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Olivia C. Harrison, *Natives Against Nativism: Antiracism and Indigenous Critique in Postcolonial France*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2023. 284 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. $112.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-5179-1059-4; $28.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-1-5179-1060-0; $28.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 978-1517910600.

Review Essay by Clare Finburgh Delijani, Goldsmiths, University of London

In my early teens, every Friday after school I would pull a *keffiyeh* from the bottom of my bag, tear out of school, and head for the South African Embassy in central London. Joining the Non-Stop Picket against apartheid, which lasted from 1986 until the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990, and which brought South African dissidents together with local protesters against Thatcherite neoliberalism, or for nuclear disarmament, these Fridays witnessed my gauche and stumbling political awakening. In *Natives against Nativism* Olivia Harrison's deft hands trace resistance to occupation, oppression and discrimination through the *longue durée* of imperial history, enabling transversal lines to emerge between seemingly disparate markers of protest. In this important publication, which consolidates Harrison's previous analyses of international decoloniality, for instance in the works of Abdelkebir Khatibi, networks of solidarity between heterogeneous indigenous groups become apparent across "our wildly disparate but intimately connected decolonizing world" (p. 24).[1]

The Muslim International series at the University of Minnesota Press in which *Natives against Nativism* appears includes publications on the USA, UK and Iran. It is therefore all the more felicitous that Harrison's France-focused study features in this series especially since, were it not extremely difficult to gather data on ethnicity and religion, France would no doubt be revealed as the European nation with the largest Muslim and Arab populations. The Press might think about enlisting copy editors with a French specialism, although the small typographical anomalies in no way detract from the indisputable quality of Harrison's book. *Natives against Nativism* changes the terms of debates on oppression, resistance, and the fight for global justice well beyond Muslim studies and is of relevance to French studies, sociology, history and human geography.

The term *indigène*, which appears in the book's title as "natives" and "nativism," constitutes the axis on which Harrison's intersecting lines of enquiry pivot: "It is the story of how natives turned into immigrants, and immigrants into natives" (p. 16). Since the European conquest of the Americas, says Harrison, colonized subjects, postcolonial migrants, and their descendants have been produced by dominant colonial discourses, as strangers, foreigners or unwelcome immigrants, referred to by the pejorative terms native in English, *indigène* in French.[2] The irony is not lost on the fact that settlers, whether in the USA or in Algeria under French occupation, on the one hand distinguish themselves from the indigenous population, whom they oppress; and on the other, "indigenize" themselves, strengthening their claim to the land with the aim to replace and erase the indigenous population.

Harrison goes on to recount that, unlike the colonially marked native, *indigène* has more recently been reclaimed by rights groups, who have transformed the term from racial insult into political and politicized protest: "the descendants of France's postcolonial migrants, from Algeria and the four corners of France's tricontinental empire, take the identity *indigène* to claim nativeness in the land that colonized their ancestors" (p. ix). Racialized citizens of today's France, such as people marked as "Arab" or "Black," who suffer from discrimination going back centuries and originating in the colonies, reject the designation "immigrant" especially since they, along with their parents and even grandparents, were often born in France. Reclaiming *indigène*, they insist that they, like any other French citizen, are "native" to France. More a political provocation than an essentialist claim to a specific identity originating in a particular ethnicity, this antiracist appropriation of *indigène* simultaneously exposes and denounces the processes that have produced enduring racialized identities. The subjecthood of the *indigène* is "a relational, situational identity, a defensive response to racist essentialism rather than an identitarian fantasy," explains Harrison (p. 119). To the insult "We were here first," Harrison's indigenous critique responds, "We are here because you were there." Given the unapologetic rise in nationalist populism across the globe—from Trump's USA to Narendra Modi's India—the scope and significance of indigenous critique are evident well beyond France.

But claims to indigeneity have backfired, admits Harrison. In a competition for victimhood, France's white majority has in recent years recast itself, in their terminology, as an imperilled minority, vulnerable to anti-white racism, white genocide, immigrant invasion and the great replacement—terms weaponized by unvarnished white supremacists. Bringing the vocabulary of decolonization to bear on the current migrant question, the anti-immigrant lobby calls for their own form of decolonization via what they term remigration: the expulsion from France of postcolonial citizens, and creation of a system of apartheid across national borders, calculated to keep migrants, asylum seekers and refugees out. France's white majority have consequently reclaimed *indigène* as a token of their own conception of French identity, reserved exclusively for those with French ancestral roots (whatever these might be).[3] Indigeneity as a claim for rights and justice thus mutates into nativism.

The far right have not only appropriated *indigène* to stake their claim to French soil but, Harrison explains in a further expansion of her argument, they have also coined the term *indigéniste* to condemn as anti-republican anyone engaging in postcolonial studies or decoloniality more widely. By way of an example, they—meaning not only Marine Le Pen's far-right Rassemblement National but even the supposedly centrist incumbent government—target critics of France's state secularism, whom they accuse of importing US-style identity politics and of condoning Islamist extremism. With subtle sensitivity, Harrison examines this and other incendiary matters such as the slippages between the antiracist activism of France's pro-Palestinian movement and the indisputable antisemitism of skits by, for example, the stand-up Dieudonné M'bala M'bala.[4] One might therefore regret that she does not situate her account of the struggle for Muslim rights in France within the context of the violent Islamist attacks on civilians that have taken place in France since 2015, which have further stoked anti-Muslim racism and discrimination.

Harrison identifies two ur-signifiers which, for her, embody antiracist struggles in France: the Palestinian, and the indigenous American. In the case of the first, Harrison must surely feel

vindicated by the recent exhibition at Paris's Insitut du monde arabe, entitled "Ce que la Palestine apporte au monde."[5] Not only, argues Harrison, are both of these figures exemplary of the global history of settler occupation, forced displacement and racial discrimination, but they have also served as a heroic "rallying cry of the nascent migrant rights movement" in France (p. 24). Transforming themselves from refugees into fierce guerillas, the Palestinian Fedayeen inspired the oppressed worldwide, explains the author. In chapter one, Harrison's interviews, examination of memoirs, and painstaking research in the archives of a number of French antiracist militant movements reveal how the emerging campaign for migrant rights in 1970s France was firmly grounded in the Palestinian struggle for sovereignty: "[T]he question of Palestine is also a French question" (p. 193). She recounts the campaigns for migrant rights run by clandestine organizations which, to this day, have had a profound impact on grassroots antiracist associations such as SOS Racisme, the Parti des Indigènes de la République, and the Comité verité et justice pour Adama.

Harrison focuses notably on three 1970s organizations: the Comité de soutien à la révolution palestinienne (CSRP, 1970-1972)—whose main publication was tellingly named *Fedaï*—the Mouvement des travailleurs arabes (MTA, 1972-1976), and their militant performance collective, Al Assifa (1973-1976). The latter, recounts Harrison, transformed mainly North African migrant workers into militant performers who participated directly in the struggle for their own rights by touring cafés, factories and dormitories across France, Belgium and Switzerland, with educational sketch shows like *Ça travaille, ça travaille et ça ferme sa gueule* (1973). Inspired by contemporary events, most notably the Palestinian struggle against occupation, and by popular political performances of France's May 1968 protests, experimental actor improvisation, the Maghrebi storytelling tradition *al-halqa*, and North African music, Al Assifa encouraged audience participation and mobilization, elevating migrants from unwelcome strangers and victims of discrimination and oppression to figures of resistance in the postcolonial metropole.[6]

Much of Harrison's book introduces readers to material which, while crucially important to debates surrounding racial and global justice, is little known. Chapter two, however, focuses on one of the twentieth century's great author-activists, Jean Genet. Centering both on his much celebrated writings on the Palestinian struggle, including "Quatre heures à Chatila" (1983) and *Un captif amoureux* (1986), as well as on his unrealized filmscript *La Nuit venue* (on which he worked from 1975 to 1977), Harrison demonstrates how, for Genet as for other artists and theorists she examines, resistance by occupied and displaced Palestinians and the oppression of migrants in France feature on the same transnational imperial map.[7] Harrison's analysis reveals migrants, whether Palestinian, French, or Black American, as privileged figures in Genet's sustained examination of racism. One of a handful of intellectuals to rally around the CSRP, Genet, in Harrison's words, demonstrated his support for natives and the critique of nativism.

Providing the example of one-time antiracist activist Farida Belghoul's 1986 novel *Georgette!*, chapter three circles back to the right-wing reappropriation of anticolonialism and antiracism by the nativist right.[8] One of the first pieces of mainstream French literature to be written by and about the Maghrebi migrant experience, *Georgette!* tells the tale of a second-generation French-Algerian girl who refuses to assimilate into a culture that rejects her. In 2013 the novel was republished by one of France's most influential alt-right ideologues, Alain Soral, who read it as

an example of the impossibility for Maghrebis to integrate into French society, tendentiously coopting it as a warning against immigration. Michael Rothberg's notion of multidirectional memory, where contesting interpretations of history collide, seems to inform much of Harrison's study.[9] In this example, Belghoul and Soral highlight the incompatibility of North African migrants with the French state, but for opposing reasons.

Chapter four returns to theatre, with an account of French director Mohamed Rouabhi's workshops with Palestinians in the West Bank shortly before the outbreak of the second Intifada in the 2000s. Using Edward Curtis's early twentieth-century photograph of an Apsaroke indigenous American elder as a prompt, Rouabhi encouraged participants to counter the racist stereotyping of Palestinians via their antiracist remediations of Curtis's classic colonial iconography. The few Palestinian performers who were granted visas then toured France with a production of *El menfi* (*The Exile*, 2000), in which critique of colonial oppression triangulated indigenous Americans, Palestinians and postmigrant French citizens in a complex articulation of antiracist protest.

Attention to the oppression of, and resistance by, Palestinians and indigenous Americans continues into chapter five, where Harrison provides information on two lesser-examined films by the godfather of nouvelle vague cinema, Jean-Luc Godard, and his Dziga Vertov film collective partner, Jean-Pierre Gorin. With her characteristic eye for detail, Harrison examines *Ici et ailleurs* (1974) and *Notre musique* (2004), the latter filmed in Sarajevo just eight years after the genocide of Bosnian Muslims by Serbs.[10] *Notre musique* acts as a warning against the instrumentalization of nativist indigeneity in a Europe seeking to define itself as homogenously white and Christian, an ideology which has historically resulted in the ethnic cleansing of Jews in the past (the pogroms and the Holocaust), and Muslims nearer to the present (Srebrenica during the Bosnian War).

Chapter six zooms out from metropolitan France to ask what the Palestinian situation might teach us about the planetary question of migration today. The figure of the Palestinian refugee as unwelcome guest, dating back to the founding of the state of Israel in 1948 and the consequent forced migration of Palestinians, enables an understanding of ongoing mass displacement across the world as recurrence, argues Harrison. In contradistinction to a migration crisis—the etymology of crisis is "turning point"—cycles of forced migration have plagued the globe for centuries, she argues. After all, I would add, the term diaspora was first used to describe the Jewish people who, in 586 BCE, were dragged by the Mesopotamian ruler Nebuchhadnezzar to Babylon, marking the start of their exile.[11] The displacement of Palestinians, their immobilization at border zones, and their position as stateless refugees, become exemplary of the plight of migrants today, according to Harrison. As with the other chapters, Harrison curates this one with equal measures of flair and poise, including case studies as diverse as Maki Berchache and Nathalie Nambot's film *Brûle la mer* (2014), which brings into dialogue a Tunisian migrant who wants to stay in a France where he is not welcome, and a Palestinian refugee who wants to return home but cannot; Nathacha Appanah's novel *Tropique de la violence* (2016), which invokes the Israeli-blockaded "open-air prison" of the Gaza Strip to describe the notoriously abject slum on the French island outpost of Mayotte, to which Comorian migrants cross in the hope of reaching French territory (p. 178); and Ai Weiwei's documentary *Human Flow* (2017), which features drone footage not only of Palestinian refugee camps but also of Rohingya

Muslims in Bangladesh, and Latines at the US-Mexico border.[12] In each case, trajectories of displacement are heterogeneous yet overlapping. Whether examining documentary film, novels, popular theatre, archival photographs, newspaper articles, YouTube clips or critical theory, Harrison applies her acute observation and incisive commentary, producing succinct argumentation expressed with buoyant energy. Each chapter contains a profusion of endnoted material which, rather than clogging the prose, generously offers multiple possibilities for future research.

Harrison admits to the pitfalls of coopting the twin figures of Palestinian and American in transindigenous identification, and to the potential violence of reducing a multiplicity of peoples under one single nomenclature of indigeneity, expressing her care "[not to conflate] the very different political, geographic, and temporal contexts that have produced the colonial identities" (p. 9). I wonder whether, in this respect, she might have approached some of her interlocutors and case studies with a little more circumspection. In no way wishing further to perpetuate the invisibilization of indigenous Americans, I concentrate here on the Palestinians, since they intersect more with my field of expertise.

The eviction of Palestinians from Israel in 1948, and the Israeli settlement of the West Bank—and previously of Gaza—by religious fanatics claiming a messianic connection to the holy land today are in clear violation of international law. Nonetheless, I question the historical accuracy of classifying Israel as a "settler-colonial state," of a piece with the USA, as Harrison does (p. 109). Whereas European colonial settlement was a feature of the capitalist expansion of empire, the mass migration of Jewish people to the Middle East and the founding of Israel were a direct consequence of their persecution and murder in Europe. Moreover, while North America, Australia and other settler nations were colonized by Europeans with no legitimate local geographical or cultural claims, there is a Jewish history in Israel-Palestine—albeit one periodically interrupted by expulsions and migration. Religious extremists undertake to excuse their arrogance, aggression, and abuse with claims of essentializing indigeneity. However, some Jewish people are not exactly *not* indigenous to the region, a nuance which might have opened Harrison's term to even further exploration.

Israel and Palestine are currently among the planet's most white-hot terms, so it is little surprise they raise debate, consternation, and perplexity. One theorist cited by Harrison calls immigrants the Palestinians of France; Nathacha Appanah declares, "Gaza c'est la France" when critiquing the French state's neglect for migrants in Mayotte's marginalized borderlands (p. 178). On the one hand, this non-essentialism has the merit of disidentifying people from nationality and ethnicity. On the other, might there be a danger that the Palestinian who stands in for the globe's postcolonial migrants is yet again stripped of their subjectivity, individuality, and history? Notably, between their 1974 and 2004 films, do Godard and Gorin periodize the Palestinian situation to account for the fact that since the Oslo Accords (1993) there has been increasing despair, expressed by Palestinian theorists like Edward Said and Israeli historians like Ilan Pappe, that Palestinian sovereignty is nowhere in sight?[13]

Genet is perhaps complicit in this appropriation of and over-identification with Palestinian oppression, describing the Fedayeen fighters as "si semblables à moi que j'en fus d'abord émerveillé."[14] Conversely, in instructive ways Genet highlights the theatricality of the

Palestinian struggle. In his article “Les Palestiniens” he describes a series of photographs taken of guerillas in their mountain bases. Intentionally holding their rifles in phallic positions, the young fighters appear battle-ready yet effortlessly cool as they pose for the money shot.[15] In *Un captif amoureux* Genet continues his meditation on the Fedayeen’s self-conscious production of their iconic image, describing them as “des guerriers-artistes,” and their mountain camps as “un théâtre dans la verdure.”[16] He explains, however, that they never took this fabrication of aura seriously, always recognizing it as “une théâtralisation très profane qu’un sourire légèrement narquois suffit à détruire.”[17] Indeed, their mothers instantly dispelled the slightest whiff of heroism: “Des héros ! Quelle blague. J’en ai fait et fessé cinq ou six.”[18] While in one sense, coopting the Fedayeen as the embodiment of rebellion might empty their cause of its actual historical and geographical reality; in another, the Fedayeen seem actively to promote their status as international megastars. Given that the Fedayeen frequently targeted Israeli civilians while fighting for Palestinian sovereignty, their image construction also conspired to dress their brutality up in battle chic.

I now cringe at the thought that I appropriated their headscarf as a must-have fashion accessory on anti-apartheid demos. But rather than reproaching my performative activism, perhaps the Fedayeen might have revelled in their position at the very fulcrum on which, in Harrison’s terms, “multidirectional vectors” of transindigenous identification and solidarity balanced.

NOTES

***** I should like to extend my grateful thanks to my three colleagues for their essential and astute comments on this piece.

[1] See Olivia C. Harrison, *Transcolonial Maghreb: Imagining Palestine in the Era of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); and, Olivia C. Harrison and Teresa Villa-Ignacio, eds., *Souffles-Anfas: A Critical Anthology from the Moroccan Journal of Culture and Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

[2] The term “native,” often used to designate indigenous Americans in the USA, is not always pejorative.

[3] Françoise Vergès writes, “Dans le discours nativiste, le passé est imaginé comme lieu où gît la vérité de soi, falsifiée par la violence coloniale” (p. 90). See “Postface,” in Aimé Césaire, *Nègre je suis, nègre je resterai. Entretiens avec Françoise Vergès* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2005).

[4] See Alexander Stille, “The Case of Dieudonné: A French Comedian’s Hate” *The New Yorker*, Jan. 10, 2014, https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-case-of-dieudonn-a-french-comedians-hate.

[5] Exhibition “Ce que la Palestine apporte au monde,” Institut du monde arabe, Paris, May 31-December 31, 2023.

[6] In this respect Harrison's book complements Emine Fisek's authoritative study of community migrant theatre in France, *Aesthetic Citizenship: Immigration and Theater in Twenty-First-Century Paris* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017).

[7] Jean Genet, "Quatre heures à Chatila," in *L'Ennemi déclaré, textes et entretiens*, ed. Albert Dichy (Paris: Gallimard, 1991); and, Jean Genet, *Un captif amoureux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986).

[8] Farida Belghoul, *Georgette !* (Paris: Barrault, 1986).

[9] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

[10] *Ici et ailleurs*, directed by Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville (Sonimage/INA/ Gaumont, 1974); and, *Notre musique*. directed by Jean-Luc Godard (Avventura Films/Péripéphéria/Canal Plus/Arte/Vega Film/TSR/France 3, 2004).

[11] Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas* (London: Routledge, 2008).

[12] *Brûle la mer*, directed by Maki Berchache and Nathalie Nambot (Les Films du Bilboquet, 2014); Nathacha Appanah, *Tropique de la violence* (Paris: Gallimard, 2016); and, Ai Weiwei, *Human Flow* (Participant Media/AC Films/Amazon Studios, 2017).

[13] Edward Said, *The End of the Peace Process* (London: Granta, 2002); and, Ilan Pappe, *A History of Modern Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[14] This quotation is from a manuscript written by Genet that appeared in the exhibition catalogue *Les Valises de Jean Genet*, ed. Albert Dichy (Paris: Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine, 2020). This particular quotation from the manuscript is not reproduced in the text of the catalogue.

[15] Jean Genet, "Les Palestiniens," in *Genet à Chatila*, ed. Jérome Hankins (L'Aire: Solin, 1991).

[16] Genet, *Un captif amoureux*, pp. 69, 443. In the same publication Genet also describes the self-conscious theatricality of the Black Panther Party during the US Civil Rights Movement: "[ils] voulurent cette image, si l'on veut théâtrale et dramatique" (p. 139).

[17] Genet, "Les Palestiniens," p. 122.

[18] Genet, "Quatre heures à Chatila," op. p. 253.

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