

Palestinian-Indigenous solidarity must move beyond tokenism and mobilization towards transformational solidarity and organization.



**PALESTINE'S
and
TURTLE ISLAND'S
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ENTWINED**

Mohamed Abdou

relative to a euro-amerikan Christianity but also arguably because of Islam's founding upon, and relationship to, social justice.

Aligned appropriately and as a quintessential signifier in whose global Orientalist shadow others are cast—as with NoDAPL Indigenous water protectors, who were compared by u.s. mercenary firms like TigerSwan to “jihadi movements,” and Black Lives Matter activists, who were designated by the f.b.i. as “Black identity extremists”—Islam and Muslims are ideally positioned to geopolitically demystify the intimate intersections between imperialism and “settler colonialism” in Palestine and Turtle Island.

By reneging on this responsibility, particularly those of us who identify as immigrant South Asian and North Afrikan Muslims, we become zionists on stolen land while we simultaneously expose our hypocritical fantasies of freeing Palestine—and ourselves.

That is why we immigrants in the u.s. and kanada must seriously re-examine our ethical-political commitments when comes to supporting Palestine, founding an abolitionist and decolonial Islam, and forming alliances with Indigenous and Black peoples in their demands for Indigenous land rematriation as well as Black reparations. We need to move beyond reactionary paradigms of “survival” and “resistance” towards pro-active strategic movement objectives that center our collective livingness, thriving, and liberation. Palestine’s freeing is simultaneously entwined with the freeing of Indigenous and Black people in Turtle Island. To end Palestinian occupation, the bewitched amerikan/kanadian false dream must fall and be replaced by a genuinely decolonial enchanting else.

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It means transformational solidarity, a long-term process grounded in shared spiritual, ethical, and political commitments that demand a transformation of all our relations, including to the local, historical, and material geographies of the land we are situated on.

As Palestinian scholar Dana Olwan wrote in an article titled “On Assumptive Solidarities in Comparative Settler Colonialisms,” incidents in which “Indigenous activists are invited to provide opening ceremonies for pro-Palestinian events” are many and are often animated by the lack of a deeper interrogation and challenging of the “Canadian and United States settler coloniality and thus normalize the violence of such states.”

This type of transformational solidarity is not new. For example, it has been customary in Chile, a country with the largest Palestinian population outside the Middle East, for Palestinians to march in solidarity with the Indigenous Mapuche people on the annual Indigenous People’s Day parade and work on the land with them.

While these solidarity lines do take place in the U.S. at the level of mobilization, they are inconsistent at the level of organization. Land acknowledgments are about intent, purpose, and above all—action.

As Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael), the spiritual Pan-African revolutionary, put it: “What mobilization does is, it mobilizes people around issues. [But] those of us who are revolutionary are not concerned with issues. We are concerned with the system. ...Mobilization usually leads to reform action, not to revolutionary action.”

As I write in my book *Islam and Anarchism: Relationships and Resonances*, Muslim immigrant settlers bear a particular responsibility to act not only because of the geopolitical context of Islamophobia and Islam as a quintessential other

and, by far, the largest polluter.

Indigenous-led NoDAPL protests in 2016 against the Dakota Access Pipeline, which was set to run close to the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, were a missed opportunity for Muslim and pro-Palestinian activists to center and draw deeper connections between settler colonialism at home and abroad.

Another blatant instance of the relationship between settler colonialism at home and abroad is at Cornell University, the Ivy League institution where I was a visiting scholar last year and which has also been a hub of pro-Palestinian activism in recent weeks.

Set among the bucolic countryside of upstate New York and flush with waterfalls, gorges, and evergreens, Cornell is regarded as the largest university land grab in U.S. history and the single largest beneficiary of the 1862 Morrill Act, which saw 10.7 million acres (4.3 million hectares) stolen from 250 different Indigenous peoples in 15 states and handed over to universities.

In this, Cornell accrues benefits from the principal revenue and capital of the land as well as surface extraction rights involving minerals, resources, mining, and water. Cornell University is also partnered with Technion-'Israel' Institute of Technology, founded in 1912, whose military research and development labs have pioneered the technologies of Palestinian dispossession.

Muslims' special responsibility

Understanding our investment in settler colonialism should push us to oppose it in full. This goes further than pickets, teach-ins, Boycott-Divestment-Sanction (BDS) campaigns, blockading arms manufacturers premised on short-term crisis management, or the performative land acknowledgments that have become customary at land-grab universities like Cornell.

Over the past two months, protest marches in solidarity with the Palestinian people have taken place all across the United States and Canada. They have attracted a diverse crowd of people, including many Indigenous nations and communities.

Participants have denounced "U.S. imperialism" for enabling 'Israel's' aggression, ethnic cleansing, and genocide while others have charged 'Israel' itself with "settler colonialism."

However, many attendees—especially pro-Palestinian immigrants—have failed to comprehend their own relationship to settler colonialism. Many of us see the U.S. and Canada as secular democracies that provide good economic opportunities and not as settler-colonial societies, serving as the blueprint for 'Israel.' We have ignored our own complicity as settlers.

Muslims and South Asian, North African, and Arab immigrant settlers must interrogate the legitimacy of America's and Canada's right to exist and the costly trade-off they make in taking on national identities in these countries that come at the expense of Indigenous peoples at "home" and imperialist adventurism abroad.

Settler-colonial history ignored

A significant number of migrant Muslims do not seem to comprehend that American societies are animated by white-supremacist religious doctrines such as manifest destiny and the doctrines of discovery and terra nullius, Protestant ethics, common law property rights, and Victorian notions of gender and sexuality.

Rather, Muslim "arrivals" to the U.S. should consider the history of settler colonialism in the Americas—a history that sees Islamophobia and anti-Indigenous narratives as well as anti-Blackness and anti-Jewishness inextricably bound.

In the late 15th century, Christopher Columbus's conquistador invasion of the americas commenced as the european Crusading eviction, murder, and forced conversion of Muslims and Jews in Andalusia was coming to an end.

There, Muslims and Jews were racially and religiously cast as "enemies," "savages," and "heathens," an othering that tinted the lens through which Columbus and his successors saw Indigenous peoples in the americas, describing them as "blood drinkers," "cannibals," and "devils."

As Alan Mikhail writes in his book *God's Shadow*, Columbus described the weapons used by the Indigenous Taíno people of the Caribbean as "alfanjes, the Spanish name for the scimitars used by Muslim soldiers," while Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés identified 400 Aztec temples in Mexico as "mosques," described "Aztec women" as "Moorish women," and referred to Montezuma, the Aztec leader, as a "sultan."

Later, in the 16th century, as the transatlantic slave trade got under way, Afrikans—20 to 30 percent of whom were Muslims—would become the new "infidels" and "savages."

These were not mere insults but euro-amerikan Christian religious and racial narratives of dehumanization that eventually found their way into u.s. religious doctrine, law, and settler attitudes.

They were used to justify the expropriation of Indigenous land and resources as well as the enslavement and continued "after-life of slavery" projects targeting Black peoples. They also drove the Islamophobia that in recent years has resulted in Muslim bans, unmitigated u.s. government support for zionist settler colonialism, as well as the death and destruction wrought as part of the "war on terror."

Rather than question the u.s. settler-colonial project root and branch, Muslim immigrants have taken it for granted and

tried to entrench themselves as "good liberal settlers," eliding their own settler-colonial complicities, even when they have come from countries ravaged by the effects of imperialist u.s. foreign policy.

amerikan nightmare

This love for the delusional promise of the "American dream" runs counter to what the selectively quoted anti-amerikan Muslim Malcolm X, referred to as an "amerikan nightmare" and exists despite a surge in recent years of Indigenous activism as well as a vast body of scholarship in Indigenous, Palestinian, and comparative settler-colonial studies.

This activism and work help us understand that the u.s.'s imperial commitments abroad are informed by the violence it has wreaked against Black peoples and Indigenous peoples in north amerika—or what the latter refer to as Turtle Island.

As Eve Tuck, professor of critical race and Indigenous studies at the University of toronto, and K. Wayne Yang, professor of ethnic studies at the University of california, san diego, wrote in a paper titled "Decolonization is not a metaphor": "Oil is the motor and motive for war and so was salt, so will be water. Settler sovereignty over the very pieces of earth, air, and water is what makes possible these imperialisms. ... 'Indian Country' was/is the term used in Viet Nam, Afghanistan, Iraq by the U.S. military for 'enemy territory.'"

A case in point is the Iraq war. Critics and some u.s. officials were adamant that the war—spearheaded by Vice President Dick Cheney, a former CEO of oil giant Halliburton—was intended to benefit big oil. However, it was missed that u.s. fighter jets, cruise missiles, and armored vehicles could not have descended on Iraq in 2003 without the fuel derived from abundant oil supplies tapped from Indigenous lands, which today makes the u.s. the world's largest oil producer