and a racialized social structure prior to the Zanj rebellion. Here the works of Suliman Bashear (1997), David Brion Davis (1984), John O. Hunwick (1978, 2005), Bernard Lewis (1971, 1990), Reuben Levy (1957), John Edward Phillips (1993) Ronald Segal (2001), and James H. Sweet (1997) are consulted.

Furthermore, definitions for, racialization, racialized social structures, racial ideology are provided in order to examine parallels between the literature and the racial ideologies of early Islamic society. For this, lead scholars on race, racial formation, and racism are used including K. Anthony Appiah (1992, 2000), Suliman Bashear (1997), Herbert Blumer (1958), Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997, 2001, 2014), William O. Brown

(1931), Oliver C. Cox (1948), W.E.B. Du Bois (1989), Richard Dyer (2000), Frantz Fanon (1952, 1966), Edward Franklin Frazier (1927), Graham W. Irwin (1977), Anthony W. Marx (1998), Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2015), John A. Powell (2008), Regina M. Schwartz (1997), Frank Snowden (1983), and Albert Szymanski (1983).

Finally, this thesis is grounded in a Pan-African epistemological framework and as such particular effort is given to including scholars of African descent who are often left out or neglected in the academy. They are highlighted, specifically because this thesis corroborates many of their arguments that have been set forth in previous decades. This includes scholarship by Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992, 2000), M.K. Asante (1988), Yosef ben-Jochannan (1991), Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997), John Henrik Clarke (1997), Cheikh Anta Diop (1974), W.E.B. DuBois (1965), Franz Fanon (1952, 1962), Edward Franklin Frazier (1927), Nigel D. Furlonge (1999), C.L.R. James (1991), Charles Mills (1997), Zakariyau I. Oseni (1989), Runoko Rashidi (2012), ‘Uthman Amr Ibn Bahr al-Jahiz (776-868), and Chancellor Williams (1987). The goal is to place all of these bodies of literature and scholarship in conversation with each other in order to deliver a holistic account of the Zanj Rebellion and racialized social structure of Iraq in the ninth century.

LIMITATIONS

The primary limitation to this thesis is my lack of exposure to speaking or reading Arabic or any other Middle Eastern language. The language barrier also directly affects my second limitation in the shortage in primary sources used in this thesis. While there is no minimum for primary documents for a historical study, I am aware that this project features a reduced amount of primary sources. I must acknowledge that there may be texts and facts that I do not have access to. Because of my limited access to translated

primary documents, I rely solely on excerpts that I have been able to locate in secondary documents. My search for these excerpts has been very time consuming as I have chosen read every possible text, article, or website that may quote an early Arabic author illustrating racial ideologies from early Islamic society. Although this was a difficult task, I have been able to locate an ample amount of excerpts and passages to sufficiently conduct this study. My third limitation pertains to my examination of Racial Ideologies and Racialized Socialized Structures in this specific historical context. Scholarship on conceptions of race and racism in the early Islamic society are scarce. While I must be sure not to project modern conceptions of race to those of antiquity, if parallels between these conceptions can be drawn, I believe that as a historian such comparisons and assessments must be made.

THESIS OUTLINE

The first chapter, provides an examination of Arab-Islamic slavery. It examines the meaning of the term “Arab” and the origins of the people that take on this identity. It then assesses slavery in its medieval Arab-Islamic context. I then discuss the basis for enslavement in the early centuries of Islam; how the Arabs conscripted Africans into enslavement; and the various forms of manumission. Next I will survey the capacities in which the enslaved would function within medieval Arab society. Finally, I will discuss the attitudes of Islam towards the institution of slavery and how Islam was used by the Arabs as a basis for racial stratification of enslaved Africans in particular.

The second chapter discusses the formation of the Abbasid Caliphate and examines the intricacies of the term “Zanj.” Here I discuss the origins and characterizations of the people labeled Zanj, as well as their entrance into the Islamic

world. This chapter also provides an account of the major events surrounding the Zanj Rebellion (869-883C.E.).

The third chapter examines a number of approaches to studying race. I highlight the ideological approach of Kwame Anthony Appiah; the Marxist Approach of Oliver C. Cox; and the Racial Formation approach of Michael Omi and Howard Winant in order to display past approaches to analyzing racism and their limitations. Finally, this chapter outlines the Structural approach of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and discusses why this is the best approach for examining race in the ninth century Iraq.

The fourth chapter examines race consciousness and highlights the perspectives of blacks living during the Abbasid era. Here I discuss race consciousness, racial identity, and illustrate the how they manifest in the literature and accounts of black Arabic poets and scholars living in early centuries of Islam. I also discuss slavery and the necessity of violent resistance.

The fifth chapter discusses conceptions and definitions of race, analyzes racial ideologies and racial social structure, and uses a socio-historical approach to analyze the parallels and connections drawn between the selected Arabic literature and the Abbasid racialized social structure. Arabic literature is used to analyze attitudes, stereotypes, scientific justifications for enslaving Africans, and religious justifications for enslaving Africans. The analysis of the Arabic literature will be used for the sole purpose of illustrating the racial ideologies used to justify racial stratification in the early Islamic social structure. In order acquire the most accurate depictions of the racial ideologies of the social structure that would have influenced the Zanj, I focus primarily on Arabic literature that was written prior to or during the ninth century. In my analysis of this

literature, I employ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's "Structural Theory of Racism" in order to examine the social, cultural, and intellectual context in which the literature was produced.¹⁵ I take into account the race of the authors, whether it is satirical, and the intent of the passages. This demonstrates that there was in fact a racialized social structure of early Islamic society, that there was a racialization process indicating a racial hierarchy, that there were racial ideologies, and that racial contestation was the logical outcome of a society structured by racial hierarchy. As a result, the final chapter concludes that as subordinated subjects of a racialized social structure in which racial contestation is sure to manifest, it was a very likely that this was one of the reasons why the Zanj to choose to revolt against the Abbasid Caliphate.

¹⁵ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation," *American Sociological Review*, 62: 3 (1997): 465.

II. ARAB-ISLAMIC SLAVERY AND THE ABBASID CALIPHATE

Origins of the People called Arabs:

In his text *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, twentieth century anthropologist, Cheikh Anta Diop, suggests that the Arabs cannot be conceived as anything other than a mixture of blacks and whites.¹⁶ According to Diop, Arabia existed originally as a Kushite empire ruled by a tribe of blacks called the Adites. The Arabian deserts, according to W.E.B. Dubois, was part of the world which the Greeks called Ethiopia and regarded as part of Africa.¹⁷ These sentiments are shared by nineteenth century historian, John D. Baldwin, who in his text *Prehistoric Nations*, argues that the Kushites belong to the oldest and purest Arabian blood and a very ancient civilization whose ruins occupy nearly the entire peninsula.¹⁸ Baldwin suggests, that the people we know today as the Arabic Semites were a foreign people and are very modern in Arabian history.¹⁹ Furthermore, according to the oldest recorded traditions, Arabia was first settled by the same Kushites that founded the early Nile Valley civilizations.²⁰ In Arabic speech, Baldwin continues, the original race of Arabia, the Adites, are called

¹⁶ Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*. (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Book. 1974), 124.

¹⁷ W.E.B. Dubois, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the part which Africa has played in world history*. (New York: International Publishers, 1965), 183.

¹⁸ John D. Baldwin, *Prehistoric Nations*, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1869), 74.

¹⁹ Ibid, 79.

²⁰ Ibid.

Aribah, meaning Arabians of pure blood. Diop argues that the black Adites who ruled the peninsula were invaded multiple times by “coarse, white Jectanide tribes” from the north beginning in the eighteenth century B.C.²¹ In the eight century B.C. these Jectanides took control of Arabia and forced most of the Adites back across the Red Sea into Ethiopia with others taking refuge in the mountains of Hadramaut. Thus, the modern Arabs should be regarded as a mixed race descended from the original black Adite settlers and later white Jectanide invaders.

The first known appearance of the term “Arab” dates back to 853 B.C. in an inscription of the Assyrian King Shalmaneser III. The inscription announced Shalmaneser’s victory over a group of rebellious chieftains. Frequently from that time on Assyrian and Babylonian inscriptions referred to the nomadic peoples living in the north Arabian desert called the “Aribi” or “Arabu.”²² Later Herodotus and other Greek and Roman authors extended use of the terms “Arabia” and “Arab” to denote the whole peninsula and its inhabitants, including the Yemenis of the southwest.²³ The Arabian peninsula mostly was steppe or desert, with isolated oases having enough water for regular cultivation. The inhabitants spoke various dialects of Arabi and followed different ways of life. Some were nomads who pastured camels, sheep or goats by using the scant water resources of the desert. These peoples came to be traditionally known as “beduin.” Other inhabitants lived as settled cultivators tending their grain or palm trees in the oases, or traders and craftsmen in small market towns.²⁴ While, the word “Arab” is

²¹ Chiekh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*. (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Book, 1974), 125.

²² Peter Mansfield, *The Arabs*. (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 13.

²³ Ibid, 14.

²⁴ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab People*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 10.

most likely derived from a Semitic root related to nomadism, an “Arab” was considered a nomad or settler inhabitant of the central and northern Arabian peninsula.²⁵ The meaning of the term “Arab” remained quite broad until the rise of Islam in the seventh century.²⁶

The Arab’s first mainstream appearance in world history resulted from the emergence of the Prophet Muhammad as the spiritual organizer of the new Arab community. Muhammad, by founding a world religion, “forged the Arabs into a people.”²⁷ During the first period of Islamic history (622-750C.E.), when Islam was solely an Arab religion and the Caliphate was a purely Arab kingdom, the term “Arab” came to be applied to those who spoke Arabic, were full members of an Arab tribe, and who either in person or through their ancestors have originated in Arabia.²⁸ Through these parameters, the term served to exclude the mass of Persians, Syrians, Copts and others who were brought under Arab rule through conquest.²⁹ Because of this more frequent contact with non-Arabs following Islamic conquest, twentieth century historian M. Watt suggests there developed among the Arabs a strong dislike for foreigners and a fear of being dominated by them.³⁰ Furthermore, according to Africana historian, Dr. John Henrik Clarke, the Arabs invaded and conquered Egypt in the seventh century and subsequently other parts of Africa.³¹ By then the Arab was no stranger to Africa as Yemen remained an Abyssinian colony until 574 C.E.³² Amassing an empire from

²⁵ Peter Mansfield, *The Arabs*. (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 14.

²⁶ Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 5.

²⁷ Joel Carmichael, *The Shaping of the Arabs: A Study in Ethnic Identity*. (New York: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1967), 22.

²⁸ Ibid, 122.

²⁹ Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.

³⁰ W. Montgomery Watt, *Islam and the Integration of Society*. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1961), 92.

³¹ Alfred J. Bulter, *The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Last 30 Years of the Roman Dominion*. (Brooklyn, NY: A&B Books Publishers, 1992).

³² Rahman, H.U. *A Chronology of Islamic History 570-1000 CE*. (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co. 1989), 8.

Central Asia and India to Spain, Portugal and the Atlantic Ocean, Clarke argues that the Arab is no different than other conquerors in world history.

Furthermore, the Zanj Rebellion was a revolt against the exploitation of Arab slave masters. In order to fully understand the Rebellion, Arab-Islamic slavery must be understood. History has shown slavery to be an institution present in many societies dating back to classical antiquity. A frequent practice in many societies throughout history has been the use of Africa as a source for acquiring enslaved labor. The study of slavery in early Islamic history is still in its infancy as few are aware of the enslavement of blacks by the people of the Arabian Peninsula called Arabs. These Arabs were predominantly Muslims. The advent of Islam in the seventh century was accompanied by conquest in Northern Africa, Western Asia, Southern Spain, and Persia for the purpose of spreading Islam.³³ On the African continent, the Arab invasion of sovereign nations eventually led to the exploitation of natural resources such as gold, ivory, salt, and the most valuable resource extracted from the African continent would be its indigenous people.

It is a well-known fact that slavery existed in several world civilizations – Ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome – for thousands of years before the coming of Islam.³⁴ The Muslim faith was developed outside of Africa; however, along with conquest by the Islamic Caliphates, the religion quickly spread to parts of the continent. In these societies enslaved Africans were taken as war captives, along with slaves of other races.³⁵ In the

³³ Graham W. Irwin, *Africans Abroad*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 122.

³⁴ David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 122.

³⁵ M. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953) 154-7.

systems predating Islam, the categories of slavery practiced in the world were many. A bankrupt debtor could be enslaved, slavery was used as a punishment for some crimes and offences, indentured servitude was a common form, or wars and battles often resulted in the enslaving of war captives.³⁶ The majority of slaves in Arab societies came to be used predominantly in domestic and military capacities.

While the earliest documentation of Arab trafficking in black slaves from East Africa dates back to the early second century, it was Arab Muslim conquest beginning in the seventh century that propelled the Arab slave trade to dominance in the Mediterranean and the Indian ocean.³⁷ In non-Muslim areas, slavery was transformed from a structurally marginal feature of society into an institutionalized and well organized economic venture, there was a large increase in the capture and sale of slaves.³⁸ Thus making, Arab-Islamic slavery is the oldest, race specific, most systemized institution of chattel enslavement of Africans.

Before Arab Islamic slavery in the seventh century, there is no evidence of an institutionalized system of slavery in the form of chattel slavery in Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa, or as it was known in Arabic as *bilad-as-Sudan*, “the country of black people,” offered a vast hunting ground for Arab slave traders. As important as the trans-Saharan Slave trade later became to Arab slavery in later centuries, it was greatly overshadowed by the traffic in slaves emanating from Africa’s East coast. Islam facilitated the growth of slavery and the development of the slave trade on a transcontinental scale. Initially,

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ R.W. Beachey, *A Collection of Documents on the Slave Trade of Eastern Africa*. (London: Rex Collings, 1976), 1.

³⁸ Ibid, 115.

most slaves were obtained through military conquest in North Africa and eastern Europe as Islam's wars of conquest, which produced an almost unending stream of male and female prisoners, many of whom were made into slaves.³⁹

Figure 1- Map of Trade Routes in the Indian Ocean⁴⁰

The slave trade inaugurated a new phase of islamization (spreading Islam), a phase which Muslim Arabs believed to be sanctioned by God.⁴¹ It was in Africa that Muslim Arabs found access to gold, slaves, wood, ivory, and later, in plantations and mining. Black slaves were brought into the Islamic world by way of routes from West Africa across the Sahara to Morocco and Tunisia; from Chad across the desert to Libya; from East Africa

³⁹ Ibid, 105.

⁴⁰ Niti Bhan, "Trade in East Africa – A very short introduction to a very long history" Emerging Futures Lab. Accessed April 6, 2016. <http://nitibhan.com/2015/12/04/trade-in-east-africa-a-very-short-introduction-to-a-very-long-history/>

⁴¹ Peter R. Dermant, *Islam vs. Islamism: The Dilemma of the Muslim World*. (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 58.

down the Nile to Egypt, and across the Red Sea and Indian Ocean to Arabia and the Persian Gulf.⁴² Slave dealers, also known as importers (*jallab*) or cattle dealers (*nakhkhas*), brought the enslaved to towns for sale in slave markets, sometimes known as exhibition halls (*ma'rid*).⁴³ In such towns and cities, these slave dealers even saw fit to organize themselves into guilds with their own shaykh (i.e. respected male leaders) like other craftsman and professionals, which demonstrates the complexities of the industry.⁴⁴

Recruitment of the Enslaved:

Along with Islam came two major changes to ancient slavery. The first is found in the presumption of freedom, and the second a ban on the enslavement of free persons except in strictly defined circumstances.⁴⁵ As such, slave populations were acquired primarily through *jihad*, tribute, purchase, and procreation.⁴⁶ In the early periods of Islam (i.e. the seventh to the ninth century C.E.), capture was the main source of recruiting the slave populations through Caliphal conquest and expansion. *Jihad* was generally practiced in the first centuries of Islam as a religious imperative that inspired believers to carry the message of the Prophet Muhammad to the far reaches of the known non-Muslim world. Writing in the twentieth century, African historian Yusef Ben-Jochannan, notes that *jihads* were brought to Africa as early as the year 640 C.E.⁴⁷ While

⁴² Ibid, 10.

⁴³ John O. Hunwick, "Black Africans in the Islamic World: An Understudied Dimension of the Black Diaspora." *Tarikh* 5:4 (1978): 67.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in The Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 5.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 9.

⁴⁷ Yusef A.A. Ben-Jochannan, *African Origins of the Major "Western" Religions*. (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991) 195.

jihad also referred to personal spiritual battles or “striving in the way of God,”⁴⁸ its use for expansion and cohesion of the Islamic community was a product of the rise of Islam and not the cause of it.⁴⁹ Thus, the enslavement of non-believers was seen as compensation for Muslims deaths in wars as well as a way of stimulating conversion to the faith.

Conversion itself was perceived by many Muslims as its own reward with enslavement serving as an opportunity to learn about the Islamic faith.⁵⁰ Heeding Islamic law, capture was carried out in the form of *jihad*, holy battles, and through raids on non-believing populations of people. With the large demand for slaves in Baghdad, the need to import large numbers of slaves led to a rapid increase in the frontiers of the Islamic world, where both slave raiding and slave trading primarily took place.⁵¹ *Jihad* and raiding became a common way of obtaining and maintaining an efficient system of distribution and delivery. In Africa, it became common practice to wage war against peoples who were militarily vulnerable, and usually non-believers of the Muslim faith were considered fit subjects for enslavement.

Initially, it seemed that it was religious belief and not race, national origin, or territoriality that was the determining factor in whether an individual could be enslaved. In theory, individuals who converted to Islam prior to their capture, could not lawfully be placed in bondage. However, in time, many slaves would be acquired from surrounding

⁴⁸ W. Montgomery Watt, *Islam and the Integration of Society*. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1961), 66.

⁴⁹ Fred McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 295-296.

⁵⁰ W.G. Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 41.

⁵¹ E. A. Belyaev, *The Arabs, Islam, and the Arab Caliphate in the Early Middle Ages*. (New York: Frederick a. Praeger Inc., Publishers, 1969), 240.

African ethnic groups whether they practiced Islam or not.⁵² This illegal practice of enslaving African Muslims raises the question as to whether belief in Islam was the actual deciding factor and introduces the idea of race as factor for enslavement. In many cases, Islam failed to offer the enslaved a gateway to freedom. It became common practice for many devout Muslims to refuse to acknowledge African Muslims as true believers if their practice of Islam fell short of accepted Arabcentric norms.⁵³ Furthermore, it seems logical that it would be to a slave trader's detriment to narrow the areas from which Africans could potentially be captured from by encouraging conversion and identifying Muslim communities in Africa. By remaining indifferent to the religious practices of Africans, slave traders found a larger reservoir to exploit in Africa. Interestingly, Christians and Jews from Europe, who were considered "people of the book," were usually spared from being reduced to slavery by paying a tax.⁵⁴ However, they could forfeit their immunity to enslavement by failure to pay the tax or if they attempted to flee to a non-Muslim land.⁵⁵

Slave populations were imported also by tribute through the establishment of treaties between Muslim rulers and non-Muslim states.⁵⁶ In many cases, non-Muslims states that were not directly ruled by Arab Muslims often paid tribute in the form of slaves when they had little else of value to offer.⁵⁷ The earliest example of non-Muslim states paying tribute in the form of slaves to Muslim rulers is contained in a treaty signed

⁵² Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*. (United States: New Amsterdam Books, 1989), 24.

⁵³ Ibid, 31.

⁵⁴ Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 15.

⁵⁵ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*. (United States: New Amsterdam Books, 1989), 25.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ W.G. Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 32.

in the 652 C.E. between Arab-Muslim rulers of Egypt and black Christian Kings of Nubia.⁵⁸ This treaty involved the payment of 360 slaves a year by Nubia to the Muslim overlords.⁵⁹ According to Arab the fifteenth century historian, Magrizi, the treaty required that:

each year you are to deliver 360 slaves which you will pay to the Imam of the Moslems from the finest slaves of your country, in whom there is no defect. [There are to be] both male and female/ Among them [is to be] no decrepit old man or woman or any child who has not reached puberty. You are to deliver them to the Wali of Aswan.⁶⁰

Twentieth century historian, Bernard Lewis, argues that it is because of this treaty that Nubia remained unconquered for so long. The treaty specified delivery of hundreds of slaves, later supplemented by elephants, giraffes, and other beasts.⁶¹ Also writing in the twentieth century, Africana historian Chancellor Williams, suggests this treaty was upheld and tribute was paid on a regular basis up until 1272 C.E. when the Nubian King of Makuria denounced the treaty and refused to pay tribute.⁶²

In the early centuries of Islam, acquiring slaves by purchase was the most legal means for the acquisition of new slaves. Throughout the Islamic empire, although slavery was maintained, enslavement of locals was prohibited; therefore, slaves were purchased on the frontiers of the Islamic world and then imported to the major centers, where there were slave markets from which they were widely distributed. During the Abbasid

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Y.F. Hasan, *The Arabs and the Sudan: From the Seventh to the Early Sixteen Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1967), 134.

⁶⁰ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 124.

⁶¹ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in The Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 9.

⁶² Chancellor Williams, *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race From 4500 B.C. To 2000 A.D.* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1987), 151.

Dynasty, Baghdad was the central city of the empire, but, the holy city of Mecca stood as the center of the Islamic world. As such, Mecca remained the main market for slave trading up until the official abolition of slavery in 1962.⁶³

In contrast to European forms of slavery, the use of procreation among the slaves to naturally increase the slave population was rarely used and fairly insufficient to maintain numbers. The slave populations in the Islamic Middle East was constantly drained by manumission, as the freeing of slaves was a common practice in Arab Muslim society. Military slaves, in particular, were typically manumitted at some point in their careers and if they were able to reproduce, their offspring were free and not slaves. Usually, marriage between the enslaved was not permitted, which is why there were very few descendants from two slave parents. Another reason for the low natural increase of the slave population in the Islamic world was castration. A large proportion of male slaves were imported as eunuchs which precluded having offspring and the reproduction of an enslaved population. There was also a high death toll among all classes of slaves from military commanders to humble menials. Slaves populations died in other large numbers from endemic and epidemic diseases.⁶⁴ For the Zanj in the marsh lands of south Iraq, the marshes were breeding grounds for mosquitoes and gnats and this made them susceptible to malaria.⁶⁵

⁶³ John Alemillah Azumah, *Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa*. (Oxford: One world Publishers, 2001), 151.

⁶⁴ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in The Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 10.

⁶⁵ Alexandre Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3rd/9th Century*. (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), 11.

Manumission:

On the institutional level, the three modes of recruitment, enslavement, and manumission were interrelated. Particularly in Islamic slavery, the strong reliance on prisoners of war as a means to meet growing labor demands was in part caused by the high rate of manumission, which required a constant inflow of outsiders to replace and to increase the slave population.⁶⁶ Manumission could be granted by a formal declaration on the part of the master and was usually recorded in a certificate given to the manumitted slave. The act of liberating a slave was commonly performed on a slave master's deathbed or at some point in later on in the career of a military slave. It was also common for slaves to be given their freedom in atonement for a slave master's sins or even as punishment for any public offense.⁶⁷ Although Muslims were forbidden from enslaving other Muslims, conversion to Islam by non-Muslim slaves did not have to result in the slave's liberation. Thus, slave status was not affected by the embracing of Islam.⁶⁸

Manumission in most cases was viewed as an act of piety and also would be prescribed as penance for a criminal act. Encouraging manumission for killing another Muslim, the Quran [4:93] states: "If any Muslim slay a believer unintentionally, he must emancipate a slave and pay the blood-money to the heirs of the slain person unless they remit it of their own accord. If, however, he does not find a slave to set free, he should fast for two months in succession." Furthermore, a slave master could manumit a slave

⁶⁶ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) 114.

⁶⁷ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*. (United States: New Amsterdam Books, 1989), 40.

⁶⁸ Bernard Lewis, *Race And Slavery In The Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 9.

through a formal declaration and a recorded in a certificate given to a freed slave.⁶⁹ As it pertains to the practice of slave masters marrying their female slaves, a master could not marry his own slave women unless he first emancipated her. Twentieth century Islamic scholar and writer, Mirza Bashir Ahmad, writes of a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad stating: “If any of you have a slave girl, whom he gives good education and excellent training, and then he emancipates her and marries her, he shall have a two-fold reward.”⁷⁰

In other cases, a slave could ask for his freedom. A formal contractual arrangement could be drafted between slave and owner, known as *mukataba*, in which the slave would agree to buy his/her freedom for a specified price to be paid in installments over a period of time.⁷¹ Although the owner did not have to comply with the request, it was considered to be an act of piety which God would reward.⁷² Once this agreement was reached, the master no longer had the right to sell or trade his slave and it could be terminated by the slave but not the master. Children born to a slave after the entry into force of the contract were born free.⁷³ The option of manumission through a *mukataba* is indicative of a significant right of slaves to earn and retain an income without which such a contract would be devoid of meaning. Furthermore, slaves with special skills in carpentry, woodworking, tanning, or sailing in urban areas had a far better likelihood of earning a wage than those with no skills or those that lived in rural areas.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 8.

⁷⁰ Mirza Bashir Ahmad, *Islam and Slavery*. (Rabwah West Pakistan: Ahmadiyya Muslim Foreign Missions, 1967), 13

⁷¹ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*. (United States: New Amsterdam Books, 1989), 41.

⁷² John O. Hunwick, “Black Africans in the Islamic World: An Understudied Dimension of the Black Diaspora.” *Tarikh* 5:4. (1978): 20.

⁷³ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in The Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 8.

Male Slaves and Eunuchs:

Once enslaved, males were trained for military service, domestic servitude, administrative positions, and overseers of harems. Male slaves were usually subjected to one of the most devastating aspects of Muslim slavery, castration. These castrated slaves were called eunuchs and as twenty-first century historian, Paul Lovejoy, suggests: “Eunuchs comprised a special category of slavery that does not seem to have been characteristic of most non-Muslim societies.”⁷⁴ The majority of the enslaved African males were emasculated before selling them in the Muslim world and it should be noted that 80-90 percent of them did not survive the procedure.⁷⁵ Those that survived were used either to guard property, holy sites, for agriculture work on plantations, mining, or for military services, to stock the army infantries of Muslim rulers. Writing in the twentieth century historian, Gordon Murray, suggests that the traffic in eunuchs in Africa was probably as old as the slave traffic itself. For instance, Ethiopia became best known for eunuchs, who would go on to be well appreciated as servants and door keepers in the mosque in Medina.⁷⁶

In domestic settings, homes were functionally divided into areas reserved specifically for women and those reserved solely for men. Male slaves served in a number of capacities and saw to the needs of their masters as grooms, guards, tutors, administrators, musicians, scholars, secretaries, commercial agents, and clerks. Another

⁷⁴ Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 17.

⁷⁵ Ann E. McDougall, "A Quest for Honour": Slavery, Islam, and the Contributions of Martin Klein to African History." *Canadian Journal of African Studies, Special Issue: On Slavery and Islam in African History: A Tribute to Martin Klein*. 34:3, (2000): 555.

⁷⁶ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*. (United States: New Amsterdam Books, 1989), 93.

unique use of male slaves was to preserve the honor of his master by guarding the virtue of his master's wives and concubines. It was a very common practice in Islamic society to veil the women in special quarters, called harems. Most harems were protected not only by locks but also by slave guards that were customarily eunuchs.

While eunuchs became prevalent among the male slave class, Murray notes a specific ban on castration attributed to the Prophet Muhammad by a hadith stating: "Whoever cuts off the nose of a slave, his nose will be cut off and whoever castrates a slave, him also shall we castrate."⁷⁷ Since mutilation and abuse of slaves was forbidden by Muslim law, eunuchs needed to be imported from abroad. On the frontiers of the Islamic world, where castration procedures were normally performed, local enslaved children were taken for this purpose. Furthermore, as a result of enslaved African males being made eunuchs, they were unable to marry nor were they able to reproduce, which is why it was very rare for slaves to bear children and also the cause of the constant demand for new slaves.

Unlike white eunuchs, who would only be deprived of their testicles, African male slaves often were subjected to the most radical form of castration, known, according to twentieth century historian, John Laffin, as "level with the abdomen."⁷⁸ Historical sociologist Orlando Patterson, white eunuchs were thought to be intellectually superior, while black eunuchs were to be morally degenerate.⁷⁹ Thus, it is presumed that this specific procedure was circumscribed to African based on the assumption that Africans

⁷⁷ Ronald Segal, *Islam's Black Slaves: The Other Black Diaspora*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), 40.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 52.

⁷⁹ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 321.

possessed an uncontrollable sexual appetite. As a result, the castrated African male usually became the keeper of his master's women. These two polar opposites, the beautiful Arab woman and castrated African slave, illustrates the master's power over the sexual and reproductive functions of his slaves as well as the women in society. Also the general demand for eunuchs can be largely accounted for by the increased numbers and sizes of harems in the Islamic world.

Harems, Concubines, and Enslaved Women:

Female slaves were normally used as domestics and those deemed the prettiest were placed in harems.⁸⁰ The large increase in the numbers and sizes of harems in the Islamic World was also directly linked to the demand for female slaves. According to Segel, the harems of rulers could be enormous, as the harem of Abd al-Rahman III in Cordoba contained some six thousand concubines in the tenth century.⁸¹ Furthermore, when considering the Islamic slave trade as compared to the American slave trade there are many contrasts. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was agriculturally based and labor was exploited; therefore, there was a preference for male African slaves to work on the plantations. Muslim slavery was the opposite, as slaves were used primarily to suit the cultural and social needs of the slave-owning elites (i.e. harems, domestic and military slaves).⁸² Additionally, there was a large emphasis on sexual exploitation in the form of concubinage. Twentieth century historian, Martin Klein, even estimates for every

⁸⁰ Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 16.

⁸¹ Ronald Segal, *Islam's Black Slaves: The Other Black Diaspora*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), 39.

⁸² Ann E. McDougall, "A Quest for Honour": Slavery, Islam, and the Contributions of Martin Klein to African History." *Canadian Journal of African Studies, Special Issue: On Slavery and Islam in African History: A Tribute to Martin Klein*. 34:3, (2000): 555.

African male enslaved, the Muslim world enslaved two African women.⁸³ Since Muslim men were not permitted to use slave women as prostitutes, concubinage made them sexually available, to be commanded rather than courted. According to twentieth century historian, John O. Hunwick, Abyssinian women were of the most prized African slave women for concubinage among slave owners because of their beauty, presumably their lighter skin and more “Arab” features.⁸⁴

The great demand for concubines was reflected in the majority of girls and young women who fell victim to enslavement. During slave raids, it was not uncommon to kill many of the men and older women but capture the young women for the long treks to slave markets to be sold. The slave girls were assigned such tasks as chambermaids, cooks, seamstresses, wet nurses, and confidantes. In fact, the more menial and hard labor tasks were usually reserved for those African slaves that were deemed unattractive.⁸⁵ Also, young women often were groomed to entertain and to please. As such, many concubines were trained to strum a lute, compose verses, or comport in ways that showed off their beauty and grace.⁸⁶

Although, the pre-Islamic practice of using female slaves as prostitutes would eventually be forbidden by *sharia* law, a slave master generally held complete sexual access to his female slaves. The primary purpose of most Muslim men in acquiring a concubine was for sexual purposes. Concubines offered men a religiously sanctioned method for relieving possible unhappiness resulting from a marriage that was sexually

⁸³ Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule In French West Africa*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

⁸⁴ John O. Hunwick, “Black Africans in the Islamic World: An Understudied Dimension of the Black Diaspora.” *Tarikh* 5:4 (1978): 68.

⁸⁵ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*. (United States: New Amsterdam Books, 1989), 56.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 89.

ungratifying.⁸⁷ While Muslim slave owners were entitled to the sexual enjoyment of their slave women, the same right was not recognized for free Muslim women or their own male slaves. The common practice of castration and imported eunuchs assigned to guard harem ensured this. In many cases, it was hardly possible to find a harem without a eunuch.⁸⁸

The *harem* was an area of the household set aside solely for women and some may even go as far to say that it contained its own separate social structure. This tightly drawn circle was comprised of a man's wives, free Muslim women, concubines, servants, children, and eunuchs and their lives revolved around it. As a result, the high volume of new slaves provided for fresh young faces being able to appear at any time. Because of the high turnover among these young slave women, many Arab men preferred their company to that of their wives, who often became "neglected and embittered women."⁸⁹ Furthermore, a young, attractive concubine that entered the household of her master often became the object, scorn, and hatred of the master's legitimate wives. Subsequently, the household atmosphere, could become charged with scheming, rivalry, animosity.

Prior to purchasing a slave woman whom an owner intended to use as a concubine, he was sure to make determine whether she was receptive to his romantic advances.⁹⁰ This process usually took place in the privacy of special stalls set aside in slave markets solely for the close examination of female slaves by prospective buyers. According to Murray, in these stalls men could take liberties with these girls in a manner they would not dream of when courting a woman, that they wished to marry. Also, there

⁸⁷ Ibid, 84.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 91.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 89.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 86.

was no social degradation in being a concubine and it was not uncommon for a master to marry his concubine who would have been bought to be tried out as a potential wife. Interestingly, in an essay entitled “Free Women and Slaves,” al-Jahiz, the famed ninth century author of African descent, argued that in many cases slave girls were better off than free men and women:

Slave girls in general have more success with men than free women. Some women seek to explain that by saying that before acquiring a slave a man is able to examine her from every standpoint and get to know her thoroughly, albeit stopping short of the pleasure of an intimate interview with her; he buys her, then if he thinks she suits him. In the case of a free women, however, he is limited to consulting other women about her charms, and women know absolutely nothing about feminine beauty, men’s requirements, or the qualities to look for, Men, on the other hand, are sounder judges of women.⁹¹

As mentioned above, marriage between slaves was a very rare occurrence. Slaves could marry but only if given consent by the master. A Muslim was strictly forbidden from marrying his own slave unless he first emancipated her.⁹² Children born of a master and slave relationship were automatically free if the father chose to acknowledge paternity. Benefiting from privileged the relationship with her master, slave mothers would acquire the status of *umm walad* (mother of child).⁹³ As a result, she could no longer be sold or alienated by her master and upon his death she would be manumitted. Also, it was forbidden to separate a slave mother and her young child until the age of seven. At that time children in bondage, if unclaimed by a probable slave master father,

⁹¹ Ibid, 86.

⁹² Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in The Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 8.

⁹³ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*. (United States: New Amsterdam Books, 1989), 43.

were eligible to be sold to different masters as property.⁹⁴ Those slave women that bore their master's children were not to be sold or given away. Ronald Segal suggests that in a respect, concubines were arguably more secure than wives, who might be divorced against their will.

White Slaves:

As stated above, it appears that the basis used for enslavement in Islamic slavery was not initially centered on race, rather it was religious non-belief. Arab-Islamic slavery was not limited to Africa. Initially white slaves were primarily imported from the Eurasian steppe, particularly Transoxania (Eastern Iran), and were usually of Turkish origin.⁹⁵ European slaves came to be used primarily in the military and the Caliph's personal guard. They also became a luxury only to be enjoyed by the wealthy. Furthermore, the association of African peoples with slavery can be seen in the Arabic language itself. By medieval times, European slaves came to be known as *mamluks*, an Arabic connotation for "owned", while the term "*abd*," meaning slaves, was reserved for African slaves.⁹⁶ Over time *abd* lost its exclusive meaning and came to be used solely in reference to an African person regardless of whether he was a slave or free.⁹⁷ The semantic transformation of the word *abd* from a social to a racial or ethnic designation was likely derived from the persistent portrayal of Africans as slaves throughout Islamic history.

⁹⁴ Ronald Segal, *Islam's Black Slaves: The Other Black Diaspora*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), 39.

⁹⁵ Matthew S. Gordon, *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords: A History of the Turkish Military OF Samarra*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001) 21.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 99.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

So long as slavery maintained a racialized social structure, Arab and Turkish slave owners favored European slaves over Africans. Accordingly, European slave girls were often preferred over African girls as concubines. Even among African slave girls, fairer complexioned Abyssinians were preferred over their darker-skinned counterparts. Although European and black slaves were often grouped together as the barbarians of the north and south together as subjects fit for enslavement, there were often distinctions drawn between them. As will be extended upon in later chapters, Arab slave masters spoke more approvingly of the Europeans and unfavorably of the Africans. European slaves were often credited with possessing more useful skills, enhanced human qualities, and deemed deserving of places in the higher ranks of the slave social hierarchy. On the other hand, African slaves were usually seen as lacking in such qualities and deemed fit only for the least gratifying and menial tasks. This is clearly observed in the Arab use of military slaves.

Military Slaves:

Outside of domestic and agricultural uses, the largest capacity in which the enslaved were employed was in military services. Slave soldiers were usually acquired in large groups and in some cases, actually constituted a major element of the Caliphal army.⁹⁸ Ownership of military slaves was normally restricted to the Caliph, such slaves were typically acquired as older children or adolescents for training purposes.⁹⁹ Slaves were employed for numerous reasons, some were required to fight in battles or during

⁹⁸ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*. (United States: New Amsterdam Books, 1989), 66.

⁹⁹ Ronald Segal, *Islam's Black Slaves: The Other Black Diaspora*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), 45.

campaigns, others were subjected to menial work. Furthermore, only two peoples from outside of the Islamic world would fight for the Muslims in significant numbers during the first two centuries of Islam: Africans and Turks. Africans fought on the side of Muslims in many of their first battles (632-750 C.E.), while the Turks would not fight until later decades. These European slaves were usually immediately recruited to serve as military slaves and were trained as the cavalry in the Caliphal Armies.

The creation of a cavalry core of Turkish military slaves and an infantry core of African military slaves was a significant shift in the organization of Arab Muslim armies. While it could be logical to organize troops by linguistic categories and groupings, to use geographic and racial similarities are questionable. A common justification for these resulting racial grouping is that the stereotypes of the period were that Turkish slaves were excellent cavalymen, and Africans because of their lack of a tradition of horsemanship were a logical choice for infantries. In support of this, Murray suggests the Turks were supremely favored because of their prowess as archers and their devotion to the masters.¹⁰⁰

Eventually this favoritism diminished as slavery as an institution became over time an overwhelmingly black institution. According to twentieth century historian, Daniel Pipes, African soldiers did have large roles in early Muslim armies, but these roles remained secondary.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, in by the ninth century, African military slaves composed a small portion of the Abbasid military and government.¹⁰² It should also be

¹⁰⁰ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*. (United States: New Amsterdam Books, 1989), 26.

¹⁰¹ Daniel Pipes, "Black Soldiers in Early Muslim Armies." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 13:1 (1980): 94.

¹⁰² Ibid.

noted that Arab historians rarely viewed the happenings of African military slaves as largely significant. Writing in the twentieth century, historian Jere L. Bacharach even suggests that:

It was not unusual to find references to African slaves in Iraq without any warning of when and how they got there or what happened to them after the specific event was recorded; for example, a revolt of African Zanj slaves in Basra in 76/695 or the appearance of 4,000 Zanj military slaves in Mosul in 133/751. Therefore, the silence in the Arabic chronicles on the numbers and activities of African military slaves in Iraq from 210/825 to the Zanj Rebellion (255/869-271/883) may reflect their absence or, more likely, their relative unimportance in the eyes of the chroniclers.¹⁰³

The population of African military slaves was possibly highest in ninth century Iraq; however, as noted above details of their activities has disappeared from the recorded history of medieval Iraq.¹⁰⁴ As the reaches of the Caliph extended, African military slaves were imported into the Caliphal armies because a real need existed; however, in their service as infantry they were viewed as expendable and inferior.

Racial considerations also figured importantly in the distribution of assignments in slave armies. The better and more prestigious posts in the cavalry were set aside for the *mamluks* while the *'abids* were restricted to serving as lowly foot soldiers or performing menial chores.¹⁰⁵ By the ninth century, the term *'mamluk*' even shifted from simply meaning "owned" to denote both racial background and occupation.¹⁰⁶ Most Muslim armies were composed of cavalry and infantry units that were organized into units on the

¹⁰³ Jere L. Bacharach, "African Military Slaves in the Medieval Middle East: The Case of Iraq (869-955) and Egypt (860-1171)." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 13:4 (1981): 472.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 476.

¹⁰⁵ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*. (United States: New Amsterdam Books, 1989), 99.

¹⁰⁶ William McKee Evans, "From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea: The Strange Odyssey of the "Sons of Ham." *The American Historical Review*, 85:1 (1980): 29.

basis of racial identities (i.e. *mamluks* and *abids*). Bacharach suggests that this was purposely done for three reasons. First, in these segregated units, racial similarities were believed to be the cohesive element within the units and promoted a sense of unity. Second, that the natural rivalries that would develop between these racialized units would further strengthen a ruler's position as the units would attempt to outperform each other on the battlefield. Third, the resulting racial animosity between these segregated units offered a balance which prevented one military or racial group from dominating the government.¹⁰⁷

Islam as a basis for Slavery and Racial Stratification:

While some used the Quran to endorse and justify slavery as an institution, there are a number of contradictions that emerged with the practice of slavery and some of the principles of Islam. When these contradictions that manifest in practice, it is difficult at times to differentiate between notions of Islam and Arabism, meaning the distinction between religion and Arab cultural and imperialistic ideals. Thus, in addition to Islam acting as a moral code delivering regulations to a long-standing institution (i.e. slavery), the religion also served as a vehicle for non-Muslim Arabs and Arab Muslims to justify the expansion of their empire and to amplify their imports and profits from world trade. The Arabs extended Islam to create racial stratification, which, in Africa, came to supersede non-belief as the primary condition for enslavement. Additionally, justification for the institution of slavery would be found in the Quran and the Hadith (i.e. traditions of the Prophet Muhammad); however, a number of contradictions emerge demonstrating a

¹⁰⁷ Jere L. Bacharach, "African Military Slaves in the Medieval Middle East: The Case of Iraq (869-955) and Egypt (860-1171)." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13:4 (1981): 471.

departure from the parameters prescribed by Islam. Evidence of this is observed in, the treatment of non-believers, *jihad*, and expressions of racial beliefs about Africans found in early Islamic doctrine.

The institution of slavery as a practice is not condemned in the Quran, Hadith, or in Islamic law. Instead, it provides with stipulations aimed at regulating and mitigating possible abuse.¹⁰⁸ Prior to Islam, the institution of slavery was already in existence in Arab society. As a result, the religion of Muhammad sought to treat the problem of slavery by addressing the owners. For slave traders in Africa, Islam provided a divine moral code and a set of legal principles that regulated interaction within prospective slave populations.¹⁰⁹ In the Quran [16:75] there is a parable of two men that displays "a slave under the dominion of another; He has no power of any sort; and [another] man on whom [Allah has] bestowed goodly favors, and he spends thereof (freely), privately and publicly: are the two equal? Praise be to Allah." This parable illustrates an instance of slavery and supports the idea of inequality that is to exist between master and slave as part of a divinely established social order.¹¹⁰

The primary justification for slavery found in Islam stems from non-belief in Islam, otherwise known as *kufr*.¹¹¹ Islam sanctions slavery and the legitimacy of enslavement as long as it occurred in the space between the Dar al-Islam (the House of Islam) and the Dar al-Kufr (the Land of Dis-belief), which meant that it occurred between

¹⁰⁸ John Alemillah Azumah, *Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa*. (Oxford: Oneworld Publishers, 2001), 118.

¹⁰⁹ Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

¹¹⁰ Bernard Lewis, *Race And Slavery In The Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 6.

¹¹¹ John Alemillah Azumah, *Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa*. (Oxford: Oneworld Publishers, 2001), 117.

the faithful people of Islam and the pagans who were said to still be in ignorance and darkness.¹¹² Africa became considered the stronghold of non-belief and logically became a major source of slaves for Muslim lands as early as the seventh century.¹¹³ In a display of Arab supremacy, Arab Muslims believed themselves to be the sole members of the civilized world. They believed that they themselves possessed enlightenment and the true faith and that the outside world was inhabited by infidels and barbarians.¹¹⁴ Because of this, the remainder of people, “people of the book” and pagans, were seen primarily as sources of slaves to be imported into the Islamic world and molded in Islamic ways. As such, slavery is regarded as a means of dealing with the antithesis of Islam, which was manifested in non-belief. Within this context, slavery was cast as a blessing in disguise, and millions of Africans were enslaved by Muslim societies for fourteen centuries.

However, a contradiction arises in the fact that once enslaved, the majority of slaves converted to Islam. Muslims are forbidden from enslaving other Muslims. As such, though a Muslim cannot be enslaved by another Muslim, conversion to Islam after being captured either through *jihad* or purchase, that did not change one’s fate nor that of their offspring.¹¹⁵ In other words, once enslaved, the status of slavery is actually permanent regardless of the enslaved’s faith. If non-belief was the primary cause of enslavement and the underlining principle for the existence of the institution of slavery in Islam, why then were slaves not granted emancipation once converted?¹¹⁶ Additionally,

¹¹² David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 63.

¹¹³ John Alemillah Azumah, *Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa*. (Oxford: Oneworld Publishers, 2001), 127.

¹¹⁴ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in The Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 42.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 9.

¹¹⁶ John Alemillah Azumah, *Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa*. (Oxford: Oneworld Publishers, 2001), 126.

another contradiction is found in the non-belief justification, is that this doctrine was only applied to Africans as opposed to all people. Islamic law provides sanctions for enslavement of all non-believing peoples; however, very conveniently this principle is not applied to non-believing Arabs.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, according George Murray, the second Caliph Umar opposed the practice and is reported to have declared: “No ownership of an Arab is permitted.”¹¹⁸ Thus, a belief in Arab racial superiority is demonstrated since all non-believers are to be reduced to slave status while Arabs, Muslim or not, are exempt from such a status.

Similarly, *jihad* served as the primary source in acquiring slaves and was intentionally directed against non-believers of Islam, as they were legally and religiously enslavable in Muslim Society. *Jihad* sanctioned “the born unbeliever, his offspring and his wives to be made captives and his property is to be divided up.”¹¹⁹ Moreover, the Quran [8:69-71] states: "But [now] enjoy what ye took in war, lawful and good...Allah gave you mastery over them." Also it was common practice for women and children that were not killed in *jihad* to be taken as slaves. In support of this the Prophet Muhammad is famously quoted stating that non believers must be dragged to paradise against their will and that these people are the non-Arabs and non-believers that are captured in holy war and made to enter Islam.¹²⁰ Thus, in the name of *jihads*, Muslim warriors became the principal suppliers of slaves for the Islamic slave trade.

¹¹⁷ Bernard Lewis, *Race And Slavery In The Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 117.

¹¹⁸ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*. (United States: New Amsterdam Books, 1989), 32.

¹¹⁹ David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 67.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 128.

Figure 2 – Map of the Spread of Islam¹²¹

Jihad is holy war carried out on non-believers; however, many of these *jihads* were not carried out for “holy” reasons, in the name of gaining converts. Interpretations of *jihads* vary as on certain levels they are concerned genuinely with religious reform and deep spiritual conflict.¹²² However, many *jihads* that were carried out in Africa were primarily conducted for economic reasons, as the rising demands developed at slave markets.¹²³ As a result of this demand, warfare was undertaken to enslave prisoners under the guise of spreading Islam. As Islam spread throughout Africa, many African communities began to convert on their own to avoid enslavement. According to twenty-first century historian, David Robinson, in reality there was very little investigation as to

¹²¹ Cristian Ionita, “Historical Maps of the Islamic World” The World on the Map. Accessed April 6, 2016. http://www.edmaps.com/html/islamic_world.html.

¹²² Richard J. Reid, *A History of Modern Africa 1800 to the Present*. (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Publication, 2012), 99

¹²³ David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 63.

the religious practices of inhabitants of the African continent and there was also little accountability.¹²⁴ While Muslim law unequivocally forbids the enslavement of free Muslims of whatever race, this law was not always strictly enforced to protect Muslim African captives from Arab slave traders.¹²⁵ Thus for the African continent, those whose lands were unknown and status unclear, were assumed to be non-believers and enslaved without investigation.

Another justification for slavery in the African world came in the racist ideology that suggested blacks became legitimate slaves by virtue of the color of their skin. This justification of the Arab Muslim equation of blackness with servitude in early times was based on the biblical Genesis story called the Curse of Ham.¹²⁶ In this story Noah's younger son, Ham, saw his father's nakedness as he lay drunk and uncovered inside his tent and did not cover his father's body. Noah upon hearing this cursed the descendants of Ham's son, Canaan, to be slaves of the descendants of Noah's sons, Shem and Japheth. This biblical curse of servitude is believed to have fallen upon blacks who were said to be the descendants of Ham. Bernard Lewis suggests this belief came into Islam by way of Jewish and Christian converts.

Furthering this, twenty-first century historian, David Goldenberg, notes a seventh century Jewish Yemen convert to Islam, named Kab al-Ahbar, who spoke of the cursed descendants of Ham stating that "Among them are Nubians [*nuba*], the Negroes [*zanj*], the Barbars [*brbr*]... and all the black: they are the children of Ham."¹²⁷ Additionally,

¹²⁴ Ibid, 68.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 53.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 128.

¹²⁷ David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 107.

Goldenberg notes Wahb ibn Munabbih, a celebrated eighth century authority on the traditions of *ahl al-Kitāb* (i.e. people of the book), reporting that God “changed [Ham’s] color and the color of his descendants in response to his father’s curse,’ and that Ham’s descendants are Kush, Canaan... the various races of blacks [*sudan*]: Nubians, Zanj, Qaran, Zaghawa, Ethiopians, Copts and Barbar.”¹²⁸ Increasing reliance on the Curse of Ham myth coincides with the swelled entry of enslaved Africans into the Islamic world. That the earliest of this quotes appears from the seventh century following the emergence of Islam, demonstrates yet another use of Islam and its resulting traditions to justify the enslavement of Africans in particular.

Islamic Scholar, Suliman Bashear’s twentieth century text, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam*, highlights several Hadith that emerged, following the Islamic adoption of the Curse of Ham, that connected blackness to evil and impiety and whiteness with purity and piety. An eighth century tradition states in further detail that the Prophet was approached by an Ethiopian man who recognized that they (blacks) were inferior to the Arabs “in color, appearance and [possession of] prophecy,” and asked whether in spite of all of this, if he would be able to join the Prophet in heaven if he believed in him and followed his example. It is said that to this the Prophet replied, assuring the man the blacks would appear white in paradise from within a distance of one thousand years.¹²⁹ This tradition suggests that as an Ethiopian, a person with black skin, is first inferior to Arabs and second that to be pious is to be white, which can only occur for him in heaven.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Suliman Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam*. (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1997), 93.

Traditions of the Prophet were even used to associate blackness with evil and apocalyptic speculations.

In another eighth century tradition, the people of Mecca were urged to leave the city before the occurrence of the two darknesses. The first being a black wind that would destroy everything in its path, and the second, a massive raid of black men who would come up from the sea and destroy the Ka'ba, the sanctuary in Mecca, and cast it into the sea.¹³⁰ This tradition may have been formulated in response to an Abyssinian invasion of Yemen and South Arabia in 570 C.E., in which an expedition against Mecca was undertaken to capture the city and destroy the Ka'ba.¹³¹ While the expedition was unsuccessful, it was perhaps part of the background forming the depiction of blacks as natural enemies of Islam. In an additional eighth century tradition of the Prophet it states that "beginning with the creation of Adam the colours white and black were destined by God for the people of Paradise and Hell, respectively."¹³² In this tradition, blackness is said to be a color associated for the people of hell, thus concluding in essence that all blacks are predestined for hell.

Consequently, it was at this time that blackness became strongly identified with slave populations. This idea expressed that blacks were condemned to be slaves and menials while Arabs are blessed to be prophets and nobles. Ironically, some scholars argue that the power of Mecca at the time was established by an army of African slaves.¹³³ As time persisted it was believed that African Muslims were somehow

¹³⁰ Ibid, 99.

¹³¹ John Alemillah Azumah, *Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa*. (Oxford: One world Publishers, 2001), 132.

¹³² Ibid, 78.

¹³³ M. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 154-7.

different from other Muslims and that Africa was a legitimate source of slaves.¹³⁴ The attitude toward black Africans remained on the whole negative, as African states were believed to be, submissive to slavery. It was also believed that Africans had little that is essentially human. Beyond conquest and enslavement, where Arab understandings of skin color were previously based on individual personal complexion, it became used to designate ethnic groups, with 'black' referring to the dark-skinned peoples being imported from the African continent.¹³⁵ In contrast, 'white' came to be used in reference to the Arabs, Persians, Greeks, Turks, Slavs, and other people to the north and to the east.¹³⁶ Lewis argues that this specialization and designating of color illustrates a clear connotation of inferiority attached to darker and particularly black skin. Furthermore, the Arabs used Islamic doctrine to portray blackness as a signal for servitude in Arab Muslim thinking and more importantly as a basis for racial stratification.

Conclusion:

Beginning nearly a thousand years before and lasting centuries after Europe's Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in West Africa was the Arab-Islamic Slave Trade, in which millions of Africans were taken from the African continent and sold into slavery in the Muslim world. In sanctioning slavery, the Quran and Islam not only laid the foundation for a new social institution; moreover, it gave its blessings to a practice that had been a way of life for a long time in the region.¹³⁷ In the seventh century, Islam's wars of

¹³⁴ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in The Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 53.

¹³⁵ David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) 197.

¹³⁶ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in The Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 126.

¹³⁷ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*. (United States: New Amsterdam Books, 1989), 37.

conquest, which continued throughout the middle ages, produced a nearly endless stream of male and female captives that would be made into slaves.¹³⁸ Writing in the twenty-first century, historian W.G. Clarence-Smith suggests: “The institution of slavery further depended on brutal raids, pathetic slaves of destitute people, traumatic forced marches, dangerous sea journeys, and the demeaning routines of the slave market.”¹³⁹ Additionally, the early conquest and expansion of the Islamic empire were made possible by slavery. Without it the Arabs would not have been able to exploit the labor of slaves in critical administrative roles, military, and agriculture.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, in Islam the Arabs found justification for their terrible institution and they used the religion in order to exploit slave labor their own economic and imperialistic interests.

Because of the wide spread non-belief in Islam, Sub-Saharan Africa, or *bilad-as-Sudan*, “the country of black people,” offered a vast hunting ground for the slave traders. Throughout the Islamic world race was a vital issue as the Arabs and other the light-skinned groups had decidedly racist attitudes toward the blacks they conquered.¹⁴¹ Sociologist, Orlando Patterson, takes this racial factor to mean the assumption of innate differences based on real or imagined physical or other characteristics.¹⁴² Indeed, the Arabs had always considered Africans as specially suited to be their servants. Accordingly, there has been a distinct, though muted, feeling of racism which, as we shall later see, was evident in Arab practices and attitudes towards Africans. Racist views

¹³⁸ Ibid, 5.

¹³⁹ W.G. Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5.

¹⁴⁰ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), viii.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 176.

¹⁴² Ibid.

expressed by Arab Muslims, scholars, authors, and poets illustrated a deep root in public attitudes towards Africans.

The fact that Arabs enslaved Africans on a large scale over the course of several centuries is directly related to how they perceived them as a people in relation to themselves. Obviously, the Arabs considered Africans especially as being suited for enslavement. Arbitrarily uprooting them from their indigenous societies and transporting them across thousands of miles of ocean and desert resulted in innumerable deaths and inconceivable psychological trauma for those that survived this forerunner of the middle passages of Europe's Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Taking into consideration the elements of cause and effect between slavery and racism, it seems that noted twentieth century historian of the Caribbean, Eric Williams' argument that: "Slavery was not born of racism, rather racism was the consequence of slavery" find validity in the Arab Islamic institution of slavery as well.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 7.

III. BLACK SLAVES REVOLT DURING ABBASID REIGN

Formation of the Baghdad Caliphate:

Originally the term “Arab” was used to reference the pale skinned inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula that spoke Arabic and practiced the Muslim religious tradition.¹⁴⁴ By the ninth century, Arab conquest had resulted in the diminishing of the “pure” Arab’s social superiority for two reasons. The first contributing factor to this was the population’s general background of universal biological miscegenation, stimulated by polygamy. It was not uncommon for many of the Abbasid Caliphs to be born of slave mothers of Turkish or Slav descent; however, ancestry traced was through the father’s line which remained a “pure Arab” descent.¹⁴⁵ Thus, under the Abbasid Dynasty, the word “Arab” lost its former prestige as the Arabs were diluted by blood. The second factor was the spread of the Arabic language to the Muslim masses throughout the Islamic world. The expansion of the Islamic empire (stretching from Spain to Western Asia), resulted in the Arabs taking control of world trade and the spread of the Arabic language. Thus, as the masses began to convert to Islam and began speaking Arabic, not only was one of the world’s first universal civilizations created but the term “Arab”

¹⁴⁴ Joel Carmichael, *The Shaping of the Arabs: A Study in Ethnic Identity*. (New York: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1967), 128.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

began to lose its tangibility. Nonetheless, the Arabs of the peninsula and the Arab aristocrats of the Bedouin tribes retained a personal arrogance for belonging to the people that had produced the prophet, the Quran, and Islam itself. Still they maintained the success of the Arabic language that was spoken throughout their vast empire by Muslim Persians, Turks, Jews, Africans, Greeks, and so on.¹⁴⁶

The Zanj Rebellion took place in the middle of the ninth century in a vast empire ruled by the Caliphs of the Abbasid dynasty, who had been in power for over a century. The Abbasid Caliphate is commonly referred to as the Baghdad Caliphate, named after its capital city. Baghdad, officially named *Madinat as-Salam* (The City of Peace), was founded in 762 at the site of a small town known as Isuq Baghdad, “the market of Baghdad,” by al-Mansur, the second Abbasid Caliph.¹⁴⁷ al-Mansur chose this location primarily because of its close proximity to a navigable canal linking the Tigris and the Euphrates, which made it a central position on the intersecting trade routes. The Abbasid Dynasty was comprised descendants of Abbas, who was an uncle of the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁴⁸ Thus belonging to “the house of Allah’s apostle,” Abu-l-Abbas founded the Abbasid Dynasty in 749 and led a rebellion slaughtering all members of the Umayyad clan, the current Caliphate Dynasty in power.¹⁴⁹ With only the infants escaping with their lives, the Abbasids delivered retribution not only to the living Umayyads, but even the corpses of past Caliphs of the now fallen dynasty. According to twentieth century

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 130.

¹⁴⁷ E. A. Belyaev, *The Arabs, Islam, and the Arab Caliphate in the Early Middle Ages*. (New York: Frederick a. Praeger Inc., Publishers, 1969), 197.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid 206.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 197.

historian, E. A. Belyaev, the corpse of Caliph Hisham was taken from its tomb, whipped, crucified, burned, and the ashes were thrown into the wind.¹⁵⁰

Dying of smallpox in his early thirties, Caliph Abu-l-Abbas (749-754), designated his brother al-Mansur (754-775) as his successor and he became to be the chief organizer of the Abbasid Caliphate. During his reign, the political roles of Persian feudal lords increased as they served as *vizirs* (prime ministers) of the Caliph and oversaw the administration of the Caliphate. al-Mansur's great grandson, Caliph al-Ma'mun (813-833) achieved fame for his cultural achievements. First, he commissioned the translation of classical Greek and Hellenistic science and philosophy, which made this scholarship accessible to Arabic-reading scholars. Second, his leadership resulted in the formation of "rationalistic" Islamic doctrine and marked the beginning of Muslim theology. The reign of al-Ma'mun would appropriately come to be called the "House of Wisdom."¹⁵¹

The period following the death of Caliph al-Ma'mun has been referred to the beginning of the Caliphate's dislocation. With the Caliphate's capital being moved to the city of Sammarra on the Tigris for a short period and back to Baghdad in 833, the empire found itself struggling to maintain authority over the provinces and territories that formerly belonged to the Caliphate under previous dynasties. The Caliph's authority had been in steady decline as governors began to break away and create their own independent states and dynasties. First, the Iberian Peninsula came under control of the Cordova Umayyad Dynasty. In the late eighth century, the Caliphate lost present day

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 199.

Morocco to the Idrisid Dynasty (788-985) and North Africa (Maghrib) to the Aghlabid Dynasty (800-909). Thus during the first century of Abbasid rule, the Caliphal autocracy was merely a political reality in Baghdad as independent states were formed in North Africa, central Asia, Afghanistan, and Persia.

By 869, the year of the Zanj Rebellion, Baghdad was the center of the Abbasid Caliphate's economy. At this time, the main branch of production was agriculture, which functioned in direct relation to artificial irrigation agriculture in southern Iraq. The Arabs had an old saying that "Where the water ends, the land ends." As such, the Abbasids took an strong interest in the development of lower Mesopotamia.¹⁵² It was in southern Iraq where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers facilitated the building of dams, dikes, and canals that formed an extensive irrigation network. Irrigational agriculture produced large yields of grain and palm trees produced sweet dates. Cotton, millet, lentils, melons, watermelons, onions, sugar beet, and rice were also grown on a large scale.¹⁵³ The widespread use of slave labor in agriculture and irrigation was essential to the economy, as enslaved labor irrigated virgin land, drained swamps, cleaned salt flats, harvested salt, and mined for metals.

While these lands were often received by their owners as rewards for services from the Caliphal government, the Caliph was still seen as the representative of Allah on earth and paramount owner of all land and water in the state. Thus farmers "owned" the land, but the Caliph remained the autocratic ruler and farmers were expected to pay tribute and taxes on a regular basis to the Baghdad treasury. The Abbasid rulers'

¹⁵² Ibid, 205.

¹⁵³ Alexandre Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3rd/9th Century*. (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), 11.

concentration on agriculture, particularly in Iraq, led to agriculture providing more than 30% of the receipts of the state treasury.¹⁵⁴ Twenty-first century historian, Hugh Kennedy, notes that during this time, under Islamic law all reclaimed land brought under cultivation belonged to the man who made it productive.¹⁵⁵ This made reclamation a lucrative investment and caused a demand for slave labor for one of the rare instances of large scale agricultural slavery in the Islamic world.

At the intersection of commerce between the Far East, India, Europe, and Africa, Baghdad naturally became the center of the Abbasid Caliphate's economy. Commercial trade relationships formed as the empire was situated between the Mediterranean and the Indian oceans, as well as the Black and Red seas, and the Persian Gulf. Arab caravan traders became very familiar with routes crossing deserts, steppes and forests of the lower Sahara, where trade with West African societies yielded exchanges of salt for gold and large numbers of slaves. Also from black Africa (e.g. the Sudan and Sub-Saharan Africa), Arab traders acquired ivory, ostrich feathers, and animal skins.

In time, Basra became the largest trading port in Iraq as well as a major international maritime trading port and played a key role in the development of the East African slave trade.¹⁵⁶ Beginning as early as the seventh century, enslaved Africans were exported in steady numbers from East Africa to ports like Basra. Exported from ports on the East Africa coast, merchant ships brought ivory, precious woods, gold dust, precious

¹⁵⁴ E. A. Belyaev, *The Arabs, Islam, and the Arab Caliphate in the Early Middle Ages*. (New York: Frederick a. Praeger Inc., Publishers, 1969), 206.

¹⁵⁵ Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*. (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), 177.

¹⁵⁶ Mark Horton and John Middleton. *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers. 2000), 73.

stones, and slaves to the Abbasid Empire. These enslaved Africans, from the Eastern African coast, which stretched from Ethiopia, through Somalia, down to Mozambique, came to be known as the Zanj.¹⁵⁷

Figure 3 – Map of the Abbasid Empire¹⁵⁸

The feudal society of the Abbasid Caliphate was indeed slave holding. Following the early conquests of Islam, the slave regime was not merely retained but expanded. As empire’s capital city of Baghdad grew, the resulting the decay of rural communities meant that slaves were needed to be used in the modes of production that required the most labor.¹⁵⁹ They were especially required for artificial irrigation, mining, and crafting that involved hard labor. Thus the labor demand and widespread development of

¹⁵⁷ E. A. Belyaev, *The Arabs, Islam, and the Arab Caliphate in the Early Middle Ages*. (New York: Frederick a. Praeger Inc., Publishers, 1969), 216.

¹⁵⁸ “‘Abbāsīd Dynasty,” Last modified October 24, 2014. <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Abbasid-dynasty>.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 240.

domestic slavery were met by an active slave trade. Slave ships and caravans grew crowded with slaves from the Eastern Europeans and Western Asians in the North and Africans to the South. While the Arabs enslaved whites as well as blacks, particularly large numbers of black slaves arrived in Basra from the East African coastline, presumably due to Basra's immediate proximity to trade in the Indian Ocean. Ships carried slaves from the ports of Somalia and Zanzibar to Basra where Arab and Persian slavers would be waiting to inspect and purchase them. By the ninth century, many of these black slaves were selected to serve in domestic capacities and service in the Caliphal military. However, tens of thousand were taken to southern Iraq where they worked on state lands and private estates. These African slaves would be called the Zanj.

Origins of the People called “Zanj”:

When the tenth century geographer, al-Musudi, spoke of the Zanj it was in reference to Africans along the Indian Ocean coastline from the Horn to Mozambique.¹⁶⁰ By that time, the people populating the area were primarily Bantu migrants who had moved eastward to settle the thriving commercial ports that held an integral role in the trading world of the Indian Ocean.¹⁶¹ These people called Zanj were said to control trade between the African interior and ports on the coast.¹⁶² Musudi noted that the: “The Sea of the Zanj reaches down to the country of Sofala (modern day Mozambique), which

¹⁶⁰ Basil Davidson, *The African Past: Chronicles from Antiquity to Modern Times*. (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press Book, 1964) 107.

¹⁶¹ Robert O. Collins, *Eastern African History*. (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997), 3.

¹⁶² Martin Meredith, *The Fortunes of Africa: A 5,000 Year History of Wealth, Greed, and Endeavor*. (New York: Public Affairs, 2014) 82.

produces gold in abundance and other marvels. It is warm and ... Their country is divided by valleys, mountains, and stony deserts, which are abound in wild elephants.”¹⁶³

Writing in the twenty-first century historian, Martin Meredith, suggests that the “Land of Zanj” was a familiar destination for Arab and Persian sea captains travelling the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, the Zanj coast was renowned for its valuable trade items of ivory, rhinoceros horns, tortoiseshell, leopard skins, rock crystal, gold dust from the “Land of Sofala” far to the south, and slaves.¹⁶⁴ Using the seasonal monsoon winds of the Indian Ocean, merchant ships from Arabia and Persia set sail from the north-east from November until March and return home when the winds changed in April. Through international trade, East African towns became increasingly prosperous with the wealth merchant elite constructing house of coral stone and purchasing luxury items of pottery, glass, porcelain, cloth, beads, cooking pots, and brass oil lamps.¹⁶⁵

The meaning and origins of the term “Zanj” has been debated amongst scholars for decades. Ghada Hashem Talhami in her article, “*The Zanj Rebellion Reconsidered*,” argues that the Zanj rebellion was not a majority African rebellion and sought to determine the exact ethnic origin of the Zanj.¹⁶⁶ “Zanj” does not refer to a specific ethnic group, rather it is a term that was imparted to Africans by Arab and Persian foreigners that visited the East Coast of Africa. The earliest mention of Zanj in Africa was found in an excerpt from the Arab astronomer al-Fazari around 780 C.E.¹⁶⁷ Initially, the term

¹⁶³ Basil Davidson, *The African Past: Chronicles from Antiquity to Modern Times*. (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press Book, 1964), 108.

¹⁶⁴ Martin Meredith, *The Fortunes of Africa: A 5,000 Year History of Wealth, Greed, and Endeavor*. (New York: Public Affairs, 2014) 81.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 82.

¹⁶⁶ Ghada Hashem Talhami, "The Zanj Rebellion Reconsidered." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 10:3 (1977): 460.

¹⁶⁷ Marina Tolmacheva, “Toward a Definition of the Term Zanj,” *Azania: Journal of the British Institute of History and Archaeology in East Africa* 21:1 (1986): 108.

clearly meant those Africans who originated in Eastern Africa and practiced pagan religion. As conquest expanded the Islamic empire, the meaning of the term came to be a general term for all blacks regardless of region of origin.¹⁶⁸ Meredith suggests that Arab merchants gave it its name, meaning “Land of the Blacks.”¹⁶⁹ Unfortunately, Arab and Persian geographers often incorrectly applied the names of multiple regions and ethnic groups of African peoples.¹⁷⁰

Figure 4 – Map of “The Land of the Zanj”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 109.

¹⁶⁹ Martin Meredith, *The Fortunes of Africa: A 5,000 Year History of Wealth, Greed, and Endeavor*. (New York: Public Affairs, 2014) 81.

¹⁷⁰ Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias, “Models of the World and Categorical Models: The “Enslavable Barbarian” as a Mobile Classificatory Label.” in *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa: Vol. 1*, ed. John Ralph Willis, (London: Routledge, 1986), 31.

¹⁷¹ Niti Bhan, “Trade in East Africa – A very short introduction to a very long history” Emerging Futures Lab. Accessed April 6, 2016. <http://nitibhan.com/2015/12/04/trade-in-east-africa-a-very-short-introduction-to-a-very-long-history/>

The term eventually transitioned from its original ethnic and geographic designation and acquired religious, cultural and linguistic nuances none of which may have been part of its original meaning.¹⁷² By the ninth century, the time of the Zanj Rebellion, the term “Zanj” was distinctly used by the Caliphate to refer to slaves and sets of Africans belonging to a specific socioeconomic category. It also commonly entailed a connotation of dependence and inferiority. In most cases “Zanj” carried a negative connotation with an implication of inferiority; furthermore, in Persian the term “Zangi” could describe a fool or a simpleton.¹⁷³ The term became a “free floating” classificatory label and the stereotype of the Zanj as an enslavable barbarian was available to justify either slavery or servile status.¹⁷⁴ While there has been much debate around the term, Bernard Lewis delivered a concise opinion that has been accepted by a number of scholars when he wrote that: “the word Zanj refers strictly to the natives of East Africa (south of Ethiopia), and thence more generally to Bantu-speaking African.”¹⁷⁵

A number of Arab travelers and scholars from the medieval era have left accounts regarding the Zanj. Much of the information describing the characteristics of the Zanj and their way of life are rather anecdotal. Influenced by the second century Greek doctor, Galen, Arab geographer al-Musudi attributed ten special characteristics to the Zanj: “black complexion, kinky hair, flat nose, thick lips, slender hands and feet, fetid odor, limited intelligence, extreme exuberance, cannibalistic customs.”¹⁷⁶ As such, the Zanj

¹⁷² Marina Tolmacheva, “Toward a Definition of the Term Zanj,” *Azania: Journal of the British Institute of History and Archaeology in East Africa* 21:1 (1986): 113.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 109.

¹⁷⁴ Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias, “Models of the World and Categorical Models: The “Enslavable Barbarian” as a Mobile Classificatory Label.” in *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa: Vol. 1*, ed. John Ralph Willis, (London: Routledge, 1986), 42.

¹⁷⁵ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Color in Islam*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971), 16.

¹⁷⁶ Alexandre Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3rd/9th Century*. (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), 16.

were consistently characterized as different, backwards, and uncivilized to the Arabs of the era. Alexandre Popovic notes Bakoui, who furthers the Galen's ten characteristics of the Zanj, stating: "They differ from other men by their black color, their flat nose, the thickness of their lips, the thickness of their hands, by their odor, by their quickness to anger, their lack of intellect, their habit of eating one another and their enemies."¹⁷⁷

According to the Arab cosmographer Kazouini, the term 'exuberance' is intended to mean that one never sees a worried Zanj since they abandon themselves to gaiety and are incapable of sorrow. Kazouini, goes on to state that "Doctors say this is because of the equilibrium of the blood from the heart or, according to others, because the star Soheil (Canope) rises over their head every night and this star has the power to give rise to gaiety..."¹⁷⁸ This also demonstrates the dehumanization of the Zanj by the Arabs.

Among other things the Zanj were depicted as evil, cannibals, ugly, idolaters, cruel; they are go naked most of the time; they were great fighters; and they venerated the Arabs.¹⁷⁹

According to Suliman Bashear, an isolated tradition attributed to the Prophet was the blunt statement that "a Zanji is an ass."¹⁸⁰ Additionally there was a common proverb attributed, sometime attributed to the Prophet, claiming that: "The hungry Zanj steals; the sated Zanj rapes."¹⁸¹ Even the notable Arabic author of the ninth century, al- Jahiz, himself of African descent, described the Zanj as "the least intelligent and the least discerning of mankind" and held that they were "the worst of men and most vicious of creatures in character and temperament."¹⁸² Another prevalent attitude toward the Zanj

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 17.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 16.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 18.

¹⁸⁰ Suliman Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam*. (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1997), 86.

¹⁸¹ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Color in Islam*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971), 19.

¹⁸² John Alemillah Azumah, *Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa*. (Oxford: One world Publishers, 2001), 139.

“perceives of them as the worst of creatures, and their physique as ruined by the heart of their homeland, a which has caused them to be burned in the womb.”¹⁸³ It was common for the Zanj to be generally stereotyped as stupid, the cheapest slave in the market, cheerful for no apparent reason, thieves, ignorant to Arabic, and possessing no memory.¹⁸⁴ It would stand that over a century prior the Zanj Rebellion in 869, an eighth century tradition attributed to Anbasa al-Basri, would charge that: “The worst of slaves are the Zanj.”¹⁸⁵

The Revolt of the Zanj:

Importation of enslaved Africans increased dramatically following the rise of Islam in the early seventh century since the new religion prohibited the enslavement of Arabs and other Muslims. These Africans from the East Africans numbered in the tens of thousands. While many scholars agreed that the Zanj were mostly Bantu speaking Africans, twentieth century historian, Vinigi L. Grottanelli, suggests that it is perfectly possible that some of the blacks involved in the revolt have been taken from the pre-Nilotic tribes of western Ethiopia.¹⁸⁶ In southern Iraq, the Zanj were subjected to extremely harsh labor in a brutal climate and malaria-infested swamps, which resulted in high mortality rates among them. They lived in dirty huts (possibly African styled), haphazardly made of reeds and palm leaves. The Zanj were forced to dig ditches, drain marshland that had become overgrown with reeds, clean salt flats by removing the salt

¹⁸³ Suliman Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam*. (Princeton: The Darwin Press. 1997), 82.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 21.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 83.

¹⁸⁶ Vinigi L. Grottanelli, “The Peopling of the Horn of Africa,” in *East Africa and the Orient: Cultural Syntheses in Pre-Colonial Times*, ed. Neville H. Chittick and Robert I. Rotberg. (New York: Africana Publishing Company. 1975), 72.

crust, procure saltpeter and extract salt from seawater.¹⁸⁷ Following their reclamation efforts, they were also used to work the agricultural land on cotton and sugar cane plantations.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore they were only given a few handfuls of flour, semolina, and dates. The poor conditions in which they lived, developed in them a group spirit, and their great number, amounting to many thousands, gave them a consciousness of their own strength.

Underfed, treated harshly by their taskmasters, and perennial victims to recurrent malarial epidemics and other diseases, the Zanj harbored a burning resentment, which they expressed in a number of revolts. The first rebellion occurred in 689 and was quickly suppressed by the caliphal forces. Five years later the Zanj rose up again in rebellion led by an African named Riyah, traditionally remembered as the “Lion of the Zanj.”¹⁸⁹ Attracting many followers, and successfully engaging and defeating the government forces, they terrorized the Euphrates but were eventually put down by the caliphal army.

By the ninth century, the Zanj worked in gangs of 500 to 5,000 men, called “sweepers” and were quartered in villages, owned by wealthy absentee slave masters, that were scattered throughout the flats.¹⁹⁰ As more and more slaves arrived from East Africa, grievances mounted and tension rose. The majority of scholarly accounts of the rebellion suggest that only shrewd and courageous leadership was needed to spark the revolt. In

¹⁸⁷ E. A. Belyaev, *The Arabs, Islam, and the Arab Caliphate in the Early Middle Ages*. (New York: Frederick a. Praeger Inc., Publishers, 1969), 240.

¹⁸⁸ Erik Gilbert and Jonathan T. Reynolds. *Africa in World History: From Prehistoric to the Present*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2012), 131.

¹⁸⁹ Alexandre Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3rd/9th Century*. (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), 22.

¹⁹⁰ Udjang Tholib. “The Economic Factors of the ‘Abbasid Decline During the Buwayhid Rule In the Fourth/Tenth Century.” *Al-Jami’ah*, 47:2 (2009): 355.

September 869 C.E., the Zanj were called to revolt by a free Persian named Ali ibn Muhammad, who claimed to be descended from Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. Before coming to the south, Ali first went to Baghdad with his most capable general, the black freeman, Sulayman ibn Jami.¹⁹¹ In Baghdad, Ali questioned and recruited a number of slaves that were entrusted by their masters to travel between Basra and Baghdad to sell goods. He appealed to a slave named Rayhan ibn Salih, who was in charge of his master's slaves in Basra. Promising to make Rayhan a commander, Ali instructed him to "Induce as many slaves as you can to join and bring them to me."¹⁹² Agreeing to do so, Rayhan returned the next day along with another slave, named Rafiq, who brought with him, as instructed, a banner written upon it in red and green letter "God has purchased the souls of believers and their property, for they have attained to paradise fighting in the way of God."¹⁹³

Early on the Saturday morning of September 9, 869, Ali set out initially to intercept a group of fifty slaves, who shared the same owner as Rayhan, on their way to work. Ordering their leader to be seized, they went on to another work site where they did the same thing, this time liberating and recruiting five-hundred slaves to the cause.¹⁹⁴ The next site yielded one-hundred fifty Zanj, and the next eighty. According to ninth century historian, al-Tabari, Ali and the rebel army continued to operate in this fashion for the rest of the day. In an address to the Zanj, Ali appealed to them by speaking of their miserable condition and that he wanted to improve their lot so that one day they too

¹⁹¹ Theodor Nöldeke, *Sketches from Eastern History*. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892) 147.

¹⁹² Al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabarī, Volume XXXVI: The Revolt of the Zanj, A.D. 869–879/A.H. 255–265*, trans. by David Waines. (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 35.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 36.

¹⁹⁴ Alexandre Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3rd/9th Century*. (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), 40.

would have beautiful homes and slaves.¹⁹⁵ He promised them wealth and swore that he never never betray or fail to support them. After refusing the offers made by the imprisoned slave masters and overseers, Ali ordered the Zanj to give each one of them five-hundred lashes with whips of palm branches. After the punishment, he released the slave owners and sent them on their way to Basra making them vow not to reveal to anyone his whereabouts or the number of troops gathered.

Once started in 869, the rebellion spread, gaining extraordinary victories and strengthening their ranks with liberated slaves. By the end of the rebellion's first year, it is said that fifteen thousand slaves joined the Zanj rebel army.¹⁹⁶ The Zanj numbers grew constantly, and Ali appointed officers by promising them any man they recruited to the cause. In one of their first significant battles, the poorly equipped Zanj fended off an imperial troop of four thousand men. One Zanj rebel was purportedly seen charging into battle only carrying a plate as a weapon.¹⁹⁷ From these victories, the Zanj gained supplies such as weapons, horses, boats, and most importantly food. Following these early victories, Ali addressed the Zanj rebel army and through several interpreters, swore that none of them would ever be returned to their former masters for any price. He added, "May some of you remain with me and kill me if you feel that I am betraying you."¹⁹⁸ He also assured them that it was not for his own wealth and gain that he started this rebellion; however, most scholars agree that Ali was merely an opportunist that was attempting to amass his own wealth and personal interests.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 46.

¹⁹⁶ E. A. Belyaev, *The Arabs, Islam, and the Arab Caliphate in the Early Middle Ages*. (New York: Frederick a. Praeger Inc., Publishers, 1969), 242.

¹⁹⁷ Alexandre Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3rd/9th Century*. (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), 46.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 48.

The Zanj rebel army were joined by hundreds of liberated slaves after each successful battle.¹⁹⁹ Additionally, Theodor Nöldeke suggests the rebellion was joined by several fugitive slaves from the surrounding villages and towns. He goes on to note an occasion when in battle against the Caliphal army, a division of military soldiers came

Figure 5 –Map of Iraq During the Zanj Rebellion²⁰⁰

upon a contingent of nearly unarmed Zanj rebels and three hundred blacks military slaves went over and joined the Zanj.²⁰¹ al-Tabari notes a runaway slave being brought to Ali and stating, “I have only come to you from a strong desire to be in your company.”²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 45.

²⁰⁰ Wikimedia Commons, “Zanj Rebellion.” Last modified June 16, 2015. Accessed April 6, 2016. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zanj_Rebellion.svg.

²⁰¹ Theodor Nöldeke, *Sketches from Eastern History*. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), 153.

²⁰² al-Tabari, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume XXXVI: The Revolt of the Zanj, A.D. 869–879/A.H. 255–265*, trans. by David Waines. (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 61.

Additionally, the insurrection benefited greatly from black military slaves who defected to join the ranks of the Zanj from imperial troops sent to crush the rebellion. As a result, this enriched the insurrection with arms, supplies, and well trained man power. Aside from bravery, the Zanj's great achievements were due in part to their excellent leadership and fighting tactics.

The Zanj army was composed of three corps, a navy, an infantry, and a cavalry. All three were commanded by Ali's generals, each with their own horsemen and colored flags.²⁰³ They fought in the familiar marshes and canals of the south, in which they took full advantage of. In the marshy terrain, the Zanj found an environment that was ideal for guerrilla warfare. According to Nöldeke, it was Zanj's peculiar mode of fighting out of concealed side channels shielded by heavily over grown reeds that contributed to the success of their military tactics.²⁰⁴ Night attacks became a signature for the Zanj and their many successful raids and their knowledge of the area made them nearly impenetrable to the Caliphate's large cavalry army of Turks.²⁰⁵ Even Zanj women were commissioned to gather and throw bricks in battle. The women were also ordered to keep the men supplied during battles.²⁰⁶ Underestimating these forces and unable to send enough troops to suppress the Zanj due to other pressing military operations, the imperial forces fell especially to the Zanj's unique fighting style – namely charging out of concealed side channels heavily overgrown with reeds, to ambush the troops as they rowed along canals and rivers.

²⁰³ Alexandre Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3rd/9th Century*. (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), 136.

²⁰⁴ Theodor Nöldeke, *Sketches from Eastern History*. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), 154.

²⁰⁵ Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*. (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), 178.

²⁰⁶ al-Tabari, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume XXXVI: The Revolt of the Zanj, A.D. 869–879/A.H. 255–265*, trans. by David Waines. (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 65

After a failed assault on Basra, the Zanj established their own capital city, al-Mukhtara (the Elect City), situated on a dry plain south east of Basra. Twentieth century historian, David Brion Davis, suggests this may have been the first “maroon” community in recorded history.²⁰⁷ It was located south of Basra on the west bank of the Tigris and was intersected by the Abil-khasib canal, and many other canals surrounded it. Because of the constantly changing water-courses in that region it is not likely that this cite will ever be made out again. A large iron chain and two huge barriers closed the entrance to the main canal which was divided by two bridges. Walls fitted out with catapults surrounded the city, which was filled with houses of brick and palm leaves, and several palaces made with bricks of baked clay. A portion of Ali’s palace had even been brought from a building in Basra.²⁰⁸ In the center of the city was a mosque, a prison, and several markets. The Zanj also minted their own currency as early as 871, which served to facilitate and improve trade with surrounding peasants and Bedouin merchants. Despite the spoils of war, the Zanj were heavily dependent on Bedouin merchants for agricultural produce, fruits, cattle, and fish.²⁰⁹ This proved fatal later on when the imperial army established a blockade and cut their access to these merchants and all external communication.

On September 7, 871, after a month of battling, the Zanj finally took the prized city of Basra and several surrounding villages. The Zanj scoured the city, setting it ablaze and when there were no victims left the Zanj abandoned Basra permanently. According al-Musudi, the Zanj army massacred many as three-hundred thousand men in

²⁰⁷ David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Bondage*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1984), 7.

²⁰⁸ Alexandre Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3rd/9th Century*. (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), 134.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

order to take the city.²¹⁰ The Zanj then cut off Baghdad's supplies from the south, intercepting the ships on the Tigris. Popovic notes that in 878, some members of the Zanj army reportedly intercepted and carried off the *kiswa* (the fabric cover which is changed every year) for the Ka'ba (the most famous sanctuary of Islam, called the "Temple" or the "House of God," *Bayt Allah*, located in about the middle of the Grand Mosque of Mecca).²¹¹ By 879, after capturing the city of Wasit and with the area under control, the seemingly unconquerable Zanj, extended their territory northward from southern Iraq to within seventy miles of Baghdad. This was the height of the Rebellion.

In 880, the caliphal army were freed of other pressing military preoccupations throughout the Abbasid empire and begin its final offensive. Led by the caliph's brother, al-Muwaffaq, the army was supported by a large river fleet, including: decked ships, barges and open boats to be used to penetrate through the channels and canals to the stronghold of the Zanj. Now the imperial army was able to seize the entire Zanj enclave with the exception of the capital, which was impregnable due to its natural and man-made fortifications. al-Muwaffaq, along with his son Abul-'Abbas (the future Caliph Mu'tadid), pushed the Zanj back south, eventually establishing a blockade of their capital city. He then strategically built a city named after himself, al-Muwaffaqiyya, facing the city of al-Mukhtara and began to destroy the fortress of the Zanj capital. al-Muwaffaq did this by commissioning his men to clear away the obstacles (i.e. bridges, dams, chains) that had prevent their sips from advancing into the waterways.²¹² He also hurled molten lead at al-Mukhtara's fortresses and used fireships against the bridges. Next, he exploited

²¹⁰ Alexandre Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3rd/9th Century*. (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), 63.

²¹¹ Ibid, 183.

²¹² Theodor Nöldeke, *Sketches from Eastern History*. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), 169.

the primary weakness of the Zanj by seizing the Bedouin merchants who supplied the Zanj, and effectively cutting off the rebels's resources. al-Muwaffaq also found success in luring some of the Zanj forces over to his ranks by offering them amnesty, a place in the imperial military, and most importantly promising that they would not be returned to their former masters.²¹³

Figure 6 – Coin from the Zanj Maroon City²¹⁴

The Zanj endured al-Muwaffaq's attacks for two years and on June 12, 883C.E., the Lu'lu, the commander in Northern Syria, wrote to al-Muwaffaq for permission to join

²¹³ Theodor Nöldeke, *Sketches from Eastern History*. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892),167.

²¹⁴ Walker, J. "A Rare Coin of the Zanj." (*The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 3 (1933): 651-655.)

him with his troops.²¹⁵ al-Muwaffaq approved the request and decided not to commence the final assault until Lu'lu arrived. Lu'lu's arrival with 10,000 men solidified the decisive assault on al-Mukhtara, as transport ships were stocked with readied troops and the waterways of the hostile area completely free of obstacles. On August 5, 883C.E., al-Muwaffaq is said to have led 50,000 men into battle to take the Zanj capital city.²¹⁶ After six more days of battle, al-Mukhtara was taken. Ali ibn Muhammad was captured, beheaded and his head was sent to Baghdad for presentation to the caliph. The Zanj Revolt, which had terrorized Iraq and undermined the Abbasid empire for nearly fifteen years, was finally suppressed. The final siege of the Zanj capital at al-Mukhtara took more than three years before it was breached and the caliph's armies were finally triumphant.

The fact that the Abbasid empire, the strongest administrative system in the Muslim world, struggled for fifteen years to suppress the Zanj revolt, indicates the massive nature of the insurrection as well as the underestimation of the clout of the revolt. Other than the Haitian Revolution, no other slave revolt in African history has proved to be as successful as the events that took place in the late ninth century. In response to the Zanj Revolt, large scale plantation slavery was never again practiced the Arab world and Basra along with southern Iraq fall into decline as the revolt paralyzed the trade and commerce and exposed the weakness of the political and military system of the caliphate.

²¹⁵ Alexandre Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3rd/9th Century*. (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), 119.

²¹⁶ Theodor Nöldeke, *Sketches from Eastern History*. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), 172.

Although the Zanj were of African descent, very few historians have considered race to be relevant in the study of the Zanj Rebellion. Traditionally historians have denied the relevancy of modern concepts of race. Instead they rely on Marxist theory to conclude that the Zanj Rebellion was exclusively a class struggle. A simple analysis shows that the the Zanj revolted because they could no longer remain under the oppressive rule of their Arab slave masters. One must wonder why, in such political unrest, Ali ibn Muhammad could appeal to the most oppressed group in ninth century Iraq's racialized social structure. Thus, although class is a relevant factor, the aim of this study is to show that one cannot thoroughly examine African slave rebellions, such as the Zanj Rebellion, without also examining the role of racial racialized social structures.

Furthermore, no historian analyzing the revolt has considered the racial elements that could have contributed to the revolt. Is it not likely that the enslaved Africans rebelled against the degradation and oppression they experienced as a result of their blackness? E. A. Belyaev asserts that the masses of the Zanj had no desire to adopt the religious teachings of Ali ibn Muhammad. He further notes that since they were from so many different regions of the African continent, speaking several different languages, it was impossible to find translators for all of them. Furthermore, he argues that for many of the Zanj, Ali ibn Muhammad was no more than a "dumb man" whose preachings they were deaf to.²¹⁷ Regarding this claim, perhaps the Zanj were caused to rebel by a sense of group solidarity based on the only common trait amongst them, their race. It must be noted that no historian to write on the Zanj has made mention of any white European and Turkish slaves participating in the rebellion. The Zanj rebellion was the result of several

²¹⁷ E. A. Belyaev, *The Arabs, Islam, and the Arab Caliphate in the Early Middle Ages*. (New York: Frederick a. Praeger Inc., Publishers, 1969), 243.

factors, and race was indeed one of them. In order to examine this racial element, a structural approach must be taken in order to analyze, the different racial groups in Iraq during this time, racialization process, racial stratification, and prevalent racial ideologies to determine whether the Zanj rebelled in contestation of their assigned position on in the racialized social structure.

IV. A STRUCTURAL APPROACH TO STUDYING HISTORICALLY RACIALIZED SOCIETIES

Scholars such as Eric Snowden have argued that the ancient world did not make race the focus of irrational sentiments or the basis of uncritical evaluation. He also posits that ancient societies did not commit the shameful error of biological racism and that black skin color was never a sign of inferiority.²¹⁸ What has followed is the widely accepted view that it is erroneous for scholars to read modern racial concepts into ancient documents to observe color prejudice. Additionally, this opinion of ancient societies being free of conceptions of race thus meaning that they were free of “racial” prejudice has been extended to all societies stretching from ancient Greece to fifteenth and sixteenth century Europe and the inception of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

Furthermore, as it pertains to the Zanj Rebellion and ninth century Iraq, scholars such as Bernard Lewis and Alexandre Popovic, among others, have suggested that race and notions of racism had absolutely no influence on sparking the Zanj Rebellion and that it is erroneous to project modern conceptions of race and racism into analysis of the Zanj.²¹⁹ As a result, reluctance to discuss notions of race has persisted in academia because of commonsense understandings of racism that have been developed by mainstream social scientists and critical analysts.

²¹⁸ Frank Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1983) 63.

²¹⁹ Alexandre Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3rd/9th Century*. (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999) 21.

Moreover, scholars have maintained ideological interpretations of racism that tend to reduce racial phenomena to a result of irrational ideologies held by members of a given society or as a derivation of class structures.²²⁰ According to these perspectives, racism is characterized as prejudice, a mental incapacity, or some sort of disease that causes individuals to discriminate against or feel that they are superior to another person because of the color of their skin. Sociologist, E. Franklin Frazier, demonstrates this conventional interpretation of racism in his argument that race prejudice involves a “mental conflict” and can lead to a form of insanity.²²¹ This one-dimensional perspective is grounded in what twenty-first century sociologist, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, calls the idealist view of racism. This prevailing framework narrowly depicts racism first as a set of ideas or beliefs. Next these beliefs are assumed to lead individuals and societies to develop prejudice in the form of negative attitudes towards an entire group of people, and ultimately these beliefs about racial groups form prejudicial attitudes that stimulate individuals to commit real actions or discrimination against other racial groups.

The idealist approach tends to focus on individual instances of racial discrimination that lead to racial harm. An example of this is illustrated in Kwame Anthony Appiah’s text, *In My Father’s House*, in which he presents two forms of racism that individuals can be susceptible to: extrinsic and intrinsic racism. Before defining these concepts, Appiah positions his doctrine of “racialism” as a presupposition of extrinsic and intrinsic racism.²²² Racialism is the view “that there are heritable characteristics,

²²⁰ Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers. 2001) 45.

²²¹ Edward Franklin Frazier, “The Pathology of Race Prejudice.” *The Forum*, (1927): 858.

²²² Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 13.

possessed by members of the human species, which allow us to divide them into a small set of races in such a way that all the members of these races share certain traits and tendencies that they do not share with members of any other race.”²²³ In other words, a racialist is an individual that believe that humankind can be be separated into races based on certain morphological traits and tendencies. These morphological traits and tendencies are used to constitute a race from what Appiah calls a “racial essence.”²²⁴ While Appiah considers racialism to be a false concept and considers it to be a cognitive rather than a moral issue, he suggests that racialism is not in itself a doctrine that must be dangerous. Accordingly, as it pertains to racists, though Appiah argues that not every racialist is a racist, he maintains that every racist is also a racialist.

Appiah defines extrinsic racism as the belief that members of different races differ in respects that warrant discrimination and different treatment.²²⁵ Extrinsic racists base their moral distinctions on differences between members of different racial groups because they believe the racial essences of particular races of men are predisposed to lack morally relevant qualities such as intelligent, honesty, and courage. Furthermore, Appiah claims that people can be cured of this form of racism once the proper evidence is provided disproving claims of inherent differences between races. Thus, once evidence is presented showing “that Negroes do not necessarily lack intellectual capacities” and that “Jews are not especially avaricious,” an extrinsic racist should be cured of his racism.²²⁶ However, if this evidence fails to change an extrinsic racist’s attitude substantially, then

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid, 14.

Appiah suggests that a cognitive incapacity exists and this person is also an intrinsic racist.

Appiah's second form of racism defines intrinsic racists as people who differentiate morally between members of different races, because they believe that each race has a different moral status.²²⁷ An intrinsic racist holds the belief that because a person is of the same race that there exists reason for preferring one person to another.²²⁸ For the intrinsic racist, there is no amount of sufficient evidence that a member of another race being capable of the moral, intellectual, or cultural achievement of members of their own race to justify treating a person of another race as they would members of their own race. Thus intrinsic racism is not a simple preference for one's own race, but also a moral doctrine that underlies differences in the treatment of people in contexts where moral evaluation is appropriate.²²⁹

Some alternative approaches to analyzing racism have transcended the individualizing ideological approach and have connected racism to larger social systems. While these perspectives have advanced the methods used to study racism and racialized societies, they nevertheless have limitations that make them unsuited for sufficiently analyzing racialized social structures. For example, the Marxist approach argues that class is the central variable of social life with class acting as the primary social dynamic. All social divisions such as race and gender are therefore considered secondary derivatives of class based economic struggles. Within this perspective, Marxist sociologist, Albert Szymanski, argues that racism is a "legitimizing ideology for an

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid, 19.

exploitative structure.”²³⁰ He goes on to state that racist ideologies are proliferated by the bourgeoisie in the media, educational system, and other institutions. When linked to the distribution of petty advantage within the working class, these ideologies cause disorganization amongst the working multiracial working class. As a result of the ensuing working class conflict and distraction, the bourgeoisie are able to more effectively exploit the majority group of workers.²³¹

Similarly, Marxist sociologist, Oliver C. Cox, in his text, *Caste, Class, and Race* defines racism as “a social attitude propagated among the public by an exploiting class for the purpose of stigmatizing some group as inferior so that the exploitation of either the group itself or its resources or both may be justified.”²³² Cox suggests that racism originates in the development of an ideology that culminates in an “erratic pattern of verbalizations cut free from any on-going social system.”²³³ Cox like all Marxists argues that racism is essentially a political-class conflict and “racial exploitation is merely one aspect of the problem of proletarianization of labor, regardless of color of the laborer.”²³⁴ Thus for Cox, racism exists merely to justify the humanly degrading treatment, and exploiting classes must argue that the proletariat is innately degraded and degenerate and naturally merit their conditions.²³⁵

Another Marxist approach is demonstrated in, sociologist, Edna Bonaciah’s split labor market argument, which suggests that race relations and racism are a result of intra-working class frictions that are the product of a labor market being separated along racial

²³⁰ Albert Szymanski, *Class Struggle: A Critical Perspective* (New York: Praeger Publications, 1983) 402.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Oliver C. Cox, *Caste, Class, and Race*. (New York: Doubleday, 1948) 393.

²³³ Oliver C. Cox, “Race Relations: Its meaning, beginning, and progress.” in *Theories of Race Racism: A Reader*, eds. Les Back and John Solomos, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 71.

²³⁴ Ibid, 73.

²³⁵ Ibid.

divisions.²³⁶ According to Bonaciah the split labor market occurs when there is “a difference in the price of labor between two or more groups of worker holding constant their efficiency and productivity.”²³⁷ Thus in the case of racial slavery, the enslaved racial group offers the cheapest priced labor.

While the Marxist perspective regards racism as an irrational ideology within a labor structure, there are those who rather see racism as constructing structures of domination based on race. This approach is demonstrated in Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s *Racial Formation in the United States*. Omi and Winant’s innovative theoretical approach to analyzing racial phenomena defines racial formation as a “vast summation of signifying actions and social structures, past and present that have combined and clashed in the creation of the enormous complex of relationships and identities that [are] labeled race.”²³⁸ Central to this approach is the notion that race “is a concept, a representation or signification of identity that refers to different types of human bodies, to the perceived corporeal and phenotypic markers of differences and the meanings and social practices that are ascribed to these differences.”²³⁹

According to Omi and Winant the construction of race and racial meanings must be understood as a universal phenomenon of categorizing humans on the basis of real or imagined attributes. Thus, through a complex process of selection, human physical characteristics (“real” or imagined) manifest as the basis to justify or reinforce social differentiation. Omi and Winant call this the concept of “Making Up People.” Race

²³⁶ Edna Bonacich, “Advanced Capitalism and Black/White Race Relations in the United States: A Split Labor Market Interpretation,” *American Sociological Review*, 41:1 (1976): 48.

²³⁷ Ibid, 36.

²³⁸ Michael Omi and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 13.

²³⁹ Ibid, 111.

then, for Omi and Winant, is not a mode of “differing” as much as it acts as an “othering” mechanism. Othering creates and justifies subordinate status and unequal treatment in order to structure oppression and exploitation.

Furthermore, the construction and categorizing of individuals into racial groups as viewed by Omi and Winant are the result of the racialization process. They define racialization as “the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group.”²⁴⁰ Accordingly, racialization transpires in large-scale and small-scale levels, which are demonstrated in how race shapes all spheres of social life (macro-socially) and shapes the identities of individual actors (micro-socially).²⁴¹ Racialization on the large-scale can be observed as the foundation and consolidation of the modern world-system. This can be seen historically in that conquest and colonization of the western hemisphere, African slavery, and abolition have all involved profuse and profound extensions of racial meanings into the new social terrain. On the smaller-scale the process of “making up people” also operates as customary form of racialization. Small scale processes, such as racial profiling, may be understood as a form of racialization since the act involves racial categories having meanings attached to them that are constructed using pre-existing conceptual elements that have crystalized through religious, scientific, and political ideologies and projects.

It follows then that these categories formed in the racialization process are used to advance the concept of what Omi and Winant call “racial projects,” which they define as “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political,

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 111.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 30.

cultural) along particular racial lines.”²⁴² Racial projects are attempts to shape how identities and social structures are racially signified and how racial meaning is embedded in social structures. These racial projects are viewed as the building blocks in the racial formation process since they occur at both the large macro scale with racial policy making and also at the smaller scale of everyday experience and personal interaction.²⁴³ Thus racial projects are carried out both by dominant groups and subordinate groups as well as by institutions and persons.

Furthermore, Omi and Winant argue that a racial project can be deemed as racist “if it creates or reproduces structures of domination based on racial significations and identities.”²⁴⁴ They suggest that every racial project is both a reflection and a response to the broader patterning of race in the social structure.²⁴⁵ Therefore, every racial project that is carried out represents an effort to either reproduce, extend, undermine, or challenge the current racialized social system. Finally, Omi and Winant review racial formation in the United States to determine how the social structure has been racially organized and ruled. They consider the historical transitions from racial despotism and domination to modern notions of racial democracy and colorblindness in the United States as the primary framework for contemporary racial rule.²⁴⁶ The Racial Formation approach represents a theoretical breakthrough in the area of studying race. This approach, wisely takes into consideration concepts of race, racialization, and the process

²⁴² Ibid, 125.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 128.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 132,

of contestation of racial meanings and stratification in order to reorganize the racial dynamics by institutions and individuals in racialized societies.²⁴⁷

Although, the Idealist, Marxist, and Racial Formation approaches to analyzing race and racism in given societies are useful, their limitations remain. Appiah's notions of intrinsic and extrinsic racism provide an example of how the study of racism has been reduced to a social psychology focused on individual actors. Here racism is characterized as irrational ideas and beliefs that are induced by ignorance, defective sets of morals and cognitive incapacities. Similar approaches have led to clinical approaches to studying racial attitudes that are concerned with identifying individual racists and non-racists in a given society. Bonilla-Silva argues that if racism is confined to individual belief and behavior, the usual response is to seek to punish or educate racist individuals.

Approaches similar to Appiah's that portray racism as an individualized phenomenon also fail to connect racial beliefs and attitudes to a social system of racial domination. Racism is then bound to notions of morality and attitudes as opposed to the structural measures taken to socially stratify groups that are look upon negatively. Thus, if racism is not linked to a social structure but rather to individuals, it risks advancing the notion that social institutions cannot be racist. Furthermore, in this approach, racist individuals are stigmatized, which encourages the notion that societies as a whole cannot be racist.

The Marxist view on race relations and racism indeed also has its flaws and limitations. First, Bonilla-Silva suggests that racism is embedded but lacks novel foundations in the social structure. Both Szymanski and Cox view racism as being

²⁴⁷ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 30.

advanced by the bourgeoisie and regard it to be a baseless ideology that lacks actual racial foundations. As a result, the social structure is barred from being identified simply as racist but is rather seen as classist that simply uses race. Next, the Marxist approach also maintains an ideological approach, since racism is believed to be merely a dividing mechanism for the working class, and racial strife is viewed as being derived from false interests.²⁴⁸ As a result, the material interests of minority racial groups in the working class are viewed as actually being the same as the working class as a whole. Racism then is regarded as the result of irrational ideologies that merely divide the working class struggle against the bourgeoisie and again the social structure is overlooked.

Bonaciah's approach particularly falls short because of her failure to acknowledge that racism can be expressed by members of the dominant racial group who are also members of the working class. One of Bonilla-Silva's critiques is that, since the interests for working class racial groups are not viewed as independent of the proletariat, Marxists fail to deliver in-depth analysis of the politics and ideologies of race.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, since race specific issues of the working class are viewed as baseless ideologies, race is not believed to be able to act independently to effect social life. Thus, a deficiency in the Marxist approach is demonstrated in its inability to acknowledge that racial groups experience positions of subordination and superordination in racialized societies and develop different interests that manifest in racial contestation (e.g. the interests of slaves and free working class whites may differ).²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 25.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation," *American Sociological Review* 62:3 (1997): 475.

While Omi and Winant's Racial Formation approach wisely takes into consideration racialization, contestation of racial meanings and stratification in order to reorganize the racial dynamics by institutions and individuals in racialized societies, it still possesses significant limitations.²⁵¹ First, Omi and Winant provide limited discussion of the domination and racial stratification that occur following the racialization process. The resulting racial stratification from racialization establishes race as an independent criterion for vertical hierarchy. Thus, Bonilla-Silva argues that Omi and Winant are neglectful in acknowledging that race, as a social construct like gender and class, possesses its own independent effects on social life. The second limitation is demonstrated in the role of irrational racial ideologies in racial formation. While the racial formation approach emphasizes the meanings that come to be associated with categorized racial groups, there is limited mention of how social relations are organized by the persistence of racial ideologies. Although it has been stated that idealist views of racism lead to narrow analyses of racialized social structures, Omi and Winant's racial formation places a large focus on the construction of racial identities and neglects the integral role of racial ideologies in maintaining current racial stratifications formed based on interests of the dominant racial group.

Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva suggests that the most appropriate method for studying race and racism is through a structural view. His Structural Theory of Racism positions racism not as a psychological phenomenon to be examined at the individual level, nor simply as irrational thinking, but rather as a racialized social system with specific mechanisms, practices, and social relations that produce and reproduce racial

²⁵¹ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers. 2001), 30.

inequality at all levels. According to Bonilla-Silva, this approach allows analysts to show how all groups are interconnected and how racialized social structures shape the life chances of every racial group in a society. Transcending individualized understandings of race and racism, the structural approach analyses multiple institutions in an ongoing process that produces racialized outcomes.²⁵² In other words, Bonilla-Silva's focus is on the process of racialization in social structures. Overall, the structural approach places emphasis on how race is originally constructed, articulated, and contested in a given society, which allows for a historically-specific analysis of racialized societies.²⁵³

The term *racialized social systems* refers to social structures in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races.²⁵⁴ By race Bonilla-Silva is referring to people categorized or grouped based on phenotypical characteristics such as skin color and hair texture in order to denote group distinction.²⁵⁵ He also suggests: "Race like other socially constituted categories is a human creation and thus exhibits a high degree of malleability and permeability not seen, for instance, in biologically determined categories."²⁵⁶ Furthermore, while it is true that race is not a scientific truth, a closer analysis reveals that it is indeed a social, political, and historical reality.²⁵⁷ Thus because race is a social construct that is based on a hierarchal system, there is a meaning accompanying each racial stratification and focus must be placed on the meaningful consequences of race.

²⁵² John A. Powell, "Structural Racism: Building upon the Insights of John Calmore," *North Carolina Law Review* 86:3 (2008): 793.

²⁵³ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation," *American Sociological Review*, 62:3 (1997): 475.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 469.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 472.

²⁵⁶ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "The Essential Social Fact of Race," *American Sociological Review*, 64:6 (1999): 901.

²⁵⁷ M.K. Asante. *Afrocentricity*. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1988) 95.

Historically the classification of people in racial terms has been primarily a political act linked to conquest, colonization, or enslavement.²⁵⁸ The creation of such classifications entail a dialectical process of construction; moreover, the creation of an “other,” also involves the creation of a category of “same.”²⁵⁹ For example, if blacks in early Islamic history have been traditionally defined as natural candidates for slavery, then Arabs are defined as free subjects. Thus, by characterizing another subordinate racial group, according to sociologist, Herbert Blumer, the dominant racial group by opposition is defining their own group.²⁶⁰ Bonilla-Silva argues that all racialized social systems place people in racial categories involving some sort of hierarchy which places one race in the superior position to enjoy certain privileges.²⁶¹ This process of racialization is always hierarchal; and the race ascribed with the superior position (i.e. the Arab) enjoys social, political, economic, and psychological advantages over the group or groups ascribed with inferior positions.²⁶²

The resulting categorizations and classifications of groups are carried out by the dominant social group in order to dictate the social relations and rules of engagement based on racial distinctions. This racialization process is a direct reflection of the racial structure of the society and race becomes an independent criterion for vertical hierarchy in society. Additionally, it must be understood that simply because not all members of the subordinate race or races are at the bottom of the social order, it does not negate the fact

²⁵⁸ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation,” *American Sociological Review*, 62:3 (1997): 471.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Herbert Blumer, “Race Prejudice as A Sense of Group Position.” *The Pacific Sociological Review*. 1:1 (1958): 4.

²⁶¹ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001) 37.

²⁶² Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “The Essential Social Fact of Race,” *American Sociological Review*, 64:6 (1999): 899.

that races, as social groups are in either a superordinate or subordinate position in the social system.²⁶³ Furthermore, once the process of attaching meaning to a people occurs, race becomes a real category of group association and identify.²⁶⁴ Thus, as a result of being placed within the racial hierarchy, the ascribed racialized social relations and practices constitute the racialized structure of a particular society.²⁶⁵

Following the racialization process, race becomes the point of opposition between racialized groups at all levels of social formation as all “normal” dynamics of social relations maintain a racial component. Since race, like gender and class, are socially constructed, both the ascribed meaning and position assigned to races in a racialized social structure will always be contested. Bonilla-Silva defines racial contestation as “the struggle of racial groups for systemic changes regarding their position at one or more levels.”²⁶⁶ Contestations over what it means to be Black, White, Arab, or Persian reflects and steers the social, political, ideological, and economic struggles between the races. While most of this contestation is expressed at the individual level, there are times when it can become collective and develop the potential to effect meaningful systemic change in the social structure.²⁶⁷ Contestation can manifest in passive and subtle forms or in more active and overt forms; however, fundamental changes in racialized social systems are always met with struggles that reach the point of overt protest (i.e. resistance and rebellion). While this does not mean a violent racially based revolution is the only way

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation,” *American Sociological Review*, 62:3 (1997): 472.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 470.

²⁶⁶ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001) 43.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

of causing effective changes to the positions of racial group, Bonilla-Silva suggests social systems must be “shaken up” for fundamental change to take place.

It is here that the phenomenon that social scientists label racism becomes relevant to the social system. Bonilla-Silva prefers the term racial ideology to racism in reference to the ideological use of racial notions and stereotypes. Racial ideology operates to rationalize social, political, and economic interactions among the races. Furthermore, racial ideology “mediates the world of agents and the structures which are created by their social praxis.”²⁶⁸ Thus racial ideologies strengthen the beliefs of racial actors in social systems and provides the rules for perceiving and dealing with the “other” in a given racialized society.

Additionally, twentieth century philosopher, Charles Mills, suggests racial ideologies are also directed at the minds of subordinate racial groups in order justify and instill subjugation.²⁶⁹ According to Mills, racial ideologies can serve to cause members of subordinate racial groups to be self-loathing and provide racial deference to the dominant racial group. Blumer suggests that racial ideologies, such as condemnatory traits or debasing traits, promote among the dominant racial group a self-assured feeling of being naturally superior or better, while also justifying and promoting the social exclusion of the subordinate racial group. Also racial ideologies are created as a defensive reaction to potential challenges of group position in the racialized social structure and work to preserve the integrity and position of the dominant group.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation,” *American Sociological Review*, 62:3 (1997): 474.

²⁶⁹ Charles Mills. *The Racial Contract*. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997.), 88.

²⁷⁰ Herbert Blumer, “Race Prejudice As A Sense of Group Position.” *The Pacific Sociological Review*. 1:1 (1958): 5.

The ultimate goal of racial ideologies is for the subordinate racial group to accept their racial stratification as natural through the proliferation of false stereotypes. These stereotypes are always created along with a designation of the dominant racial group as normal, the standard of perfection, or ideal race.²⁷¹ All stereotypes conferred upon racially subordinated groups are created in relation to the standards of the dominant racial group. Thus, according to Richard Dyer, the dominant racial group is not represented in stereotypes but merely in their positions in the social structure; whereas, for dominated racial groups stereotypes serve as a means to categorize and keep them in their place.²⁷² Moreover, while the racial ideologies are ultimately false, they fulfill the role of maintaining the racial stratification in a social system.

Accordingly, Bonilla-Silva's Structural Theory of Racism framework for analyzing race first requires that a racialized social system allocate different economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines. This is the racialization process in which relations and practices in the racial structure of a society are designated. Next, after the racialization process, race becomes the point of opposition between racialized groups at all levels of social formation. Third, racial ideology(racism) is developed as an organizational map that guides the actions and interactions of racial actors in a given society. Fourth, once racial relations are organized racial contestation ensues in either a passive or overt manifestation. Finally, the process of racial contestation reveals the different objective interests of the races in a racialized system. Furthermore, in order to test the usefulness of racialization as a theoretical basis for

²⁷¹ Richard Dyer "The Matter of Whiteness" in *Theories of Race Racism: A Reader*, eds. Les Back and John Solomos, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 543.

²⁷² Ibid, 544.

research, Bonilla-Silva suggests that scholars must perform comparative work on racialization in various societies.

Thus, my main objective going forward is to determine whether the racialized social structure of ninth century Iraq had specific mechanisms, practices, and social relations that would have produced a racialized structure that reproduced racial inequality. I will do so by applying Bonilla-Silva's Structural Theory of Racism approach to my examination of practices of slavery, the conditions leading to the Zanj Rebellion, the racial ideologies that manifest in Arabic literature and religion, and the race consciousness the developed among the blacks in ninth century Arab society.

V. BLACK VOICES OF RACE CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE EARLY CENTURIES OF ISLAM

A fundamental component of this study is the emphasis on giving agency to the blacks that lived in Abbasid society. While scholarship on the early centuries of Islam rarely highlight a racial presence of blacks outside of the Arab-Islamic slave trade, there is evidence of race consciousness and racial identity illustrated in the creative writing of blacks during that era. The writings discussed in this chapter are linked particularly to race consciousness and racial identity of blacks living in Abbasid's racialized social structure prior to the Zanj Rebellion. As such, this chapter first examines how racial consciousness and racial identity are created by racialized social structures. Next, it highlights the perspectives and experiences of enslaved and free blacks through creative writings that illustrate race consciousness and race relations in the early centuries of Islamic society. Finally, it discusses the unintended consequence of race consciousness and identity being used to mobilize violent resistance against slavery and racial domination.

Race Consciousness and Identity:

Awareness of differences in status from other racial groups is heightened by an awareness of differences of skin color and race. Whenever there are such distinct racial lines drawn within a society, there will be a heightened tendency toward strife and

contestation between lighter and darker races.²⁷³ This study explores the racialization process, the resulting racial stratification, and the imminent contestation that will ensue. For the Zanj, their contestation took place in the form of collective, overt, and violent resistance. In order for mobilization and action to take place along racial lines there must exist a racial consciousness and identity among those called to action. Thus, where there is an absence of a self-conscious group, there can be no collectivity to interpret and act upon a shared situation.²⁷⁴ Race consciousness is a form of group consciousness and being conscious of race implies awareness of difference in status in relation to one's race.²⁷⁵

Since an individual's social status in a racialized social structure is dependent on race, the significance of race to one's identity is imperative in such a society. Twentieth century philosopher, K. Anthony Appiah, argues that once racial labels and meanings are applied to a social group, they shape the ways people conceive of themselves and operate to shape identification.²⁷⁶ For Appiah, race is a major form of identification and thus shapes actions and life plans.²⁷⁷ In a society where racial prejudice exists, the person carries with himself the constant reminder of his limitations, disadvantages, and diminished opportunities. The resulting race relations, informed by racial ideology, reflect a society's level of social tension, particularly as the subordinate minorities become aware of their oppressors' control of society based on racial domination rather

²⁷³ Kenneth J. Gergen, "The Significance of Skin Color in Human Relations" in *Color and Race*, ed. John Hope Franklin. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), 122.

²⁷⁴ Anthony W. Marx, *Making Race and Nation*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 19.

²⁷⁵ William O. Brown, "The Nature of Race Consciousness," in *Race: Individual and Collective Behavior*, eds. Edgar T. Thompson and Everett C. Hughes. (The Free Press, 1958), 344.

²⁷⁶ Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Racial Identity and Racial Identification," in *Theories of Race Racism: A Reader*, eds. Les Back and John Solomos, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 608.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 609.

than legitimate means.²⁷⁸ Furthermore, rules enforced according to racial difference aid in reinforcing of group self-consciousness among the subordinated racial groups because of their shared experiences.

Sociologist W. O. Brown in his article, "The Nature of Race Consciousness," suggests that any relegation to subordinate status for a race angers and hurts its members.²⁷⁹ Brown goes on to say that a race prejudice will emerge among the subordinated race that is more bitter and potent than that of the dominant races.²⁸⁰ Aware of the past and present exploitation, the subordinated racial group recalls with bitterness the limitations or lack of freedom and the resulting social debasement. These grievances are formulated and serve as the basis of ideologies of resistance. Thus, racial domination and stratification have the unintended consequence of consolidating and legitimating subordinated racial identity which increases the potential basis for resistance.²⁸¹

According to Bonilla-Silva, the process of racialization is always hierarchal; and the race ascribed with the superior position (i.e. the Arab) enjoys social, political, economic, and psychological advantages over the group or groups ascribed with inferior positions.²⁸² As a result of these racial categorizations and stratification, the contestation to these assigned positions in the racial hierarchy will ensue in some form or fashion, from small modes of resistance, to revolution, and even written testimony.

²⁷⁸ Graham C. Kinloch, *The Dynamics of Race Relations: A Sociological Analysis*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1974), 12.

²⁷⁹ William O. Brown, "The Nature of Race Consciousness," *Social Forces*, X (1931): 92.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 94.

²⁸¹ Anthony W. Marx, *Making Race and Nation*. (New York: Cambridge University Press. 1998), 20.

²⁸² Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "The Essential Social Fact of Race," *American Sociological Review*, 64:6 (1999): 899.

Race Consciousness and Identity Prior to the Zanj Rebellion:

Historian, David M. Goldenberg, suggests that Arabic literature follows and reflects the social structures of the Islamic worlds.²⁸³ As such, in order to give agency to the blacks living in Arab society, the voices of black poets and accounts of black experiences of the early centuries of Islam must be examined. These profiles and accounts of blacks during this time will illustrate not only race consciousness and the racial thinking of the age but also show how these assigned racial identities, ideologies, and stereotypes were either acquiesced to or contested by blacks prior to the Zanj rebellion in the mid-ninth century.

The name given to the early group of Arabic poets of African or partly African descent was the “crows or raven of the Arabs.” Use of this term to describe these prolific Afro-Arabic poets was well attested to in the ninth century.²⁸⁴ According to Professor ‘Abduh Badawi of Khartoum, who wrote the first serious study devoted to these poets, “This name [the crows of the Arabs] was applied to those [Arabic] poets to whom blackness was transmitted by their slave mothers, and who at the same time their Arab fathers did not recognize, or recognized only under constraint from them.”²⁸⁵ Badawi suggests that it was a consensus that the poets, because of their blackness passing from their mothers, occupied the lowest social statuses in society.

The most famous of the crows of the Arabs, and a major figure in Arabic literature in general, was the poet and warrior ‘Antara. Living during the pre-Islamic

²⁸³ David M. Goldenberg, “It Is Permitted to Marry a Kushite.” *AJS Review* 37:1 (2013): 45.

²⁸⁴ Bernard Lewis, “The Crows of the Arabs,” *Critical Inquiry*, “Race,” *Writing, and Difference* 12:1 (1985): 88.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

period his father was an Arab and his mother an Ethiopian slave woman by the name Zabiba. Since ‘Antara’s mother was a slave and he was not recognized by his father until later in his life, enslaved status was transferred to him at birth. A famous passage tells the story of how he gained his freedom. According to Bernard Lewis, one day ‘Antara’s tribe, the ‘Abs, were attacked by raiders from another tribe and the ‘Abs pursued and fought back. He continues:

‘Antara, who was present, was called on by his father to charge. “‘Antara is a slave,” he replied, “he does not know how to charge –only to milk camels and bind their udders.” “Charge!” cried his father, “and you are free.” And ‘Antara charged.²⁸⁶

In another verse attributed to ‘Antara states:

I am a man, of whom one half ranks with the best of ‘Abs
The other half I defend with my sword.²⁸⁷

This passage displays ‘Antara’s racial identity. First acknowledging his Arab descent through his father’s membership to the Arab tribe the ‘Abs, ‘Antara identifies his social status as a freedman. It is said that upon gaining his freedom ‘Antara came to despise his African ancestry. This is more than likely the result of notions of inferior and servitude being associated with blackness even in pre-Islamic times. Without making a direct reference, in the latter half of the passage ‘Antara acknowledges his African ancestry and former slave status, which would be the most apparent signifier of his social status. In essence, here ‘Antara is declaring that while he may dark skin color, his social

²⁸⁶ Ibid, 91.

²⁸⁷ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in The Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 24.

status is that of a free Arab. It should be noted here that during the early centuries of Islam a common insult was to address a man as a “Son of a black woman” while to address a man as a “Son of a white woman” was received as praise or boosting.²⁸⁸ In another passage ascribed to ‘Antara, he indicates explicitly that his African ancestry and dark skin mark him as socially inferior:

Enemies revile me for the blackness of my skin
But the whiteness of my character effaces the blackness.²⁸⁹

Another poet of African descent was Suhaym. Living during the seventh century, Suhaym was born and lived his entire life as a slave. According to Lewis, his name is the diminutive form of a word meaning “black” and may also be translated as “little blackie.” One story says that Suhaym was once offered by his master to the Caliph ‘Uthman, the third Caliph and companion of the Prophet Muhammad. To this ‘Uthman refused the offer replying that he did not need a slave who treated his owners as Suhaym did: “When he is sated he directs love-verses at their women, and when he is hungry he directs satires at them.”²⁹⁰ Suhaym is said to have angered his owners and men of the tribe by flirting with their women; however, his encounters with Arab women did not always proceed in his favor as in one passage he laments:

She points with her comb and says to her companion
“Is that the slave of Banl-Hashas, the slick rhymester?
She saw a threadbare saddlebag, a worn cloak,
a naked negro such as men own.
These girls excite other men and turn away from my shock of hair,
despising me as I can clearly see.

²⁸⁸ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Color in Islam*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971), 40.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, 94.

²⁹⁰ Bernard Lewis, “The Crows of the Arabs,” *Critical Inquiry*, “Race,” *Writing, and Difference* 12:1 (1985): 94.

If I were of pink, these women would love me,
but the Lord has shamed me with blackness.
Yet it does not diminish me that my mother was a slavewoman
who tended the udders of she-camels.²⁹¹

In another passage Suhaym defends himself in against the inferior status conferred upon him because of his black skin color:

My verses serve me on the day of boasting
in place of birth and coin;
though I am a slave, my soul is nobly free;
though I am black of color, my nature is white.²⁹²

In the same disposition Suhaym states:

My blackness does not harm my habit, for I am like musk; who tastes
it does not forget.
I am covered with a black garment, but under it there is a lustrous
garment with white tails.²⁹³

The last of the early poets of African decent was Abu Dulama, who lived during the eighth century, as a slave serving as the court poet and jester of the early Abbasid caliphs. According to twentieth century historian, Y. Talib, Abu Dulama “was famed for his wit, amusing adventures, acquaintance with general literature and talent for poetry.”²⁹⁴ Abu Dulama’s poetry demonstrates the acceptance of the inferiority conferred upon him by his Arab masters. To his master’s amusement, in this passage Abu Dulama mocks his own appearance, that of his own mother, and of this family:

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Bernard Lewis, *Race and Color in Islam*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971), 11.

²⁹³ Ibid, 12.

²⁹⁴ Talib Y and F. Samir, "The African Diaspora in Asia," in *General History of Africa volume 3: Africa from the 7th to the 11th Century*, ed. Ivan Hrbek, (London: J. Currey, 1992), 346.

We are alike in color; our faces are black and
ugly, our names shameful.²⁹⁵

Probably the most talented of these black poets was Nusayb, who lived in the early eighth century. Nusayb was very aware of his blackness, for which he was subjected to many insults. On an occasion an Arab poet named Kuthayyir mocked him stating:

I saw Nusayb astray among men
his color was that of cattle.
You can tell him by shining blackness
even if he be oppressed, he has the dark face
of a oppressor.²⁹⁶

Challenged by his comrades to deliver a reply Nusayb eventually responded saying: “all he has done is call me black – and he speaks truth.”²⁹⁷ And in reference to himself Nusayb states:

Blackness does not diminish me, as long as I
have this tongue and this stout heart.
Some are raised up by means of their lineage; the
verses of my poems are my lineage!
How much better a keen-minded, clear-spoken
black than a mute white!²⁹⁸

Nusayb continues stating:

If I am jet-black, musk too is very dark – and
there is no medicine for the blackness of my skin.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Color in Islam*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971), 13.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, 12.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 13.

This account displays Nusayb's awareness of the blackness of his skin and the problems that he will encounter for the rest of his life for it. Stating that "there is no medicine" for his blackness demonstrates knowledge of the social disadvantages of being black.

An account of the eighth century black poet, Da'ud ibn Salm further illustrates the acceptance of the association of blackness with ugliness and social inferiority. Famous for his "ugliness," on an occasion Da'ud ibn Salm along with an Arab named Zayd ibn Ja'far, was arrested and brought before a judge in Mecca and charged with flaunting luxurious clothes. Here racial discrimination is demonstrated in the differential treatment administered by the court to the two individuals. The Arab was immediately ordered to be released, while Da'ud ibn Salm was order to be flogged. "The judge said: I can stand this from Ibn Ja'far, but why should I stand it from you? Because of your base origin, or your ugly face? Flog him boy! – and he flogged him."³⁰⁰

Another account follows one of the most famous early eighth century musicians, Sa'id ibn Misjah. In this story Sa'id ibn Misjah, seeking lodging in Damascus, is reluctantly invited to accompany a group of young Arab men to a singing-girl's home for lunch. Upon lunch being served Sa'id ibn Misjah voluntarily withdrew himself saying: "I am a black man, some of you may find me offensive. I shall therefore sit and eat apart."³⁰¹ Thought embarrassed, the young men arranged for Sa'id ibn Misjah to eat separately. When the slave girl singers appeared to the group and Sa'id ibn Misjah praised their performance, the singers and owners were taken aback by "black man" who dared to praise the girls, and he was warned by young men to mind his manners. Upon

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 14.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

Sa'id ibn Misjah revealing his identity to the group, they all then vied in seeking the company of the famous musician.

These anecdotes provide a brief illustration of the strict racial relations between Arabs and blacks (both freedmen and enslaved) during the seventh and eighth centuries. Da'ud ibn Salm's account demonstrates how blacks were subjected to racial discrimination in legal institutions for no reason other than their race. Additionally, Sa'id ibn Misjah's account displays the treatment of a seemingly insignificant black freedman in Damascus, who while being polite is treated as a second class citizen. Furthermore, it is not until he reveals his identity as a famous musician that he is treated as a person deserving some level of respect. What is revealed is that by the ninth century, it was normal in Arab societies for blacks to be insulted; to be treated as inferior; to accept their assigned inferiority; and occupy the lowest positions of the racialized social structure.

In the ninth century, a defense of blacks in Arab Muslim society would be made one of the most prolific Arabic writers of all time, who happen to be of African descent. 'Uthman Amr Ibn Bahr al- Jahiz (776-869), was a Afro-Arabic Muslim scholar of Theology, Anthropology, Zoology, and Philosophy from Basra. In Basra, the chief city of southern Iraq, al-Jahiz lived as a poor student mingling amongst Arabs and Africans of all kinds.³⁰² The grandson of a black camel driver, al-Jahiz was endowed with an incisive mind leading him to be a famed free thinker and on nearly every branch of knowledge.³⁰³ The founder of a prose style of writing known as al-Jahiz, he wrote over two hundred publications spanning several subjects. Twentieth century philosopher, C. T. Harley

³⁰² Graham W. Irwin, *Africans Abroad*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 115.

³⁰³ Talib Y and F. Samir, "The African Diaspora in Asia," in *General History of Africa volume 3: Africa from the 7th to the 11th Century*, ed. Ivan Hrbek, (London: J. Currey, 1992), 346.

Walker, suggests that “a non-Arab once expressed an opinion ranking Jahiz with Umar the Pious Khalif and Hasan of Basra as the three greatest men among the Arabs, each in virtue of his own special qualities, a sufficiently high compliment.”³⁰⁴ It is said that in 869 al-Jahiz’s death at the age of 93 was caused by the collapse of a mound of books that he kept piled around him.³⁰⁵

In his controversial text entitled *The Book of the Glory of the Black Race*, al-Jahiz sought to ridicule Arab society and challenge the prevalent racial prejudices in the Islamic world. While al-Jahiz identified himself with Arab-Muslim culture, he presents a defense of blacks, especially the Zanj, against racial prejudice of ninth century Iraq.³⁰⁶ Arguing against the equation of blackness with ugliness, he insists that blackness is beautiful in nature, amongst humans, and even in the Ka’ba in Mecca stating that: “No color is more firmly established in value or more deeply rooted in goodness than black.”³⁰⁷ al-Jahiz lists several valiant virtues of blacks including their honesty, generosity, piety and even presents the Negus of Abyssinia as the first ruler to convert to Islam. In an extensive discussion of pre-modern world histories and the origins of cultures, al-Jahiz divides human populations into categories of whites and non-whites, and insists that anyone who is non-white belongs to a culturally superior black majority:

The number of Blacks is greater than the number of Whites, because most of those who are counted as Whites are comprised of people from Persia, the mountains, Khurasan, Rome, Slavia, France and Iberia, and anything apart from them is insignificant. But among the Blacks are counted the Negroes, the Ethiopians, the Fezzan, the Berbers, the Copts, the Nubians, the Zaghawa, the Moors, the people

³⁰⁴ C. T. Harley Walker, “Jahiz of Basra to al-Fath Ibn Khaqan on the “Exploits of the Turks and the Army of the Khalifate in General.” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1915): 632.

³⁰⁵ Graham W. Irwin, *Africans Abroad*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 116.

³⁰⁶ John Alemillah Azumah, *Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa*. (Oxford: Oneworld Publishers, 2001), 139.

³⁰⁷ al-Jahiz, U. A. I. B. *The Book of the Glory of the Black Race*. (Los Angeles: France Preston. 1981), 47.

of Sind, the Hindus, the Qamar, the Dabila, the Chinese, and those beyond them ... The Arabs come from us — not from the Whites — because of the similarity of their color to ours ... The Hindus are more yellow in color than the Arabs, yet they are (counted) among the Black peoples. And the Prophet (God bless him and grant him salvation) said, ‘I was sent to the Reds and to the Blacks,’ and people already know that the Arabs are not red, as we mentioned before. That is our glory and that of the Arabs over the Whites, whether they like it or not. And if they hate (to admit) it, it is still our glory in what we have mentioned (here) over all.³⁰⁸

Furthering his defense of blacks in ninth century Arab society, al-Jahiz attempts to dispel the negative stereotypes and notions of good, evil, piety, and impiety etc. that have been assigned to blackness and whiteness by the Arabs arguing that blackness and whiteness both originated before the creation of nations and that originally it had no association with anything dirty, ugly, or any sort of disadvantage. Of much significance to this text is al-Jahiz’s insistence on the equality of all humans. Invoking the Prophet Muhammad, he contends that “When the Prophet (Blessings of God and salvation be upon him) had learned that the Zinjs, Ethiopians and Nubians were neither Red nor White, but Black, he considered the Arabs and us as equals.”³⁰⁹ He goes on to suggest that the Prophet Muhammad, his father, and his grandfather were “the “blackest in magnificence... the most noble of men; and they were black, with black skin.”³¹⁰ Such a claim remains controversial to this day.

Several scholars have suggested that this text should be read as a satirical and attention can be drawn to several instances of al-Jahiz denigrating the Zanj. Bernard Lewis notes al-Jahiz describing the Zanj elsewhere as “the least intelligent and the least discerning of mankind” and that the Zanj were “the worst of men and most vicious of

³⁰⁸ Ibid, 56.

³⁰⁹ Ibid, 51.

³¹⁰ Ibid, 50.

creatures in character and temperament.”³¹¹ Writing in the twenty-first century historian, John Alemillah Azumah, suggests that al-Jahiz’s ambivalence is an indication of a man faced with a serious identity crisis. Scholars, such as twentieth century historian, Graham W. Irwin, have gone on to describe al-Jahiz as a ninth century counterpart of the later New World creoles and mulattos who rejected the African part of their heritage to praise “civilized” European values. Irwin suggests:

Perhaps, in selecting the Zanj as his exemplar of baseness, he was trying, under cover of satire, to disassociate himself as much as he could from the inhabitants of a continent where all men were black and to which, ultimately, he owed his dark skin. That he should feel the need to do so is in itself a wry commentary on what it was like to be educated, admired, and famous—and yet part-African—in the medieval Muslim world.³¹²

Nonetheless the poetry, anecdotes, and literary defenses of blacks in Arab society reflect the existence of a race consciousness and a racial identity. The Crows of the Arabs and al-Jahiz provide an illustration of how enslaved and free blacks were perceived and how these blacks perceived of themselves. Additionally, they demonstrate how social relations in ninth century Iraq were conducted to read blackness as a signal for denigration, discrimination, and debasement.³¹³ This debasement usually entailed slave status being conferred upon blacks during this time.

³¹¹ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Color in Islam*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971), 17.

³¹² Graham W. Irwin, *Africans Abroad*. (New York: Columbia University Press. 1977), 117.

³¹³ Lincoln, Eric C., “Color and Group Identity in the United States,” in *Color and Race*, ed. John Hope Franklin. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), 249.

Slavery and Violent Resistance:

An essential element of slavery is the power relations involved. Historian, Paul Lovejoy, argues that slavery is the fundamental denial of “outsiders the rights and privileges of a particular society so that they could be exploited for economic political, and/or social purposes.”³¹⁴ In these systems, property chattel slaves are reduced to commodities to be sold, purchased, and used in any capacity seen fit. Thus, slaves could be assigned to perform the most menial tasks, hold positions of authority, and even have access to considerable wealth.³¹⁵ However, no matter how much power a slave may have access to, a slave’s identity is directly linked to that of his owner which solidified his subordination. Lovejoy suggests that this dependence on the owner either results in subordination of slaves’ identity to that of their master, or leads to the development of a sense of comradeship with other slaves forming the basis for consciousness. As a result, according to historian, Herbert Shapiro, slaves are indeed conscious of their human identity. Furthermore, the enslaved are also able to decipher the slaveholder’s rhetoric from their perceived realities, and could not be relied upon to acquiesce in their owner’s definitions of themselves as mere property.³¹⁶ Thus, a natural result of slavery is the desire for freedom, which inevitably leads to the slave’s desire to mitigate or terminate his bondage through resistance and rebellion.

³¹⁴ Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2012), 2.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Shapiro, Herbert, “Historiography and Slave Revolt and Rebelliousness in the United States: A Class Approach,” in *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean, and Afro-American History*, ed. Gary Y. Okihiro, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 135.

Resistance to enslavement has always been an integral feature in scholarship on African slavery. Scholars have used the term resistance to describe a wide variety of actions and behaviors at all levels of human social life (individual, collective, and institutional) and in a number of different settings, which include political systems, entertainment and literature, and the workplace.³¹⁷ Surprisingly, many scholars seem to invoke the concept of resistance in their titles or introductions but fail to define it. Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachel L. Einwohner in their article “*Conceptualizing Resistance*,” defined resistance as acting autonomously in one's own interests; active efforts to oppose, fight, and refuse to cooperate with or submit to abusive behavior and control; or simply questioning and objecting.³¹⁸ As such, enslaved Africans engaged in a variety of acts that were designed to ease their burdens and to frustrate the masters' wills. They broke tools, faked illness, poisoned food, and even manipulated tensions between master and overseer. When compelled to do so, the enslaved would take up more active forms of resistance. According to James Oakes, in resistance the enslaved could become saucy, runaway, and on rare occasions joined in organized rebellions.³¹⁹

Writing in the mid-twentieth century, the Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist and philosopher, Frantz Fanon wrote multiple texts, including *The Wretched of the Earth*, on black liberation struggles of colonized Africans in the twentieth century. Fanon's significance to the Zanj is his discussion of identity and the inevitable but necessary use of counter-violence in the course of liberation struggles. Violence is an inherent aspect

³¹⁷ Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachel L. Einwohner, “Conceptualizing Resistance” *Sociological Forum* 19:4 (2004): 534.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ James Oakes, “The Political Significance of Slave Resistance.” *History Workshop*, Special American Issue, 22 (1986): 89.

of slavery since it is in essence a relationship based on power and dominion originating in and sustained by violence.³²⁰ The black slave who finds himself “outside the class system,” according to Fanon, “is the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays” and when this violence manifests it will be proportional to the violence exercised by the dominant racial group to maintain superior social status.³²¹ This violence can free the oppressed slave of his inferiority complex, from despair and inaction, makes him fearless, and restores his self-respect. Accordingly, Fanon suggests the mobilization of the masses, as a result of a war of liberation, provokes the idea of a common cause and the destruction of the oppressive class through violence unifies the people. As result, violence allows both strayed and outlawed members of the group to return and to find their place among members of the subordinated racial group in rebellion.

Furthermore, how does one define a slave rebellion? Historian, Eugene Genovese, asserts that slave revolts are simply a struggle for freedom, undertaken to enforce the enslaved’s views of social relations.³²² Resistance and rebellion against slavery can be seen as a basic assertion of human dignity and even humanity itself. He also suggests that “violent confrontation with injustice lay at the core of any revolt against slavery.”³²³ Through rebellion slaves found a vehicle to act not as dominated slaves but rather to assert themselves outside the whims and wills of their owners.³²⁴ Additionally Genovese provides eight conditions that present a higher probability of a slave revolt commencing:

³²⁰ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1982), 11-13.

³²¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. (New York: Grove Press, Inc, 1966), 48.

³²² Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), xvi.

³²³ Ibid, xiv.

³²⁴ Ibid, 33.

(1) the master-slave relationship had developed in context of absenteeism and depersonalization as well as greater cultural estrangement of whites and blacks; (2) economic distress and famine occurred; (3) slaveholding units approached the average size of one hundred to two hundred slaves, as in the sugar colonies, rather than twenty or so, as in the Old South; (4) the ruling class frequently split either in warfare between slave holding countries or in bitter struggles within a particular slaveholding country; (5) blacks heavily outnumbered whites; (6) African-born slaves outnumbered those born into American slavery(creoles); (7) the social structure of the slaveholding regime permitted the emergence of an autonomous black leadership; and (8) the geographical, social, and political environment provided terrain and opportunity for the formation of colonies of runaway slaves strong enough to threaten the plantation regime.³²⁵

Genovese maintains that this list of conditions may be extended or refined and suggests that the probabilities for large scale slave revolts will rest heavily on some combination of these conditions.

While these conditions were made in reference to slave rebellions in the Southern United States and the Caribbean, the majority of them are indeed applicable to the Zanj Rebellion of ninth century. This can be attributed to the Zanj finding themselves in a rare case of plantation style enslavement in Muslim slavery in the salt marshes of southern Iraq. However, though Genovese's conditions deserve merit he, as many historians have done, fails to acknowledge the imperative condition of the racialized social structure and the development of race consciousness among enslaved blacks. This is the task set forth in this study. Thus, the final chapter will examine the racialization process, racial stratification, and the resulting race consciousness among blacks in ninth-century Iraq, in order to demonstrate that racial contestation in the form of the Zanj Rebellion was present.

³²⁵ Ibid, 11-12.

VI. THE RACIAL ATMOSPHERE THAT PRIMED THE ZANJ REBELLION IN THE NINTH CENTURY

In order to comprehend the racial atmosphere of the ninth century Abbasid Caliphate that gave rise to the Zanj Rebellion, one first has to understand the racialized social structure of the era. This chapter draws on the previous chapters where topics of Arab-Muslim Slavery, racialism in Islamic doctrine, and racialized literature in early Islamic history were discussed, and assisted in constructing an image of the racialized social structure of the ninth century Abbasid society. The racialized social structure model provided by sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva in chapter four provided a framework for illustrating and examining this racialized social system. In this chapter the racialization process, racial stratification, racial ideologies, and the collective racial contestation that manifested in the form of the Zanj Rebellion is examined.

Racialization:

The Abbasid Dynasties came to power with an imperial empire stretching from as far as southern France, across North Africa, through the Arabian Peninsula, and into the Persian empires of the East.³²⁶ In addition to conquest, Islam's practice of *Hajj*,

³²⁶ David Nicolle. *The Great Islamic Conquests AD 632–750*. (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2009), 7.

the pilgrimage to Mecca, caused a convergence of the cultures of China, India, North and Eastern Africa, and Europe to take place in the Muslim world.³²⁷ By the ninth century Baghdad had become the economic center of the world drawing Europe, much of Africa, and Asia into trade. Amassing this massive empire, the Arabs through conquest and the spread of Islam created a truly cosmopolitan civilization.

As a result of the influx of non-Arabs into Islamic society, the dominant Arab minority population developed an awareness that their exclusive primacy was on the decline and they were beginning to lose their social and cultural power. It is under these conditions in the seventh and eighth centuries that the Arabs, as the dominant social group, racialized their universal society. The process of racialization entails the categorization of humans on the basis of race, which is accompanied by racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified social group.³²⁸ Understanding that race is socially constructed, in this case serving as a political mechanism linked to the implications of conquest and enslavement, such classifications entail a process of creating the *other* and the *self*. Initially, for the Arab, Muslims constituted the “self” while the “other” was represented by the non-Muslim, who was considered to be enslavable. Following the initial conquest and expansion of the Islamic empire beyond the Arabian Peninsula, Persians, Turks, Greeks and Slavs were viewed as easily assimilable, while a clear stigmatization was attached to blacks. By the ninth century, blackness had become

³²⁷ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in The Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 18.

³²⁸ Michael Omi and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*. (New York: Routledge, 2015.), 111.

synonymous with unbelief, paganism, and slavery, therefore characterizing blacks as the primary “other” in Arab society prior to the Zanj Rebellion.

The conquering Arabs claimed racial and social superiority, ascribing to all non-Arabs inferior status that resulted in fiscal, social, political, and military disadvantages. Since the “pure Arab,” which meant being Muslim and speaking Arabic, had become such a dated claim to superiority, the Arabs turned to the simplest yet most obvious marker of difference, skin color. Twentieth century sociologist, Edward Shils, suggests that skin color naturally becomes the focus of such passionate sentiments because it is the easiest way of distinguishing between those at the periphery and those at the center of a particular society.³²⁹ Furthermore, these groups and individuals were placed into categories of others (i.e. white, black, red, yellow), which may be referred to as races since they were subjected to hierarchical rankings within a social structure based on concepts of inequality by the socially dominant Arabs.³³⁰

An additional aspect of racialized social structures that is necessary to understand is the differences between race and ethnicity. Ethnicity, according to twenty-first century sociologist, Steven Hitlin, is a grouping of people on the basis of people’s countries or regions of origin and is more concerned with capturing the cultural dimension of human social groups.³³¹ Bonilla-Silva holds that race initially is assigned in an otherizing process by a dominant racial group, while ethnicity is often a matter of self-assertion by a distinctive cultural group. He also asserts that race is intrinsically connected to power

³²⁹ Shils, Edward. “Color, the Universal Intellectual Community, and the Afro-Asian Intellectual.” in *Color and Race*, ed. John Hope Franklin. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), 2.

³³⁰ Audrey Smedley and Brian D. Smedley. *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2012.), 25-26.

³³¹ Hitlin, Brown, and Elder. “Measuring Latinos: Racial vs. Ethnic Classification and Self-Understandings,” *Social Forces* 86:2 (2007): 592.

relations and hierarchy, while ethnicity is not.³³² During the Abbasid era, Africans were grouped together as a black race, while they were often depicted in subgroups based on ethnicity (i.e. Zanj, Abyssinians, Nubians, Sudan, or Copts). Although there existed a hierarchy within the generalized grouping of black Africans with Abyssinians as the most respected and the Zanj (blacks from the East Coast of Africa) as the most detested, all of these groups were referred to as blacks or Zanj and considered to be enslavable. Furthermore, what is significant is that racial and ethnic groupings are both made within social contexts to give meaning to identities.

In early Arabic literature human beings are frequently described as red, black, white, yellow, green, and various shades of brown.³³³ White came to describe the Arabs, Persians, Greeks, Turks, Slavs, and all peoples of Europe and Asia. According to Bernard Lewis, the northern people of Europe were designated as being dead white, pale blue, and shades of red. Red was a term used with a connotation of inferiority to describe Persians, Europeans, and other peoples of the Mediterranean that were lighter than the Arabs. The term “black” was designated primarily for the natives and inhabitants of Sub-Saharan Africa and sparingly for the people of India. Once the society was structured on a hierarchy of inequality, meanings were attached to each racial group.

Subsequently, the order of the racial structure was determined by the socially dominant Arabs who held that the “Arabs had generosity and courage; Persians, statecraft and civility; Greeks were philosophers and artists; Indians, magicians and conjurers;

³³² Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “The Essential Social Fact of Race,” *American Sociological Review*, 64:6 (1999): 903.

³³³ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Color in Islam*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971), 7.

while the dexterous Chinese were makers of furniture and gadgets.”³³⁴ Following these racial groups were the white Turks and Slavs of Europe and the black inhabitants of Africa. These races came to constitute the majority of the slave population by the ninth century, thus solidifying Islamic slavery as the world’s first race based system of slavery. Ironically, while the Quran is purported to be free of any racial prejudice and makes no reference to a racialized system of slavery, following the Prophet Muhammad’s death and the early Muslim conquests, the Islamic empire became the cradle of racial stratification.

Racial Stratification:

While both whites and blacks were enslaved there was racial stratification within the slave system. Twentieth century historian, William McKee Evans, notes that by the ninth century, racial stratification began to appear in both free and enslaved populations. This can be seen clearly in the favored treatment of white slaves which had commenced by the eighth century. The most pronounced demonstration of racial stratification within the slave system is seen in the conversion of the terms *Mamluk* (owned) and *abd* (slave). Both terms were originally used in reference to any slave; however, the terms eventually underwent a semantic transformation in which they took on racial connotations as opposed to their former use for social designation. The racialization of these terms left white slaves to be referred to as *Mamluks* and blacks as *abd*. For a black person in Arab society, the term *abd* was be used in reference to him regardless of having free or enslaved status. Thus the social status of being a slave or operating in a servile capacity became bound to blackness.

³³⁴ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery In The Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 47.

There was also favorable treatment in the labor tasks assigned to white and black slaves. White slaves were not used for hard menial labor; therefore, they were rarer and more expensive than their black *abd* (slave) counterparts. Black slaves were less expensive and more expendable, and this can be seen in three ways. First, the expendability of black slaves is demonstrated clearly in the military, in which white Turkish slaves were placed in the Arab military's cavalries while the expendable blacks were confined to infantry. In the ninth century, Ahmad ibn Tulun, the first independent ruler of Muslim Egypt would rely heavily on black slaves in his military amassing 24,000 white military slaves and 45,000 black military slaves by his death in 884C.E.³³⁵

Second, in Baghdad in the ninth century, a white "good looking" slave girl could be bought for 1,000 dinars, while a black slave girl would be sold for 25-30 dinars.³³⁶ Thus, white slave girls were prized, and many of the Abbasids took white slave girls as concubines, whom they would bear children with. Additionally, white slaves found increased value in their potential to be used to obtain substantial ransoms as a result of their capture in religious wars. Evans suggests this was likely possible because Europe, unlike Africa, had well organized institutions, such as *El Orden de la Merced*, that specialized in raising money to ransom Christian slaves.³³⁷ Furthering this, twenty-first century historian, James H. Sweet, suggests that white *mamluks* were viewed as investments to protect, while the black *abd*'s value was determined by his or her labor as an expendable means of production.³³⁸

³³⁵ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Color in Islam*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971), 69.

³³⁶ Talib Y and F. Samir, "The African Diaspora in Asia," in *General History of Africa volume 3: Africa from the 7th to the 11th Century*, ed. Ivan Hrbek, (London: J. Currey, 1992)) 342.

³³⁷ William McKee Evans, "From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea: The Strange Odyssey of the "Sons of Ham." *The American Historical Review*, 85:1 (1980): 29.

³³⁸ James H. Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 54:1 (1997): 145.

Third, white slaves were rarely used for rough labor in most cases where strenuous labor was needed, black slaves were employed. The best example of this is demonstrated in the exclusive use of the tens of thousands of black slaves that labored in the land reclamation projects in southern Iraq in the ninth century. Highlighting further the racial stratification within the slave class, Orlando Patterson asks: “What could a favored Mamluk in ninth-century Baghdad either before or after manumission have in common with a lowly African Zandj toiling in the dead lands of lower Mesopotamia?”³³⁹ Furthermore, while, it may have been easier to transport enslaved blacks from the East Coast of Africa to southern Iraq via ship than to have white slaves from the north travel by land to labor in the salt marshes, it must be remembered that white slaves were rarely subjected to strenuous labor. Black slaves were thought to be more expendable and better suited for hard work. The expendability of black slaves can be attributed to their minimal value and the nearly endless supply of black slaves from pagan Africa.

Additionally, racial stratification would affect blacks even upon manumission, as freed blacks fared poorly in comparison to their freed white counterparts. These black freedmen upon being liberated from enslaved status were still referred to as *abid* (slaves). Occupying the lowest positions in the racialized social structure as freedmen, blacks remained permanently bound to their identities as a servile class.

This inferior position in the racialized social structure is reflected in the story of Sa'id ibn Misjah, the famous eighth century black musician. Although, Sa'id ibn Misjah was a free black man in the Arab world he chose to eat separately from the Arab patrons because he knew that his blackness was considered offensive. It even seemed

³³⁹ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 299.

normal when he was admonished for merely being a black man praising a group of singing girls. While there were exceptions and blacks could be found in token positions as scholars, military generals, and musicians, it must be remembered that the majority of blacks were either confined to enslaved status, barred in many cases from marrying outside of their race, and mostly confined to lowly occupations such as butchers and bath attendants.³⁴⁰ No other racial class would be subjected to such an everlasting social status in ninth century Abbasid social structure.

A commonly neglected yet significant element of many discussions on race is an analysis of the society's dominant racial hierarchy. In ninth century Iraq, the racialized social structure was organized with the dominant Arabs at the top and the dominated darker skinned Africans at the bottom.³⁴¹ While there could be contestation over positions held in society or over what it meant to be Arab, Persian, Turk, or Slav, there was indeed no debate about what it meant to be black. In the Abbasid era blacks were unquestionably second class citizens with very little prospect of transcending the lowest positions in the racialized social structure. Reinforcing this racialized social structure and the resulting stratification were racial ideologies that prescribed race relations and the perceptions of blacks.

Racial Ideology and Race Consciousness:

As seen in the accounts of Arab scholars and travelers, racial ideologies actively stratified blacks on the basis of their skin color. While all races within the racial structure

³⁴⁰ William McKee Evans, "From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea: The Strange Odyssey of the 'Sons of Ham.'" *The American Historical Review*, 85:1 (1980): 31.

³⁴¹ Joe Feagin and Sean Elias. "Rethinking Racial Formation Theory: A Systemic Racism Critique," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36:6 (2013): 942.

had the capacity to develop racial ideologies, those of the dominant Arab race became the widely accepted ideologies. Similar to Charles Mills' *Racial Contract*, racial ideologies establish a moral guide and order social relations that rationalize the exploitation and subjugation of blacks. Racial ideologies constitute an agreed upon set of conditions that maintain a racial group's subordination thus preventing an potential to threat to the position held by dominant racial group.³⁴²

By the ninth century, blacks were subjected to stereotypes of laziness, ugliness, heathenism. Additionally, blackness came to be associated with evil, sin, and permanent servile status. And though non-belief formed the fundamental rationale used for enslavement, black skin color's association with pagan Africa also became synonymous with slavery through the Jewish Hamitic myth and the *hadith* or traditions (i.e. utterances and actions) of the Prophet Muhammad. Even the Prophet Muhammad portrayed blacks as enemies of Islam that would destroy the Ka'ba stone in Mecca, and labeled their black skin as a disfigurement. These ideologies were social representations of ideas, prejudices, and myths that solidified the racial organization of the social structure.³⁴³ Thus, blackness along with the term "Zanj" became synonymous with enslavement, servitude, hyper-sexuality, barbarity, and low social status.

Informed by these racial ideologies, social relations were constructed to assure the Arab's group position of social supremacy as well as the racial inferiority of blacks in society. Furthermore, the explicit racial stratification condemning blacks to slavery and permanent servile status, combined with the insults displayed in racial ideologies, were indeed wounding and contributory to establishing a race consciousness and racial identity

³⁴² Charles Mills. *The Racial Contract*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.), 11.

³⁴³ Ibid, 66.

among the Zanj. Additionally, for the Zanj and blacks living in Iraq during the time of the rebellion, a sense of solidarity was formed among them because of the shared common experiences derived from their blackness.

This race consciousness and awareness of difference is demonstrated in the poetry and literature of “The Crows of the Arabs” and in al-Jahiz’s text, *The Book of the Glory of the Black Race*. The Crows of the Arabs, as black poets in the early centuries of Islam illustrate in their work the social relations experienced by blacks occupying the lowest social statuses in Arab society. These poets consistently indicated that their blackness marked them as socially inferior. This can be seen in the reoccurring appearance of their blackness as a dimension of their existence that constantly afflicted them. The seventh century poet, Suhaym, reveals this in a passage stating: “If I were of pink, these women would love me, but the Lord has shamed me with blackness.”³⁴⁴ The same sentiments are articulated by the eighth century poet, Nusayb, who was very aware of his blackness, stating “there is no medicine” for his blackness, he demonstrates knowledge of the social disadvantages of being black.³⁴⁵ These social disadvantages are demonstrated once more by the eighth century black poet, Da’ud ibn Salm who reported his experience of racial discrimination after being arrested and flogged in court for simply wearing luxurious clothes, while the Arab man acting with him went unpunished.³⁴⁶ For these black poets, their black skin alone was a signifier of their social inferiority and they were well aware that their blackness dictated their life experiences.

³⁴⁴ Bernard Lewis, “The Crows of the Arabs,” *Critical Inquiry*, “Race,” *Writing, and Difference* 12:1 (1985): 94.

³⁴⁵ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Color in Islam*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971), 13.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

In his ninth century text *The Book of the Glory of the Black Race*, al-Jahiz corroborates W. O. Brown's argument that the defense of a race, the contemplation of a great racial past, and the glorification of great men of a race is sure to manifest among the race conscious.³⁴⁷ Living as a free black scholar in Basra months prior to the Zanj Rebellion, al-Jahiz's defense of blacks ridicules Arab society for its racial prejudices. Regardless of the suggested satirical element that modern scholars have argued for, the text is significant for three reasons. First, the fact that al-Jahiz felt compelled to author a text in defense of blacks, demonstrates the existence a race consciousness even in one of the most renowned Arabic scholars in history. Second, al-Jahiz's defense of blacks reflects how the notions of inferiority and servile status, disseminated from the racially dominant Arabs, affected everyone categorized as black, be they free or of slave status. And third, not only does al-Jahiz illustrate an example of racial consciousness during the ninth century, his text represents an example of contestation in response to the racial ideologies of the social structure.

Thus, when the Zanj Rebellion began in 869 C.E., the racialized social structure had been successful in creating a racial atmosphere that unintentionally created race consciousness among the blacks in Iraq. This race consciousness coupled with the racial stratification and racial ideologies provided for a racial climate that was ripe for contestation in the form of violent armed rebellion. As a result, this chapter questions whether, it was simply a matter of Ali ibn Muhammad appealing to the Zanj that caused them to revolt; or whether the Abbasid racialized social structure had primed the Zanj for rebellion. The racialized social structure not only gave way to racial contestation, in the

³⁴⁷ William O. Brown, "The Nature of Race Consciousness," *Social Forces*, X (1931): 93.

form of the Zanj Rebellion in 869 C.E., it unintentionally gave rise to race consciousness and racial group identity among the Zanj and blacks in surrounding areas.

The Zanj Rebellion as Racial Contestation:

For the Arabs of the Abbasid era, race had for centuries been imbedded in practices of slavery, exploitation, and discrimination which signified Arab racial superiority and domination.³⁴⁸ Shared experiences of enslavement and further stratification based on race deepened their imposed racial identities and expanded the potential for group mobilization among the Zanj. The racial domination resulting from the Abbasid social structure had the unintended consequence of consolidating and legitimating subordinated racial identity into the basis for resistance. Thus for the Zanj, racial domination existed, black racial identities were solidified, provoked, and influential in their mobilization for rebellion.

In southern Iraq, the enslaved Zanj were forced to dig ditches, drain marshland that had become overgrown with reeds, clean salt flats by removing the salt crust, and they were also used on cotton and sugar cane plantations.³⁴⁹ They worked in gangs of 500 to 5,000 men, called “sweepers” and were quartered in villages, owned by wealthy absentee slave masters, in dirty huts made of reeds and palm leaves.³⁵⁰ They were fed only a few handfuls of flour, semolina, and dates a day and worked in malaria-infested swamps, which resulted in high mortality rates among them. These high mortality rates

³⁴⁸ Anthony W. Marx, *Making Race and Nation*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 192.

³⁴⁹ E. A. Belyaev, *The Arabs, Islam, and the Arab Caliphate in the Early Middle Ages*. (New York: Frederick a. Praeger Inc., Publishers, 1969), 240.

³⁵⁰ Udjang Tholib. “The Economic Factors of the ‘Abbasid Decline During The Buwayhid Rule In the Fourth/Tenth Century.” *al-Jami’ah*, 47:2 (2009): 355.

were replenished by the constant influx of cheap enslaved blacks coming in from East Africa. Situated among the lowest rungs of the racialized social structure, the poor conditions in which the Zanj lived caused grievances to mount and tensions to rise. As a result of these conditions the Zanj, through associations among other slaves, found the prospect of racial and class solidarity in their great numbers, which gave them a consciousness of their own strength.

Every scholar that has written on the Zanj Rebellion has focused solely on Ali ibn Muhammad starting and leading the rebellion; however, an aspect of al-Tabari's first hand account that is constantly overlooked is the presence of free and enslaved blacks that surrounded Ali at the outset of the revolt. Tabari places emphasis on Ali but in his account there are references to the role of blacks in starting the revolt, particularly the black slaves Rayhan ibn Salih and Rafiq. Rayhan and Rafiq were instrumental in starting the rebellion but their roles as the primary recruiters and organizers of the rebellion among the Zanj themselves prior to it commencing is persistently neglected. In fact, it was Rayhan ibn Salih's slave camp that initially broke out in rebellion the morning of September 9, 869. Alas, outside of close readings of al-Tabari's text, their names are rarely mentioned in accounts of the rebellion. Tabari notes that Ali asked Rayhan ibn Salih and Rafiq to "Induce as many slaves as you can to join and bring them to me."³⁵¹ This demonstrates that it was not Ali himself who called the Zanj to rebellion; moreover, it was Rayhan ibn Salih and Rafiq, these enslaved black men that mobilized the initial camps of the Zanj for rebellion.

³⁵¹ al-Tabari, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume XXXVI: The Revolt of the Zanj, A.D. 869–879/A.H. 255–265*, trans. by David Waines. (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 35.

Another overlooked aspect of the rebellion itself is that Ali was constantly surrounded by or represented by the massive black rebel army during the rebellion. Among these blacks was the black freeman Sulayman ibn Jami, who nineteenth century historian, Theodor Nöldeke, claims served as one of the most capable generals throughout the rebellion. Also, as the Zanj rebels initially went from work site to work site liberating slaves, it was an army of liberated black slaves that was able to successfully mobilize other slaves and people who looked like them. Furthermore, Ali did not address the amassed Zanj rebel army until they were in their camp at the end of the first day. While scholars have attributed Ali's portrayal of himself as a mystic Prophet of Islam to the Zanj following him, twentieth century historian, E. A. Belyaev, argues that the masses of the Zanj had no desire to adopt Ali's religious teachings and since the teachings were from so many different regions of the African continent (i.e. Zanj, Karmatiyya, Nuba, and Furatiyya), speaking several different languages, it was impossible to find translators for all of them. According to Belyaev, for many of the Zanj, Ali was no more than a "dumb man" whose preaching's they were deaf to.³⁵² Additionally, following the construction of the city of al-Mukhtara, after the first battle in Basra in October of 869, Ali began to operate solely from Zanj maroon city only occasionally being seen in battle. Thus, when enslaved blacks were liberated following battles and raids on local villages in southern Iraq, it was more likely that racial solidarity and a sense of group identity embodied by an army of black rebels that compelled them to chose to join the Zanj ranks.

³⁵² E. A. Belyaev, *The Arabs, Islam, and the Arab Caliphate in the Early Middle Ages*. (New York: Frederick a. Praeger Inc., Publishers, 1969), 243.

This rebel Zanj army appealed to the masses of enslaved blacks, who were very aware of their existence at the bottom of a racialized social class structure. The resulting racial solidarity is best demonstrated in the actions of black military and domestic slaves living in Iraq during the time of the revolt. Historian, David M. Goldenberg, notes that during the ninth century, there was an enormous quantity of fugitive slaves; therefore, such a show of resistance was not uncommon for the time. As such, in bold displays of one of the most pronounced forms of overt resistance, these enslaved blacks fled their masters in the military and domestic settings to join their fellow blacks in rebellion against the Arab state. Goldenberg's argument is augmented by Theodor Noldeke's account of many fugitive slaves joining the rebellion from the surrounding villages and towns.³⁵³ Only a close reading of al-Tabari's text yields an account of a runaway slave fleeing to the Zanj army stating "I have only come to you from a strong desire to be in your company."³⁵⁴

Since women were rarely used for hard labor in Arab Muslim slavery and were found primarily in domestic settings, the accounts of Zanj women further demonstrates instances of racial solidarity. The Zanj women would not have been among those to join the rebellion in the work sites of southern Iraq, they must either have come as fugitive slaves that fled to join the black rebellion, or as blacks that chose to join the rebellion after being liberated following the Zanj conquering their village. Nonetheless, their choice to join the rebellion reflected a shift in loyalty from their masters to their fellow

³⁵³ Theodor Nöldeke, *Sketches from Eastern History*. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), 153.

³⁵⁴ al-Tabari, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume XXXVI: The Revolt of the Zanj, A.D. 869–879/A.H. 255–265*, trans. by David Waines. (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 61.

blacks who shared a collective racial identity formed by their common experience of being enslaved in Arab society.

The strength of the rebellion however, was derived from black soldiers who defected from the Caliphal armies to join the Zanj in rebellion. It was from these defecting formerly enslaved blacks that the Zanj army was enriched with arms, supplies, and well trained man power. The Zanj's great achievements have been attributed in part to their excellent fighting tactics which no doubt benefited greatly from runaway blacks from the Caliphal military. It must also be stated that many of the military defectors chose to join the rank of the Zanj army when they were sent out by the Caliph to suppress rebellion. There is no record of a rebel Zanj scout being sent to appeal to them, neither was Ali himself of any concern to them in their decision. Additionally, Nöldeke's account of black Caliphal military slaves switching sides and joining the Zanj rebel army in the middle of a battle further indicates the existence of a shared collective racial identity. Thus, here again it is most likely that a race conscious black identity formed by their awareness of a shared present enslavement along with a recollection of their further racial stratification as expendable black infantry military slaves served as the basis their own rebellion.

Identity formation serves as a prerequisite for mobilization and without a group self-consciousness, there can be no collective action against a shared experience or situation.³⁵⁵ For the Zanj, racial identity within a class structure was expressed and channeled into their varying modes of resistance and mobilization, which manifested in the violent militancy of the Zanj rebel army. As such, slave status was conferred upon

³⁵⁵ Anthony W. Marx, *Making Race and Nation*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 19.

individuals through violence and maintained by the threat of brutal violence or death.³⁵⁶

Thus, Frantz Fanon's assertion of the necessity of violence is applicable to the Zanj.

Fanon suggests the mobilization of the masses, as a result of a war of liberation provokes the idea of a common cause and the destruction of the oppressive class through violence unifies the people.

This violence frees the oppressed slave of his inferiority complex, from despair and inaction, makes him fearless, and restores his self-respect.³⁵⁷ This cannot be seen better than in the described image of a Zanj rebel soldier charging into battle armed with none other than a broken plate. Even the Zanj women throwing bricks during battles attests to the fearlessness and desperation of their situation and the absence of the notions of inferior status projected by the racially dominant Arab. According to Fanon, violence acts similarly to a royal pardon and allows strayed members of the group to find their place once more.³⁵⁸ This is especially seen in the actions of the black Caliphal military slaves who were welcomed by the Zanj rebel army to join their ranks.

For the Zanj, armed struggle mobilized and thrust them in the direction of rebellion, which is displayed in the fugitive military and domestic slaves that fled their masters to join their fellow blacks in rebellion. Accordingly, the racially dominant Arabs racialized social structure facilitated the development of a race consciousness among the Zanj and necessitated joint violent action in the form of the Zanj Rebellion. While the Zanj rebellion was eventually suppressed in 883 C.E., it remains as an early historical display of racial consciousness and solidarity. Thus the Zanj Rebellion was a response to

³⁵⁶ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 377.

³⁵⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. (New York: Grove Press, Inc, 1966), 73.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 67.

the conditions of slavery and social inferiority, which were both dictated by a hierarchical racialized social structure.

VII. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the goal of this study was to demonstrate that African slave rebellions, such as the Zanj Rebellion, cannot be thoroughly assessed without also examining the historical implications of the racialization process and the creation of a racialized social structure. By applying the concept of racialization – a process that can occur in any society and in any era – to the Arab Islamic slave trade I have been able to show that the Zanj Rebellion represents a display of racial contestation in ninth century Abbasid Society. As a result of the influx of cultures that converged in Baghdad in the ninth century, the socially dominant Arabs created a racialized social structure that confined blacks to the lowest positions in the social structure. This racial stratification positioned blacks in permanent roles of servitude in society whether they were free or enslaved. Enslaved blacks were further stratified and considered inferior to their enslaved white counter parts.

Ninth century Abbasid society was indeed racialized as each social group was categorized and given a racial meaning of inferiority to some extent by the dominant Arab racial group. The Arabs knowingly promoted false racial ideologies which stereotyped blacks as intellectually inferior and naturally fit for enslavement and servitude. It cannot be said that the Arabs actually believed these racial ideologies for two reasons. First, there was a small amount of blacks that were able to advance in Abbasid society, such as al-Jahiz who is regarded as one of the most prolific scholars in

Arab history. And second, by the ninth century the blacks of North Africa and the Eastern Coast of Africa were not the only blacks that had come in contact with the Arabs. Africana historian John Henrik Clarke details Arab knowledge of the great West African kingdom of Ghana as stating:

An Arab geographer, Ibn Haukal, wrote a book about old Ghana in 700 A.D. He described the court of the king of Ghana a place with sculpture, frescoes, and windows of crystal. He said that horses slept on carpets in the royal stables, and the king sat on a throne of pure gold. Agriculture was highly developed, and its gold mines were famous. The wealth of the country was spoken of as far away as Baghdad.³⁵⁹

With such knowledge of highly developed African civilizations, it is clear that it was not through ignorance that the Arabs spread these racial ideologies; moreover, these stereotypes were proliferated for no reason other than to sustain their position as the superior racial group in their own social structure.

Race, then, was a vital aspect of Abbasid society as it came to determine life chances and social mobility, and for blacks in ninth century Iraq it became a permanent signifier of social inferiority. Occupying the lowest position in the social structure were the blacks, who were not alien to Arab society but through the spread of Islam entered the Islamic world in large numbers through the Arab Muslim slave trade. Through the proliferation of racial ideologies, blacks, enslaved or free, were cemented as inferior beings that were fit solely for enslavement and servitude. These racial ideologies organized the race relations of society, which confined them to the lower rungs of the social structure. Historian, Robert L. Paquette, suggests that ideologies should be studied by social historians as a vital mediating link between structure and process on the one

³⁵⁹ John Henrik Clarke, *African People in World History*. (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1993), 35.

hand and behavior on the other.³⁶⁰ As such, the racial ideologies emanating from the social structure cannot be separated from the human realities of the Zanj and blacks in the ninth century Abbasid Caliphate.

Furthermore, given that the Abbasid Caliphate was responsible for creating much of the early Islamic theology, the racial ideologies dispensed through Islamic doctrine heavily reinforced the racialized social structure as blacks were cast as intellectually inferior, enemies of Islam bound to destroy the Ka'ba in the future, deformed because of their skin color, and natural candidates for enslavement. As a result of this racial stratification through the racialization process and the development of race consciousness, the Zanj organized in racial contestation in the form of overt violent rebellion. In accordance with Fanon's suggestion that violence from the subordinate racial group will always be proportional to the violence exercised by the dominant racial group to maintain superior social status, it must be remembered that violence is an inherent element of slavery.

Bonilla-Silva defines racial contestation as "the struggle of racial groups for systemic changes regarding their position at one or more levels."³⁶¹ Expressing their own racial contestation, the Zanj, along with enslaved blacks in the surrounding villages and black military slaves revealed their objective interests in their desire of freedom. This racial contestation manifested violently through their retaliatory mass killings and retreat from Arab society to the maroon city of al-Mukhtara to start their own independent society. Furthermore, race consciousness was demonstrated by solidarity found in

³⁶⁰ Robert L. Paquette, "Social History Update: Slave Resistance and Social History," *Journal of Social History*, 24:3 (1991): 683.

³⁶¹ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001) 43.

fugitive slaves and defecting black military slaves that fled their masters to join the Zanj in rebellion.

Many studies of slave rebellions tend to oversimplify the behavior and motivations of the enslaved.³⁶² Scholars, such as Ghada Hashem Talhami and Alexander Popovic, have attempted to remove the issue of race from accounts of the Zanj Rebellion; however, such assertions should be expected if they are conceiving of race and racism from the ideological perspective that regards racism as merely an irrational mode of thinking. Thus, past historical accounts of the Zanj Rebellion have failed to connect the rebellion to the larger racialized social structure. Scholars have consistently claimed that the rebellion was simply a revolt against slavery by an enslaved labor class. As such, many scholars have been reluctant to acknowledge the existence of race prior to the imperialist expansion that emerged from Europe in the fifteenth century. This myth that issues of race did not afflict Muslim society, should be attributed to western ignorance of the Arab Muslim slave trade and early Arab Muslim societies in general. Furthermore, the racial ideologies displayed in Arabic literature and Islamic doctrine cannot be ignored, and neither can the experiences of The Crows of the Arabs and the defenses in al-Jahiz's *The Book of the Glory of the Black Race*. These texts thoroughly demonstrate that racial thinking and race consciousness were prevalent in the ninth century Abbasid society among both Arabs and blacks.

Historian Eugene Genovese, suggests that revolts against slavery are basic assertions of human dignity and humanity itself.³⁶³ Consequently, the Zanj positioned

³⁶² Robert L. Paquette, "Social History Update: Slave Resistance and Social History," *Journal of Social History*, 24:3 (1991): 683.

³⁶³ Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), xiii.

themselves to assert their political, social and human interests in rebellion and the social structure. In doing so they chose to no longer exist as the most dominated racial group in Arab society. As such, the Zanj rebellion stands as one of the most radical and formidable threats to the Abbasid Caliphate, not only because of its military prowess or dealings in southern Iraq, but because it presented a genuine challenge to the ordering of Arab society for nearly fifteen years.³⁶⁴

In order to gain thorough understandings of history it is imperative that scholars continue to apply Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's Structural Theory of Racism to historically racialized societies that remain under-discussed. For where racialization occurs, issues of race cannot be overlooked. The Zanj Rebellion in Southern Iraq was a single occurrence of slavery and rebellion in the massive Islamic empire. Yosef Ben-Jochannan asserts that "this period of the Arab history of atrocity against the Africans cannot be overlooked, or ignored. Not for one moment."³⁶⁵ Neither can the far reaches of the Arab Islamic slave trade into eastern Asia and the Mediterranean. Arab scholars seem to have very little interest in exploring the far reaches of the Arab slave trade and as a result there is a great deal of future research that must take place. First Arab Islamic slavery must be thoroughly researched in order for parallels to be drawn with its Trans-Atlantic counterpart. Further research must be conducted on the middle passage from Africa to the Arab world by ship and by land.

Maroon polities unquestionably provide the best opportunity to make important strides in furthering understandings of slave rebellions specifically, and in the

³⁶⁴ Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*. (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), 177.

³⁶⁵ Yosef A.A. Ben-Jochannan, *African Origins of the Major "Western Religions,"* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991) 195.

understanding of resistance in general.³⁶⁶ Concerning the Zanj Rebellion, scholars must delve deeper into the operations of the Zanj capital city, al-Mukhtara. They must begin to further examine the social structure with in al-Mukhtara, its gender relations, race relations, and power structure. In the future scholars must also highlight the roles of women in the Zanj rebellion beyond being brick throwers and fugitive slaves. Additionally, resistance in the Arab slave trade in general must be further examined at all levels from domestic settings to rebellion.

Anthropologist, Runoko Rashidi, suggests that wherever they met oppression, African people have always defied subjugation and the Zanj Rebellion remains a “glorious page in African history and Black resistance movements.”³⁶⁷ Furthermore, the Zanj Rebellion stands as an extraordinary moment in history and signifies, if anything, that African people have always fought against their oppression and must continue to do so in the future.

³⁶⁶ Charles E. Orser, Jr. and Pedro P. A. Funari, “Archaeology and Slave Resistance and Rebellion.” *World Archaeology, The Archaeology of Slavery* 33:1 (2001): 63.

³⁶⁷ Runoko Rashidi, *African Star Over Asia: The Black Presence In the East*. (London: Books of Africa Limited, 2012), 174.

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