Article

Mobilising a Decolonial–Islamic Praxis: Covenants in Islam and Muslim–Indigenous Relations

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Abstract: Islam was an important factor in the decolonisation of Muslim countries from European colonial rule during the 19th and 20th centuries. However, Muslims are among the migrant-settler populations of Australia, Canada, the United States, and other British colonial states that continue to dispossess and disenfranchise Indigenous populations. This article contributes to the debate on "decolonising Islam". It contends that covenants with God and between people in Islam's pre-eminent sources, the Qur'an and *sunnah*, are antithetical to colonialism and reinforce a praxis-orientated decolonial–Islamic agenda. This article focuses on three aspects of decolonisation, addressing: (1) supremacist ideology; (2) human existence and coexistence; and (3) claims of entitlement. Using Australia as the primary case study, it examines Islamic obligations towards Indigenous peoples in settler-colonial states, emphasising the potential of covenants to promote mutual recognition and dialogue towards redressing injustices and building respectful coexistence.

Keywords: Islam; Qur'an; sunnah; colonialism; decolonisation; Indigenous; Australia; covenants

1. Introduction

There is a large and growing body of scholarship that has brought Islam into dialogue with the anti-colonial movements of decolonisation[1] and aspects of decoloniality. The large majority of this work has located Islam adjacent to large-scale political upheaval synonymous with postcolonialism. In pairing Islam with anti-colonial agendas, some scholars articulate Islam to be a positive component of decolonising and decolonial disruption (Motadel 2014; Abdou 2022; El Amrani 2023; Gani 2023). Others express a need to decolonise prevailing understandings of Islam itself to revitalise, reposition, or better prime Islam as a contemporary body of thought and practice geared towards decolonisation (Rahemtulla 2023). Despite the dialogue between anti-colonial scholarship and Islam, the physical presence of Muslim migrants and their descendants in the sovereign lands of dispossessed Indigenous peoples through colonisation has not received extensive scholarly analysis. Shadaab Rahemtulla (2023), an exception in writing on this issue in the Canadian context, raises an important question about the religious obligations and responsibilities of voluntary Muslim migrants, arguing that, via their presence, they "are structurally complicit in the ongoing disenfranchisement of Indigenous peoples" (p. 1).

This article considers and moves beyond shared historical relations, contemporary solidarity, and general principles of standing for justice and opposing injustice to address the theological issue of Islam's response to settler colonialism and how it can contribute to decolonisation through an examination of covenants—solemn agreements, commitments, and pledges—in Islam's pre-eminent sources, the Qur'an and *sunnah*.[2] In reference to the Australia case, this article argues for bringing decolonial scholarship into dialogue with Islam so to better situate an Islamic response to the enduring legacies of colonisation in Australia and to invigorate a praxistical relationality between Indigenous peoples and Muslim communities. It is not intended to be an empirical study of decolonisation in

Australia but rather a conceptual engagement with Rahemtulla's contribution to thinking about the phenomenon of structural complicity vis-a-vis religious responsibility, centring questions posed by Rahemtulla to analyse the religious position of Muslims in Australia. It also engages with Robin Kelley's (2017) recontextualisation of Patrick Wolfe's delineation of settler colonialism noting, "[de]colonization is a process and not an event"; thus, decoloniality is a reflexive obligation to refuse "to accept the permanence and terms of settler domination" (p. 274). This article contributes to the growing discourse on an anti-colonial Islam via what Emma Pérez (1999) calls the "decolonial imaginary", that is, the ontological and epistemological space where "memory/dreams/fantasy of life before and beyond invasion is possible, which, perhaps even make revolution possible" (cited in Kelley 2017, p. 274).

Through the lens of our situated experiences as a non-Indigenous Muslim Australian scholar and Indigenous Muslim Australian scholars from Meanjin (Brisbane), on the unceded lands of the Yuggera and Turrbul peoples, we engage with Rahemtulla's (2023) decolonial provocation problematising the located responsibilities of Muslims in First World settler-colonial societies, like Canada and Australia. Using Rahemtulla's (2023) three-stage hermeneutical sequence to decolonise Islam,[3] we elucidate the faith-based responsibilities of Muslim peoples and communities in Australia to demonstrate how Islam can contribute to the decolonial praxis in settler-colonial territories across the world. To delineate our praxistical decolonial–Islamic perspective, after positioning Muslim responsibilities in the context of Australia in Section 3, we present in Section 4 an Islamic narrative from the Qur'an and *sunnah* in response to three aspects of colonisation and decolonisation: (1) supremacist ideology; (2) human existence and coexistence; and (3) claims of entitlement. We demonstrate how engagement with an Islamic covenantal paradigm, derived from the Qur'an and *sunnah*, is antithetical to colonialism and can operate as decolonial praxis.

2. Decolonial Praxis

Ultimately, decolonising/decolonial scholars, including Indigenous peoples of colour, women, the subaltern, or as Fanon (1963) would say, *les damnés de la terre* ("the wretched of the earth"), are engaged in an ongoing epistemological–material project of dismantling, delinking, or rupturing colonial knowledge systems, institutional structures, oppressive legacies, and rigid Eurocentrism. Decolonising/decolonial scholars agitate from within, between and below persisting colonial structures. The central axis of this work is praxis. Praxis denotes synergistic mobilisations that cycle theorisations, reflections, and actions, concentrated with directed intent to impact, disrupt, enhance, and elevate the material conditions and lifeworlds of the colonised, or formerly colonised, peoples and lands (Mignolo and Walsh 2018; Saffari 2024). An anti-colonial/decolonial Islamic lens, the focus of this article, enables an examination of enduring colonial power dynamics in Australia, with the praxistical intent to mobilise Indigenous–Muslim coalitions that centre Indigenous sovereignty in the consciousness of Muslim migrants and their descendants. The motivation to pursue a praxistical dialogue between decoloniality and Islam is found in the Qur'an's extensive emphasis on human beings as *khalifa* (successive inheritor) of the earth, justice, human security[4] and wellbeing, and on the regulation of God–human and intra-human relations through covenants. In Islam, covenants are solemn agreements, commitments, and pledges involving acknowledgements, conditions, and consequences that set the terms governing human existence and coexistence (Rane 2023).

The scholarly shift towards pairing Islam with anti-colonial frameworks is not an unconventional alliance. Historically, the Muslim world has endured multiple forms of colonialism, and Muslims[5] have individually and collectively resisted colonisation, mobilising anti-colonial movements under the banner of, and with inspiration from, Islam (Motadel 2014; Slisli 2012). Islam was an important mobilising factor in collectivist political decolonisation from European colonial rule (the English, French, and Dutch, among others) during the 19th and 20th centuries. It must be noted, however, that Islam has been appropriated by both modern and pre-modern Muslim states in the service of nation-

and empire-building in ways not always consistent with Islamic objectives, principles, and values. In the past, a departure from Islam (as conveyed in the Qur'an and *sunnah*) was accompanied by a neglect of Qur'anic covenants and those issued by the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632), which demanded the protection of the life, property, and places of worship of people, including non-Muslims under Muslim rule (Zein and El-Wakil 2022).

We should also note the large body of literature that associates Islam with historical injustices and oppression, including in relation to the treatment of women, slavery, and military conquest (Rahemtulla 2017; Duderija 2017). Like other scholars, when speaking of Islam, we draw a distinction between the message derived from the Qur'an and *sunnah* and the so-called "Islamic tradition" that emerged in the centuries after the revelation of the Qur'an. It is beyond the scope of this article to address historical injustice and oppression associated with the Islamic tradition. We refer readers to important works in this regard concerning, for example, the treatment of women (Ahmed 2021), slavery (Brown 2020), and military conquest (Al-Dawoody 2011).

Historical and contemporary racialised and gendered oppression in either the Muslim or First/Western worlds, such as the fastidious controls over the divisions of labour, knowledge production, and exploitation of the natural environment, did not, however, end with the advance towards modernity or the achievement of national sovereignty in former European colonies. Colonialism, as Walter Mignolo (2011) argues, is the dark underbelly of modernity, such that the generative roots and legacies of colonial dehumanisations and commodifications are in fact the fabric of the modern world and endure, reproportioned and reinstituted through the centricity of Euro/American/Western institutions, ideologies, languages, commerce, governance, militarisation, and values (e.g., the colonial matrix of power, viz. coloniality). A deliberate scholarly shift towards a decolonial re-reading of so-called post-colonial histories, and a critical reappraisal of Islamic sources so to better prime Islam as a complimentary framework to aid in the resistance to and rupture of colonialism's continuing geo-political oppression and dehumanisation, is overdue. A crucial step in this process requires a thorough examination of the ideological underpinnings of colonialism.

Mahmood Mamdani's (2020) genealogy of political modernity, *Neither Settler nor Native*, outlines a range of case studies analysing the political genesis of the United States, Germany, South Africa, Sudan, and Israel–Palestine, arguing from a decolonial position that, in the colonial model, modern political nation-states found a blueprint to establish and sustain territorial power based on the proclaimed supremacism of the coloniser over the colonised. His analysis reveals how similar methods were employed that racialised and politicised a "religious or ethnic majority" to dehumanise and oppress a "manufactured minority". Mamdani (2020) reminds us that, for the European colonisation projects, "Only people deemed civilized had to be tolerated. Others—marked by their cultural differences from Christian Europeans—had to be made civilized before earning the right to be tolerated" (p. 2). Demonstrating colonialism's shifting and enduring system, Mamdani notes how American President Franklin D. Roosevelt, inspired by the theories of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, considered all people as animals, justified race wars in terms of "the survival of the fittest", and "explained the eugenic roots of Indian genocide, making a single contribution to Nazism and other doctrines of scientific racism" (Mamdani 2020, p. 40). Thus, the white man's burden was a moral obligation to either eradicate, "civilise" and/or Christianise Indigenous populations. According to Mamdani (2020), "The genocide of the American Indians, and the celebration of that genocide within the US settler regime, had a significant impact on Adolf Hitler and fellow Nazis" (p. 101). He notes that Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*:

> The racially pure and still unmixed German has risen to become master of the American continent, and he will remain the master, so long as he does not fall victim to racial pollution. (p. 106)

Hitler was under no illusions about how this mastery was attained. In a 1928 speech, he noted approvingly that the Americans had "gunned down the millions of Redskins to a few hundred thousand" (cited in Mamdani 2020, p. 106). Similarly, like that seen in

the US, Israel's imposition of an apartheid system of rule over the Occupied Palestinian Territory of the West Bank drew on European race theory and the colonial model. The ideological foundation of the far-right Israeli governments that have ruled in recent decades is aligned with the Revisionist Zionism of Vladimir Jabotinsky, a nonsocialist and nonliberal Zionism "squarely within the traditions of modern secular racism and settler colonialism" (Mamdani 2020, p. 261). Jabotinsky differentiates between Palestinian and Muslim communities based on racial appearance and religious intolerance, sowing the generative roots of sustained genocidal conflict, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and the contemporary state of Israeli–Palestinian relations (Mamdani 2020). At the time of writing, the violent, supremacist ideology of the Israeli government and military officials has been determined as a plausible case of genocide by the International Court of Justice. The supremacist ideology and sense of entitlement, which are central to colonial projects, must be dismantled for a just peace and respectful coexistence to emerge as part of a decolonial–Islamic praxis.

A decolonial–Islamic praxis in Australia follows both scholarly and community efforts to mobilise Islam as a change agent. Muslim and Indigenous communities in Australian are already disposed towards constructive, respectful relations. The relationality of Indigenous Australians with Islam and Muslims dates back centuries before British colonisation. The Yolngu and other Indigenous peoples in the north of Australia traded and engaged in cultural exchanges with the Makassans from Indonesia. Islamic references identified in Yolngu mythology and ritual include "the 'Dreaming' creation figure, Walitha'walitha, also known as Allah" (McIntosh 2005). Outward signs of the Yolngu adopting aspects of Islam include spiritual chants, creative representations, names, and customs. Their engagement with Islam, whether through conversion or conversation, was occurring but was interrupted by British colonisation (Ganter 2016).

In the aftermath of British settlement, many Indigenous Australian women married "Afghan cameleers" who were brought to Australia in the 1800s to help traverse the country's arid interior and desert regions. Others intermarried with other early Muslim people, including "Indian hawkers" and "Malay pearl divers" who had also come to Australia as "guest" workers in the late 1800s. Many Indigenous Australians today are reconnecting with their Muslim heritage, a phenomenon described as "kinversion" (Stephenson 2010). Today, Islam is the only religion that is increasing among Indigenous Australians, while other categories of religion are unchanged or have declined according to 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data.

While it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a full account of Islam and Muslims in Australia, a survey of Muslim Australian citizens and permanent residents conducted in 2019 found that reconciliation with Indigenous Australians is an issue about which 82% of Muslim Australians are concerned or very concerned. The study also reported that 94% agree or strongly agree that Indigenous Australians should be recognised in Australia's Constitution (Rane et al. 2020). This article now turns to the hermeneutical stages of instituting the faith-based responsibility of Muslims in Australia.

3. Hermeneutical Stages 1 and 2: Instituting the Faith-Based Responsibility of Non-Indigenous Muslims in Australia

This section outlines the key theorisation on the ideological and physical infrastructure of colonialism, namely racism derived from pseudoscience and its control, exploitation and domination over Indigenous land and labour.[6] We problematise the complicity of migrant Muslim Australians and their descendants in the settler-colonial structure, who reside on, benefit from, and, perhaps unwittingly, reinforce Indigenous dispossession.

Colonialism is recognised to be a shifting project, manifesting and morphing through several iterations and modalities (e.g., extractive, plantation, surrogate, internal, etc.), of which settler colonisation (SC) is one form. With the genesis of European colonialism in the Enlightenment, the scientific revolution and modernity, colonisation spread as a continuing global project, which began with the push towards the Americas in the 15th century. Driven by doctrines of white supremacy (e.g., white manifest destiny, the white

man's burden, scientific racism, doctrines of discovery, and terra nullius (empty land)), this power complex is principally concerned with the unethical seizure and exploitation of both land and human labour. Legitimised through scientific rationalism and/or religious zeal, colonialism is anchored to an enduring superiority complex, which positions the white, European, Christian male as inherently dominant over the intellectually, physically and spiritually inferior non-white native savage. Colonialism justified the theft and occupation of Indigenous lands via a self-appointed mandate, which racialised non-white natives as incapable of assuming a place in an advancing modern world.

Drawing its structuring ideologies and power modes from colonialism broadly, as a material force, SC specifically manifests through the process of seizing Indigenous territories and subjugating its human population, so to perpetually control the land and its natural and human resources. Wolfe (2006), in outlining the particularity of SC, insists that "elimination" is the organising principle, as settlement is primarily associated with the will to acquire and control the land. The annexation of territories occurs through a migrant-settler white population initialising waves of armed invasion tactics and iterative guerrilla style or large-scale sustained frontier wars. Australian historians Henry Reynolds (1982) and Bruce Elder (1988), although controversial at the time, dispute the enduring Australian truism that settlement was peaceful and the Indigenous peoples simply died out due to imported diseases, like influenza and measles. Instead, Reynolds (1982) emphasises the need to reposition the frontier conflicts as wars, due to the systematic, large-scale and atrocious tactics employed to quell Indigenous colonial resistance. Similarly, Elder (1988) challenges the peaceful settlement narrative, demonstrating the scale of the massacres occurring on the frontiers, where government-sanctioned armed militias were tasked with the eradication of entire clans, or elsewhere, where pastoralists employed deliberate poisoning or organised ad hoc retaliatory hunting parties to avenge the loss of livestock or crops (Ryan 2021).

Once the Indigenous Australian population was dispersed and controlled, the newly secured frontier territories were held indefinitely via vigilant force (i.e., armed militias, soldiers, and police forces) and an array of imported institutional, and "legal" mechanisms that manufacture the "legitimacy" of the settler occupation. These methods of force, surveillance, and bureaucratic infrastructure were designed to regulate the possibility of internal and external threats from non-white peoples. Borders in the newly created illegitimate colonies operated to deliberately deny Indigenous peoples human and civil rights, particularly the right to land and self-determination. To maintain the wealth of the original invasion and theft, the colonial rule of law (e.g., statute and common law) imported from the metropole and established in the colony effectively partitioned land, resources, citizenship and rights for the white man. As Kauanui (2016) argues, the elimination outlined by Wolfe above is a wilful intent to "eliminate the native *as native*" (p. 1). In this sense, Kelley (2017) explains "elimination" as a will that attempts to extinguish "metaphysical and material relations of people to land, culture, spirit, and each other" (p. 269).

In Australia, after the invasion and frontier wars, "elimination" manifested as waves of government policy designed to distance Indigenous peoples from traditional lands, cultural practices and each other. From the late 19th to the mid-20th century, States and Territories in Australia initiated "protection" policies through the creation of government-run reserves or Christian-run missions. Protection Acts functioned to legally remove Indigenous peoples from traditional lands and quell the "threat" of racial impurity due to the rampant sexual exploitation of Indigenous women and children in frontier spaces. Physical separation from the white race was designed to "protect" Indigenous peoples rationalised through the now defunct pseudo-science of Social Darwinism, which posited the racialised superiority of the white European race. In reality, "protection" was manufactured to sever Indigenous connections to ancestral lands and maintain an indentured Indigenous labour force. Throughout the era of "protection", government officials effectively controlled Indigenous lives, stripping away agency and erasing traditional languages, customs, knowledge and belief systems.

The "protection" era led into the official phase of assimilation, where government-initiated policies sought to forcibly remove Indigenous children from their families based on criteria associated with the blood quantum (e.g., half-caste, quadroon) or aspersions such as "familial neglect". This dark era is known as the Stolen Generations, when "approximately 1 in 10 to 1 in 3 Indigenous children" (AIATSIS 2023) were placed into government- or church-run institutions, or instead lodged with white families, to be absorbed culturally into the customs and values of the white-settler society. The legacy of the invasions, frontier wars, massacres, segregation, ethnic cleansings, and cultural assimilations has inflicted deep inter-generational trauma, which continues to fracture Indigenous peoples, families, and culture. Dispossession has caused severe social, political, and economic disadvantage, resulting in widespread poverty, unemployment, and higher rates of chronic diseases, mental health issues, infant mortality and social exclusion. Today, Indigenous peoples are over-represented in juvenile and adult prisons, low-income brackets, scales of health equality, and youth and adult suicide, while being under-represented in full-time enrolment in school, university, and employment, despite the myth of Australia being "the land of the fair go", with a "fair go tradition" (Howard 2023)—a land of equal opportunity, relative safety and plenty.

While Indigenous peoples were removed from traditional lands during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, Australia also policed the access and movement of other non-white peoples, including Muslim and other "guest workers", within the newly created borders. With the relaxing and eventual repeal of Australia's Immigration Restriction Act (known as the "White Australia Policy") after the Second World War, many Muslims arrived seeking refuge and sanctuary from colonial, post-colonial, or neo-colonial civil and economic turmoil in their home countries. For Muslim migrants, Australia presents as a land of stability, peace, and opportunity for its "open social order and egalitarian society" (Jakubowicz 2007, p. 272). However, immigration in settler countries continues to be particularly problematic from the Indigenous perspective (Bauder and Breen 2023). While colonisation often involves migrant settlement, the motivations and power dynamics differ significantly from voluntary or refugee settlement. This form of migrancy may differ in intent from colonial settlement; however, acts of migratory practice have enduring consequences for the lives of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous sovereign lands. Migratory rights, citizenship, and the legal capacity to settle are contingent on Indigenous dispossession, which, as Australian historian Marilyn Lake states, "was the prerogative of the white man and is a state-based status; with its reach, rights, and duties" defined by invasion and denial of Indigenous sovereignty (Lake 2003, p. 268).

Rahemtulla's (2023) revealing appraisal of the presence of migrant Muslims and their descendants in Canada recognises that there persists a collective Muslim unawareness of their new home country's link to the scale of continuing injustices faced by Indigenous peoples. In Rahemtulla's analysis of Muslims in Canada and their awareness of Indigenous peoples and their structural oppression, he suggests that if Muslims are indeed aware of Indigenous dispossession and the contemporary social problems this entails (which is uncommon), Muslims rationalise this injustice to be a historical occurrence, isolated between the Canadian government and its Indigenous peoples. The rationalisation of this historical act in the mind of the Muslim is the past tense and has little to do with their contemporary presence in their new homeland or the countries they left behind. As part of this "unawareness", Rahemtulla (2023, p. 2) states "it is the presence of this problematic ontological divide between migrant and settler that allows Muslims to evade—if not outright deny—an innate responsibility that we, as settlers living on stolen land, have towards Indigenous peoples".

By way of this lived ontological divide, rather than standing in solidarity with Indigenous peoples, "settler Muslims" often adopt dominant derogatory narratives that portray Indigenous peoples as criminals, alcoholics, drug addicts, welfare dependants, and inclined to rage and violence (Rahemtulla 2023). To delineate the absolution strategies employed by Muslim migrants to redirect or ignore affective positions tied to "guilt or responsibility",

Rahemtulla (2023, p. 10) draws on the decolonial work of Tuck and Yang (2012), conceptualising the term "settler moves to innocence". In principle, the idea that a settler moves to innocence denotes a range of conscious and unconscious strategies employed to eschew personal blame, complicity, and responsibility regarding dispossessed Indigenous peoples. Importantly, the "settler moves to innocence" notion sanctions continued access to stolen Indigenous lands, without having to grapple with the complexity of colonial sanctioned access to annexed lands, inherited property-owning rights via the availability of capital and proximity to white power and white privilege. For Rahemtulla (2023), interrogating the boundary space between migrancy and settlement is essential so to institute a sense of Muslim obligation towards Indigenous peoples. While being a settler may not be a choice for many, what is necessary for all immigrants and their descendants is "an honest recognition of one's own existential subject position on ethnically cleansed land" (p. 10). Essential for Rahemtulla (2023) is bringing Muslim migrants to an understanding of the continuing project of global colonialism and its enduring impact on Indigenous peoples. He asserts that Muslims can "recognise that supporting Indigenous rights and land struggles is not an act of charity—a progressive struggle, amongst others, to be a good ally with—but rather a solemn responsibility (*amana*, to use an Islamic term) that addresses our own existential complicity, as migrant settlers" (p. 7).

It is crucial to consider Rahemtulla's work on the faith-based obligation of Muslim migrants in relation to Indigenous Australian scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson's (2015) seminal work, *The White Possessive*, which needs to be discussed in some detail. Moreton-Robinson posits Australia to be a white possession, built via divisions of race and gender, which organised human beings into the categories of: (1) owning property; (2) becoming propertyless; and (3) being property (p. 25). It is possession, for Moreton-Robinson, that is an efficient qualifier to aptly summarise the coordinated actions of knowledge and power mobilised to produce and maintain racial markers (e.g., the blood quantum and skin colour) to dominate, classify, value, own and exclude Aboriginal peoples from Aboriginal lands (p. 20). Moreton-Robinson argues that:

> Migrancy and dispossession indelibly mark configurations of belonging, home, and place in the Australian context. The sense of belonging, home, and place enjoyed by the non-Indigenous subject—colonizer/migrant—is based on the dispossession of the original owners of the land and the denial of our [Indigenous] rights under international customary law. (p. 28)

Extending the argument, Moreton-Robinson states that:

> Indigenous people's circumstances are tied to non-Indigenous migration, and our dislocation is the result of our land being acquired for the new immigrants. We share this common experience as Indigenous people just as all migrants share the benefits of our dispossession. (p. 42)

In detailing the prescriptive elements of white possession and its continuing impact on Indigenous peoples, Moreton-Robinson (2015, p. 54) deconstructs the migrant-settler psychology via the British migrant subconscious and its "absence of Indigenous presence". As she explains, in the British mind, "It is the landscape that must be conquered, claimed, and named, not Indigenous people, who at the level of the subconscious are perceived to be part of the landscape and thus not human". Moreton-Robinson's position extends beyond that of simple British settlement and in turn captures all aspects of Australian migrancy, as Indigenous sovereignty is erased to claim and maintain the annexed lands and resources as white possessions, which are in turn made available, via capital, to non-Indigenous migrants. In her analysis, Moreton-Robinson unravels the complexity Australia faces in maintaining the illegitimacy of Indigenous dispossession, noting that "Indigenous ontological relations to land are incommensurate with those developed through capitalism, and they continue to unsettle white Australia's sense of belonging, which is inextricably tied to white possession and power configured through the logic of capital and profound individual attachment" (p. 22). This notion of individual attachment is a crucial aspect of

possession for Moreton-Robinson and one which is pertinent to the position of Muslim migrants in Australia, as she reveals, through a deep sense of belonging and attachment:

> Certain migrants' function within the logic of possession, to legitimize patriarchal white sovereignty through their presence and subscription to national core values tied to capital. (p. 172)

When viewed through the lens of Indigenous sovereignty, migrancy as an aggregate functions to maintain and amplify the original act of colonial dispossession. This definitive conclusion accords Indigenous peoples a unique position proportional to migrant peoples. As Moreton-Robinson outlines:

> Indigenous people cannot forget the nature of migrancy, and we position all non-Indigenous people as migrants and diasporic. Indigenous people's ontological relationship to land, the ways that country is constitutive of us, and therefore the inalienable nature of our relation to land, marks a radical, indeed incommensurable, difference between us and the non-Indigenous. (Moreton-Robinson 2015, p. 36)

For migrants entwined in the structural modalities of non-Indigenous Australia possession–Indigenous dispossession, colonialism is primarily a land- and labour-based project. So, as long as migrant-settlers are living on and benefitting from the invasion and enduring theft of Indigenous lands, they must come to reconcile with the reality that the original dispossession is all at once a pernicious act of the past, the present and the future. As Patrick Wolfe (2006) puts it, "Settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event" (p. 388).

In full view of this problem, we employ the third step in Rahemtulla's (2023) hermeneutical sequence to decolonise Islam, drawing from the Qur'an and *sunnah* to mobilise a decolonial–Islamic praxistical methodology in specific response to the issues of supremacism, coexistence and entitlement. The necessity to move theorisation towards action draws motivation from Tuck and Yang's (2012) statement that "decolonisation is not a metaphor". The implication is that activism must shift beyond the benign intellectualisation of unrest in the face of injustice. This "doing" is praxis writ large (Bargallie et al. 2023). As Rahemtulla's (2023) work makes clear, reflexive solidarity with Indigenous peoples is an obligation or a "solemn responsibility" (*amana*) for all Muslim peoples. This obligation is born of deliberate, praxistical, acts that challenge, unsettle, disrupt, and erode the continuing foundations of the settler-colonial power structure in Australia.

4. Hermeneutical Stage: Mobilising a Decolonial–Islamic Praxis

A theological reflection on Islam is not simply about invoking the principles of compassion, justice or other ethical teachings (Rahemtulla 2023). Rahemtulla contends that these are too sweeping and abstract. This section contributes to his third step with a theological reflection on the Islamic tradition, focusing on covenants in the Qur'an and *sunnah*. It addresses three aspects of colonisation and decolonisation: (1) supremacist ideology; (2) human existence and coexistence; and (3) claims of entitlement.

What Rahemtulla means by decolonising Islam is that "while contemporary Islamic thought has been shaped by resistance *to* empire, the classical Islamic tradition ("the canon") emerged in the context *of* empire", particularly the Umayyad (r. 661–750) and Abbasid (r. 750–1258) empires. He advocates that the message and example conveyed by Prophet Muhammad, specifically the Qur'an and *sunnah*, respectively, must be differentiated from the Islamic tradition that developed centuries later under the reigns of various Muslim caliphates, empires and sultanates (see Rahemtulla 2023, pp. 13–15).

It was during the centuries after the death of Prophet Muhammad that many influential sources of Islamic knowledge were developed, including the compilations of narrations attributed to the Prophet (*ḥadīth*), biographies of the Prophet (*sira*), commentaries on the Qur'an (*tafsir*), manuals of Islamic law and jurisprudence (*shariah* and *fiqh*), as well as books of theology (*kalam*), history (*tariq*), and other scholarship (Kamali 2006). While this vast body of scholarly literature was developed in relation to the Qur'an and *sunnah*, it

was also a product of the time and circumstances in which it was produced, including intra-Muslim political divisions, theological disputes, social norms and sensibilities, inter-religious influences and rivalries, as well as the identity, conditions, and objectives of the Muslim states. Hence, a more authentic and authoritative "Islamic" response must be derived from the original message of the Prophet, the Qur'an and *sunnah*.

As Rahemtulla (2023, p. 15) puts it, "Empire, therefore, was not the immediate, historical backdrop of the Qur'an. In contrast, this was precisely the socio-political milieu in which the Islamic intellectual tradition emerged, took shape, solidified". The process of decolonisation by way of Islam requires engagement with its primary, pre-eminent source, the Qur'an, and the example of the Prophet, the *sunnah.* This article contends that these sources are Islam's most compelling responses to colonialism and contributions to decolonisation. The following sections address the underlying issues of superiority, human existence, and entitlement.

4.1. Refuting Supremacist Ideology

The underlying motivations for colonial enterprises tend to be economic, including a desire for wealth, land and resources. Religious motivations to convert Indigenous populations, as in the case of the United States, Canada, and Australia, are also prevalent and involve horrific physical, psychological and sexual abuse of Indigenous men, women and children by missionaries, other settlers, and Church and state officials (Jacobs 2009; Archibald 2006). As a European Jewish settler-colonial movement, Zionism also uses a religious motivation/justification in relation to the land of Palestine: a belief that Jewish people are "God's chosen" and that the land of Palestine is "promised" by God (Pappe 2016). In all these cases, we find the dehumanisation of Indigenous populations based on claims of superiority and inferiority. Indeed, human suffering at the hands of other human beings through conquest, colonisation, slavery and other forms of oppression tends to be motivated and/or justified by supremacism based on physical attributes such as colour, ethnicity, or "race" (Mamdani 2020). Given its centrality to colonialism, a first step in an Islamic process of decolonisation is to confront the origins of supremacism and its connection to human suffering from the Qur'anic perspective.

For Muslims, the Qur'an is the collection of recitations Allah (God) revealed to Prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel over a two-decade period between 610 and 632. It is a book of guidance for humanity directed towards righteous human custodianship of the earth and success in the afterlife. The central narrative of the Qur'an concerns covenants—solemn agreements between Allah and humanity and between human beings, involving acknowledgements and commitments, pertaining to human existence and coexistence (Rane 2023).

Further details about covenants in Islam will be provided below, but at this point, our focus is on the covenant between Allah and Adam, the father of humanity from the Abrahamic perspective. The story of the creation of Adam is conveyed in various chapters of the Qur'an. In the seventh chapter, which was revealed towards the beginning of Muhammad's prophethood, highly significant dialogue offers insight into the nature of Satan and attitude towards humanity. Q7:11 informs that when Allah created Adam, Allah commanded the angels to prostrate to Adam, which they did. However, Iblees (Satan) refused. In Q7:12, Allah asks Satan, *"what prevented you from prostrating when I commended you"*, to which Satan replies: *"I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay"*. This verse provides important insight into the nature and mindset of Satan, specifically an attitude of superiority based on physical attributes. This insight is highly significant, given that the Qur'an repeatedly warns that Satan is an avowed enemy of humanity (e.g., Q2:168; Q2:208; Q6:142; Q7:22; Q12:5; Q17:53; Q20:117; Q28:15; Q35:6; Q36:60; Q43:62). Among the covenants mentioned in the Qur'an, there are a few verses that refer to covenants between Allah and the Prophets collectively (Q3:81 and Q33:7) and with specific prophets, namely Adam, Abraham, and Moses. Allah's covenant with Adam specifically concerns the enmity of Satan towards humanity:

> *And verily We made a covenant with Adam [ʿahidʾnā ilā ādama] before, but he forgot;*
> *and We found not in him determination. And [mention] when We said to the angels,*
> *"Prostrate to Adam", and they prostrated, except Iblees; he refused. So We said, "O Adam,*
> *indeed this is an enemy to you and to your wife. Then let him not remove you from*
> *Paradise so you would suffer [fatashqā]. (Q20:115–117)*

Human suffering [*fatashqā*] is linked to Satan's enmity towards humanity. The Qur'an warns of other "work" of Satan, including "intoxicants" [*al-khamru*], namely alcohol, to induce human suffering. For example, Q5:90 states:

> *O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, [sacrificing on] stone alters [to*
> *other than Allah], and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so*
> *avoid it that you may be successful.*

Langton (1997) highlights that alcohol was an agent of seduction used by the early colonisers as a tool to tame, sedate, and control Aboriginal people. Alcohol was engaged to "barter for sexual favours from Aboriginal women" and "as payment for Aboriginal labour" (p. 79). In addition to the well-documented hazards of alcohol for health, families, and society (Chikritzhs and Livingston 2021), alcohol's devastating impacts compound the intergenerational trauma suffered by Indigenous peoples due to colonisation and dispossession (McKnight 2003).

In response to notions of superiority and inferiority based on such characteristics as colour, language, and nationality, the Qur'an makes some very specific remarks. For example, Q30:22 states: "*And of His [Allah's] signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed in that are signs for those of knowledge*". In this verse, notions of human superiority based on colour and language are negated by the declaration that this diversity is among the "signs of Allah". Other verses reinforce the Qur'anic principles of human equality and righteousness (*taqwa*), and not ethnicity, lineage or nation, as the criteria by which human beings are elevated in the sight of Allah. For example, Q49:13 reads:

> *O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples*
> *and tribes so that you may know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of*
> *Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware.*

Heeding the Qur'anic warning of Satan's enmity towards humanity, and avoiding satanic traps to induce human suffering, is a key component of the Islamic process towards decolonisation. Organising and regulating human relations through covenants is essential for human security and peaceful coexistence. It is to this issue that we now turn.

4.2. Human Existence and Coexistence

Human beings have long organised relationships between each other, including intergroup, intercommunity, and international relations, through covenants and treaties. Their use by the Persians, Romans and Arabs is well known and documented (Levy-Rubin 2011). Biblical covenants resemble the form and structure of ancient Hittite treaties (Horton 2009). Among Indigenous Australians, a people whose history dates back between 60,000 to over 80,000 years, there is an established tradition of treaty-making. The Yolngu people were the first inhabitants of the continent to have encountered Muslims centuries prior to British colonisation (Ganter 2016). In the Yolngu language of the Indigenous people, who reside in the remote north-east of Australia, the word "*makarrata*" means "treaty-making", "a negotiation of peace", and "peace after a dispute" (Wood 2022). The term carries the connotation of bringing equity to intergroup relations by reducing the more powerful party's capacity to dominate the other, weaker party (Little 2020).

Islam is fundamentally concerned with human existence and coexistence, particularly relationships between Allah and human beings and between human individuals and groups (Johnston 2008). The terms and conditions of these relationships are governed by covenants, which are generally referred to in the Qur'an by the Arabic terms ʿ*ahd* and *mīthāq*. Covenants are agreements, charters, and pledges made between human beings

and God and between groupings of human beings, which involve acknowledgements and commitments, and which establish terms and conditions governing the relationship. Other related concepts include *amāna* (trust), *aymān* (oaths), *bayʾa* (pledge of allegiance), *dhimma* (protection), *iṣr* (commitment), *ʿuqūd* (contracts), and *waʾd* (promise). Covenants in the Qurʾan govern relationships between Allah and humanity, prophets, people of scripture, people of Muhammad's time, within families, and between spouses (Rane 2023). The Qurʾan's covenantal verses are exemplified in the Prophet's *sunnah* through documents and narrations (*ḥadīth*) concerning intercommunity and inter-religious relations, including between Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants of Medina,[7] with Christian, Jewish and other communities around Arabia and beyond,[8] and even with Muhammad's adversaries among the polytheists and disbelievers.[9]

Over the past decade, documents referred to as the covenants of Prophet Muhammad, such as the Covenant with the Monks of Mount Sinai, Covenant with the Christians of Najran, Covenant with the Jews of Khaybar and Maqna or Covenant with the Children of Israel, have received increasing scholarly attention (Zein and El-Wakil 2022; Morrow 2013). These documents are pledges of the protection of life, property and places of worship that Prophet Muhammad issued to Christian, Jewish and other communities of his time. This contributes to earlier research on the Prophet's Constitution of Medina and the Treaty of Hudaybiyya. The former is a document by which Prophet Muhammad established the relations between and security responsibilities of Medina's Arab and Jewish, Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants, while the latter is a peace treaty he established with the Quraysh tribe of Mecca and its allies. Covenants in the Qurʾan and *sunnah* affirm Islam's emphasis on human security and peaceful coexistence between peoples, regardless of "race", ethnicity or religion. With regard to decolonisation, covenants in the Qurʾan and *sunnah* establish an Islamic principle of establishing boundaries of human conduct, so as to recognise and protect basic rights other people, including life, territory, and sacred places.

The Qurʾan emphasises the equality of all human beings as creations of Allah and designates them as the Children of Adam. Of the Qurʾanic covenantal verses, Q7:172, which has been the focus of most scholarly attention in the past and in recent years (Al-Attas 2023; Jaffer 2017; Lumbard 2015; al-Qadi 2003), makes reference to the primordial covenant, by which the souls of all human beings testify, in a pre-earthly state, to the Lordship of Allah and acknowledge accountability to Allah on the Day of Resurrection:

> *And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam—from their loins—their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we have testified'. Lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'Indeed, we were of this unaware'.* (Q7:172)

From this perspective, all human beings have a covenant with and are accountable to Allah.

An examination of covenants in the Qurʾan and *sunnah* affirms an Islamic worldview that people should live on earth in a manner that respects all people's right to life, property and wellbeing, for which conditions and boundaries are established through covenants and treaties. Key covenantal verses from the Qurʾan command Muslims not to break the covenant with Allah and cause corruption on earth (Q2:27), not to follow Satan, the enemy of humanity (Q36:60), and stress the importance of upholding covenants, pledges and promises made in Allah's name (Q2:100 Q2:177, Q3:76-77, Q6:152, Q7:102, Q13:20, Q13:25, Q16:91, Q17:34, Q23:8 and Q70:32). Such an emphasis on covenants relates directly to the conditions for human security and peaceful coexistence, which are to be maintained through individual and community attainment of God-consciousness or righteousness (*taqwa*). The qualities associated with righteousness are conveyed, for example, in Q2:177:

> *Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the Prophets and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveller, those who ask [for help], and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer and gives zakāh; [those who] fulfill their covenant [biʿahdihim] when they promise [ʿāhadū];*

and [those who] are patient in poverty and hardship and during battle. Those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the righteous. (Q2:177)

The Qur'an refers to a long history of God–human and intra-human relationships on the basis of covenants. Many Qur'anic verses concern the "People of Scripture", which is a general reference to communities, particularly Jews and Christians, who have received prophets and messengers from Allah. Q3:187 makes specific reference to a covenant of Allah with the People of Scripture that they must convey Allah's message and not conceal it from people. This verse relates to the overarching Qur'anic theme of guidance to remind humanity of their accountability to Allah and the obligation placed upon prophets and religious communities to convey the revealed message. Other verses concerning the covenant of Allah with the People of Scripture encourage righteous conduct, peaceful coexistence and security; for example:

And when We took the covenant [mīthāq] from the Children of Israel, [enjoining upon them], "Do not worship except Allah; and to parents do good and to relatives, orphans, and the needy. And speak to people good [words] and establish prayer and give zakāh". Then you turned away, except a few of you, and you were refusing. (Q2:83)

And when We took your covenant [mīthāq], [saying], "Do not shed blood or evict one another from your homes". Then you acknowledged [this] while you were witnessing. (Q2:84)

The explicit prohibition of shedding blood and dispossessing people of their homes stands in clear opposition to colonisation and affirms a decolonial praxis. This is further emphasised in documents referred to as the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad.

Although the Prophet's covenants remain understudied and under-represented in discourses on Islam today, they have been preserved in both Muslim and non-Muslim sources (Zein and El-Wakil 2022; Morrow 2013). Tahir ul-Qadri cites the following reference to the *Prophet's Covenant with the Christians of Najran*, noting numerous juristic works in which it was recorded:

Indeed, Najran and her allies are under the protection [*dhimma*] of God and the guarantee [*dhimma*] of the Messenger of God. They are to be protected in their wealth, lives, lands and religion. This includes their priests, monks, those who are present amongst them and those who are absent and others amongst them, and their delegations and the like. They shall not be forced to change that (faith) which they are upon and no right of theirs is to be forfeited. No monk, priest or attendant amongst them should lose that which is in his possession, be it plentiful or scarce, and no fear or danger will threaten them. (ul-Qadri 2010, p. 143)

Another prominent example is the recording of the *Covenant of the Prophet Muhammad with the Monks of Mount Sinai* in *Mecmua-yı Münşeat üs-Selātīn* ("*The Correspondence of the Sultāns*") by Ferīdūn Beg (d. 1583), who was Head of the Ottoman Chancery under Sulṭān Murād III (d. 1595). This book records the *Covenant of the Prophet*, which had been preserved by the Christian monks of Saint Catherine Monastery in Mount Sinai. The document records the following among its provisions:

. . .for those who profess Christianity as their creed, in East and West, near or far, Arabs or non-Arabs, known or unknown, a Covenant of protection. If anyone breaks the Covenant herein proclaimed, or contravenes or transgresses its commands, he has broken the Covenant of God, breaks his bond, makes a mockery of his religion, deserves the curse [of God], whether he is a sultan or another among the believing Muslims. . ..Moreover, no building from among their churches shall be destroyed, nor shall the money from their churches be used for the building of mosques or houses for the Muslims. Whoever does such a thing violates the Covenant of God and of His messenger. . . (Beg 1858, p. 31)

These examples affirm an Islamic prohibition on colonialist conduct predicated on depriving people of their homes, land, and way of life. In these covenants, Prophet

Muhammad establishes an Islamic principle that recognises and preserves peoples' ways of life. Recognition of the humanity of others and their connection with the Creator is fundamental to the Prophet's covenants and serves as an important component of the decolonial praxis.

This brief examination of covenants in the Qur'an and *sunnah* affirms that, in Islam, all human beings are equal as creations accountable to God. The central purpose of covenants is the dissemination of the divine message to attain righteousness for success in the afterlife and establishing peace and security among peoples while on earth. The principles of righteousness pertain to moral and ethical human conduct towards others, by which human security and peaceful coexistence are maintained. The conditions and boundaries set by the covenants in the Qur'an and *sunnah* preclude oppressive and unjust treatment of the kind associated with colonialism. Rather, the conduct demanded by covenants in the Qur'an and *sunnah* emphasises a decolonising praxis centred on human welfare and wellbeing, exemplified by sharing from one's provisions and caring for needs of others. Covenants in Islam seek to prevent the type of dehumanising and oppressive conduct associated with colonisation, to establish a norm of recognising the legitimacy of human diversity, and to secure people's lives, property and sacred places for peaceful coexistence. This perspective is contrary to the notions of entitlement and "chosenness" central to colonialism, which we will now address.

4.3. Claims of Entitlement

Underpinning the ideology of colonialism are assumptions and beliefs of colonisers based on claims of entitlement. These claims refer to entitlement to land and resources as well as the denial of Indigenous peoples their right to self-determination (Moreton-Robinson 2015; Wolfe 2006). A case in point is the Zionist movement's claim that Jewish people are God's chosen and that God promised them the land of Palestine. While the notion of "God's chosen" is also a belief among Jews more generally, non-Zionist Jews contend that Jewish people are currently in exile by the Will of God and may only return to Israel/Palestine with God's permission (Pappe 2016). For this discussion, our focus is on the related, but more generalised, belief among colonisers of their entitlement on the basis on an assumed promise by God.

The Qur'an states: *Indeed, Allah chose Adam and Noah and the family of Abraham and the family of ʿImrān over the worlds* (Q3:33). Among the "*family of ʿImrān*" is Mary, mother of Jesus Christ. The "chosenness" of the branches of humanity is referred to in the preceding verses (i.e., Q3:19-32) in reference to receiving the divine scripture and the responsibility for its faithful dissemination and implementation. This point is affirmed in other verses of the Qur'an. For example, in the chapter titled "Mary", we read:

> *Those were the ones upon whom Allah bestowed favor from among the prophets of the descendants of Adam and of those We carried [in the ship] with Noah, and of the descendants of Abraham and Israel [i.e., Jacob], and of those whom We guided and chose. When the verses of the Most Merciful were recited to them, they fell in prostration and weeping.* (Q19:58)

The following verses indicate that "chosenness" is conditional upon worship of and obedience to the Will of God:

> *But there came after them successors [i.e., later generations] who neglected prayer and pursued desires; so they are going to meet evil. Except those who repent, believe and do righteousness; for those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged at all.* (Q19:59–60)

Additionally, elsewhere in the Qur'an, the conditions of "chosenness" are expressed in relation to the covenant with Allah. Q2:47 states that the Children of Israel were favoured by Allah: *"O Children of Israel, remember My favor that I have bestowed upon you and that I preferred you over the worlds"*. This favour is in relation to the honour of being those from among whom God's prophets were chosen and the people given the responsibility of

conveying God's message. The Qur'an is particularly condemnatory of those who are deceitful in relation to God's message:

So woe to those who write the "scripture" with their own hands, then say, "This is from Allah", in order to exchange it for a small price. Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn. (Q2:79)

In the following verses, the Qur'an affirms God's covenant with the Children of Israel:

And when We took the covenant [mīthāq] from the Children of Israel, [enjoining upon them], "Do not worship except Allah; and to parents do good and to relatives, orphans, and the needy. And speak to people good [words] and establish prayer and give zakāh". Then you turned away, except a few of you, and you were refusing. (Q2:83)

And when We took your covenant [mīthāq], [saying], "Do not shed blood or evict one another from your homes". Then you acknowledged [this] while you were witnessing. (Q2:84)

God's condemnation of oppressing and mistreating human beings in violation of the covenant is clear from the subsequent verse:

Then, you are those [same ones who are] killing one another and evicting a party of your people from their homes, cooperating against them in sin and aggression. And if they come to you as captives, you ransom them, although their eviction was forbidden to you. So do you believe in part of the Scripture and disbelieve in part? Then what is the recompense for those who do that among you except disgrace in worldly life; and on the Day of Resurrection they will be sent back to the severest of punishment. And Allah is not unaware of what you do. (Q2:85)

Further on in the same chapter of the Qur'an, the phrase about the Children of Israel being favoured and preferred over the world is repeated (Q2:122), which is followed by a verse warning about the Day of Judgement (Q2:123). The Qur'an then makes explicit reference to God's covenant with Abraham, the patriarch of Jews, Christians and Muslims, stating:

And [mention, O Muḥammad], when Abraham was tried by his Lord with words [i.e., commands] and he fulfilled them. [Allah] said, "Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people". [Abraham] said, "And of my descendants?" [Allah] said, "My covenant does not include the wrongdoers". (Q2:124)

While the leadership of Abraham among humanity is clearly affirmed as a covenant from God, the covenant does not extend to "*the wrongdoers*" [*az-ẓālimīna*], which is a term that means violators of God's will and oppressors. The term "*zulm*" is used in the Qur'an in reference to injustice, oppression, and wrongdoing (e.g., Q4:153, Q20:111, Q22:25, Q42:42). This discussion highlights that while the Qur'an acknowledges that nations and families have been "chosen" by God, this honour refers to a *responsibility* to faithfully convey God's message and is *conditional* on fulfilling the covenant, which includes the faithful dissemination of God's message and treating people justly and fairly in accordance with God's Will. Central to the divine message are the terms of the covenant with God, which concerns the welfare and wellbeing of people and the upholding of the conditions for people to live in peace and security. As the special relationship with God is not based on lineage or ethnicity but on righteousness, violation of the command for human security and peaceful coexistence invalidates one's claim to the covenant and a "special" relationship with God.

This perspective is crucial to the process of decolonisation, as it shifts the concept of entitlement from the land and resources of Indigenous people to a responsibly for their welfare and wellbeing. Indeed, the Qur'an defines those who are God-conscious as "*sharing their own provisions with others*" (e.g., Q2:3). From a practical standpoint, this should open the way for the distribution of *zakat* (alms, charity, welfare tax) to be distributed among Indigenous people as one means by which Muslim populations can support their welfare

and wellbeing. We explore the issue of Islamic obligations towards Indigenous people further in the next section.

5. Discussion: Islamic Obligations towards Indigenous Peoples

Covenants have long been used by human beings to organise and regulate relations to achieve broadly defined outcomes concerning human security and peaceful coexistence. That a tradition of covenants and treaty-making exists in both Islam and Indigenous Australian culture is crucial for their viability in mobilising a decolonial–Islamic praxis. Covenants facilitate the coming together of people in ways that are conducive to the mutual recognition and dialogue necessary for deepening awareness and understanding. The forming of such bonds would build stronger ties of solidarity between Muslim and Indigenous Australians. This solidarity, based on a sense of shared humanity, is necessary to confront the deeply entrenched attitudinal, cultural, legal, structural and systemic challenges Indigenous Australians face in Australia.

In addition to the shared historical relations and contemporary solidarity referred to above, Indigenous Australians also share a spiritual affinity with Islam in relation to the concept of creation (*khalq*), unseen reality (*ghayb*), afterlife (*ākhira*), and custodianship of the earth (*khalifa*). Though it should be noted that Indigenous Australian beliefs, cultures, and traditions are varied and diverse, Indigenous Australians *might* (Grieves 2009), and Indigenous Australian Muslims certainly *do* (Stephenson 2010), identify with Qur'anic verses referring to human beings as custodians of or inheritors entrusted with the earth (e.g., Q2:30; Q6:165; Q7:69; Q7:74; Q10:14; Q35:39).

Muslim religious authorities, and particularly Indigenous Muslim Australians, have an important role in conveying to Muslim Australians more broadly Islamic obligations towards Indigenous Australians based on a shared humanity and covenantal principles for mobilising a decolonial–Islamic praxis. Inherent in Indigenous culture is to respect the earth and not walk upon it exultantly or with insolence (Q17:37). Rather, as the Qur'an states: "*the servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth with humility, and when the ignorant address them [harshly], they say [words of] peace*" (Q25:63). The Qur'an is not oblivious to the fact that some people on earth have means and resources exceeding those of others. Such provision, however, is considered to be a test from God, an opportunity to show one's righteousness and good character:

> *And it is He who has made you successors upon the earth and has raised some of you above others in degrees [of rank] that He may try you through what He has given you. Indeed, your Lord is swift in penalty; but indeed, He is Forgiving and Merciful.* (Q6:165)

The Qur'an is explicit that the purpose of humans on earth is to worship God (Q51:56). It warns its readers not to be delusional regarding human desires and life on earth, for the final destination is with God in the afterlife:

> *Beautified for people is the love of that which they desire—of women and sons, heaped-up sums of gold and silver, fine branded horses, and cattle and tilled land. That is the enjoyment of worldly life, but Allah has with Him the best return.* (Q3:14)

The Qur'anic emphasis on justice is pervasive and well-known. Indeed, the Qur'an informs that Allah maintains creation in justice (Q3:18). Justice is incumbent upon the servants of Allah:

> *O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. So follow not [personal] inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort [your testimony] or refuse [to give it], then indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted.* (Q4:135)

The obligation to be just is reinforced by an unambiguous prohibition on injustice and unlawfulness, corrupt conduct that would see a person dispossessed of their rightful entitlements:

And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly or send it [in bribery] to the rulers in order that [they might aid] you [to] consume a portion of the wealth of the people in sin, while you know [it is unlawful]. (Q2:188)

O you who have believed, do not consume one another's wealth unjustly but only [in lawful] business by mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves [or one another]. Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful. (Q4:29)

The Qur'an affirms its intolerance of theft and corruption with harsh penalties for those who dare to violate the laws of God:

Indeed, the penalty for those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger and strive upon earth [to cause] corruption is none but that they be killed or crucified or that their hands and feet be cut off from opposite sides or that they be exiled from the land. That is for them a disgrace in this world; and for them in the Hereafter is a great punishment. (Q5:33)

Hence, the Qur'an establishes an obligation that possessions, livelihoods and means of subsistence be just and lawful, accompanied by a prohibition on theft and corruption. The theft of another's land or property is known as "*ghasb*" in Islamic law. The covenants of Prophet Muhammad, along with other narrations attributed to him, specifically prohibit the unlawful acquisition of land and property. The consensus of Islamic legal experts is that it is obligatory to return unlawfully seized property. Additionally, further compensation may also be owing to the persons from whom the property was unlawfully seized, including if it is damaged, while improvements to the property do not validate the seizure.[10]

The return of stolen land is central to, but only part of, the decolonisation process. Redressing the consequences and symptoms of intergenerational trauma and pervasive institutional injustices will require considerable financial investments that are beyond the scope of this article to calculate. Suffice it to say that multiple sources of funding will be required. A pillar of Islam is a compulsory welfare tax or alms-giving known as *zakat*, in addition to an emphasis on giving other forms of charity known as *sadaqa.* Q9:60 refers to eight categories of people eligible to receive *zakat*: poor, needy, those employed to collect, those whose hearts are to be reconciled, manumission of captives or slaves, those in debt, for the cause of Allah, and the wayfarers. Arguably, there is a case for most, if not all, of these categories in relation to Indigenous Australians. While this article lays a foundation for a decolonial–Islamic praxis, further work will need to be undertaken by Muslim religious authorities in dialogue with Indigenous peoples. There is good reason to anticipate this dialogue to be constructive. Islam reinforces the notion of human equality, and as this article has demonstrated, covenants in the Qur'an and *sunnah* are antithetical to colonialism as they reject supremacist ideology and claims of entitlement, while affirming peaceful coexistence and human security as universal principles.

6. Conclusions

Despite the growing dialogue between anti-colonial scholarship and Islam, the religious obligations of Muslim migrants and their descendants residing in the sovereign lands of Indigenous peoples dispossessed through colonisation is a scholarly debate that is still emerging. An Islamic approach to decolonising Islam requires an examination of its most authoritative, pre-eminent sources: the Qur'an and *sunnah.* Covenants are central to these sources. They permeate the Qur'anic narrative of human existence and coexistence and form the cornerstone of Prophet Muhammad's diplomacy and intercommunity relations within Medina, around Arabia, and beyond. This article contends that covenants in the Qur'an and *sunnah* establish the theological and praxistical basis for decolonisation in Islam. In addition to its emphasis on human equality by virtue of all humans being creations of and accountable to God, Islam rejects supremacism as an ideology that is satanic in origin. In Islam, Satan is the avowed enemy of humanity. The Qur'an and *sunnah* affirm that righteousness, not "race" or lineage, determine one's favour with God, rejecting claims of chosenness or entitlement. Righteousness is measured in relation to the treatment of others,

particularly in accordance with principles of justice, welfare and wellbeing. All human beings are inheritors and entrusted custodians of the earth with the right to live in peace and security. The conditions by which such an order is established comprise the covenants with God and between peoples. It is noteworthy that a tradition of treaty-making (*makarrata*), by which those who would use their superior position or physicality to dominate over others are brought to equitable relations, is also established in Indigenous tradition. Covenants provide a decolonial–Islamic praxis to mobilise Muslim–Indigenous relations based on mutual recognition, dialogue and respect for the need to redress injustices and facilitate respectful coexistence.

Notes

1 Decolonisation is the process by which colonised lands become independent of the colonising state.

2 *Sunnah* is an Arabic term meaning "way", "conduct" or "manner". In relation to Islam, it refers to the example, conduct and sayings of Prophet Muhammad (d. 632). *Sunnah* is recorded as narrations (*ḥadīth*) about and attributed to Prophet Muhammad.

3 Rahemtulla's (2023, p. 1) three stages: (1) gaining a critical understanding of the socio-historical context, namely, the history of empire on the land; (2) deconstructing the boundaries between "migrant" and "settler", which serves to vindicate the former group, releasing them of accountability and responsibility; and (3) engaging in bold theological reflection on the Islamic tradition.

4 From a Western international studies perspective, the concept of human security emerged towards the end of the 20th century as a shift away from an emphasis on military capacity to a focus on the safety and wellbeing of human beings with regard to economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007).

5 Decolonial Muslim scholar Jasmijn Rana (2011, p. 29 in Abbasi 2020) has sought to define the signifier of the Muslim, noting this moniker stands for "a diverse figure that is differentiated by its national, transnational, sectarian, ethnic, racial, gendered, and classed meanings. The Muslim is a transmigratory, global figure that enters and exits multiple terrains; thus, we can speak of the Muslim in Europe, the Americas, Asia, Africa, and elsewhere".

6 For an in-depth analysis of the impact of settler colonialism on Indigenous and Muslim peoples of Australia, see Meston et al. (2023). This paper engages with seminal works on the construction of anti-colonial discourses and "othering", including Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism* and Ghassan Hage's (1998) *White Nation.*

7 Medina is a city in Arabia to which Muhammad and his companions migrated, and for which he drafted a document, known as the *Constitution of Medina*, outlining rights and responsibilities and governing relations between the city's Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants.

8 See Zein and El-Wakil (2022) for details of the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad, including the *Covenant with the Monks of Mount Sinai, Covenant with the Christians of Najran, Covenants with the Jews of Khaybar and Maqna, Covenants with the Children of Israel, Covenant with the Magi*, and others.

9 See the *Treaty of Hudaybiyya*, a peace treaty between Prophet Muhammad and the Quraysh tribe.

10 See the Islam Q&A online, 'Rulings on seizing things wrongfully (*ghasb*)': https://islamqa.info/en/answers/10323/rulings-on-seizing-things-wrongfully (accessed on 10 January 2024).

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