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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.

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I am especially grateful for the opportunity to respond to the incisive questions Clare Finburgh Delijani, Gemma King, and Mehammed Mack raise in their generous reviews of my book. The reviewers provide an exhaustive overview of the argument of the book and a granular description of individual chapters, honing in on the circulation of anticolonial discourse across “disparate markers of protest” and the pitfalls of “over-identification” with Palestinians (Delijani); the politics and limits of deploying indigeneity as a framework for antiracist thought in postcolonial France and beyond (King); and the recuperation of indigeneity by the nativist right, which risks to overshadow the radical deployment of indigeneity against anti-immigrant discourses (Mack), among other questions that are central to the book. My response will focus on unpacking the pivotal concept of *Natives against Nativism*, “indigenous critique,” to clarify the ways in which it might defuse the nativist recuperation of indigeneity, construed as a marker of native belonging rather than a political identity forged at the colonial frontier.

As Delijani rightly notes, the book’s title plays with the various declensions of *indigène*, one of the generic terms coined to name the people who were present at the time of the Eurocolonial conquests that began in 1492 (other terms include “*naturales*,” “*indios*,” “Aboriginals,” “natives,” and later “autochthones”). These terms first appeared in the documents of conquest and were later given legal standing, for example through the 1865 Sénatus Consulte governing Muslim and Jewish *indigènes* in Algeria, or the various “Codes de l’indigénat” applied across the French empire in the late nineteenth century. These names, all derived from Latin (or Greek, in the case of autochthone), perform the violence of colonial naming, even though some, like indigenous and native, have been reclaimed by activists and, more recently, codified into international legal frameworks designed to protect the rights of indigenous peoples. Implemented in discrete colonial and settler colonial contexts and reclaimed for anticolonial purposes, the cluster of terms denoting indigeneity make an empirical claim to prior occupancy and sovereignty over territories that were forcibly taken through colonial conquest.

In the book, I expand this historical and legal definition of indigeneity, taking inspiration from the antiracist collective Indigènes de la république (now Parti des indigènes de la république, or PIR) to rearticulate the colonial nomenclature *indigène* as a political identity, one that makes possible alliances across the colonial continuum without enshrining a new definition of legal belonging. The descendants of immigrants from the four corners of France’s empire, relegated to the perpetual status of foreigners through the ubiquitous use of phrases such as “*Français d’origine immigrée*” or “*Français issus de l’immigration*,” are in solidarity with colonized Palestinians and indigenous Americans, even though their claims and demands are not the same.

These forms of transversal solidarity make visible the colonial genealogy of what, fittingly, we call nativism: an exclusionary claim to Frenchness based on racial, religious, and cultural identities forged through colonial governmentality. “Indigenous critique” does not formulate a claim to sovereignty, then, but rather a critique of the production of colonial subjects—*indigènes*—and the transformation of *indigènes* into immigrants in the postcolonial metropole.

In this sense, the phrase “indigenous critique” is methodological rather than empirical. Unlike Jodi A. Byrd, who uses this expression to speak of forms of critique elaborated by indigenous scholars and activists, I use indigenous critique to designate forms of critique that make visible the colonial genealogies of nativism, regardless of who articulates them.[1] It is particularly important to insist on this distinction because indigenous critique is a critique of assigned identities, congealed into legal and discursive frameworks during and after formal colonial rule. Indigenous critique is an attempt to divorce indigenous claims (in the expanded sense I explore in the book) from the burden of proving indigeneity.

My formulation of indigenous critique is indebted to Mahmood Mamdani’s studies of the politicization of indigeneity in the colonies, which I extend to the postcolonial metropole: how has indigeneity, as a naturalized expression of native belonging forged in the colonies, been appropriated and transformed in what I call the “settler postcolony”?[2] Settler colonialism as a project of replacement is, I contend, at the heart of nativist fantasies, which flip the terms of anticolonial discourse in support of the thesis that France has been invaded by migrants and needs to be decolonized. Here I would nuance Delijani’s formulation slightly: this is not to say that indigenous claims “mutate” into nativism, but rather to insist that indigenous claims to sovereignty (or for the PIR, rights) are not based on identity, but on a set of historical experiences founded on extreme power differentials between colonizer and colonized. As Mack rightly notes, nativist appropriations of indigeneity are based on a willful erasure of these power differentials, as if political identities such as colonizer, colonized, or *indigène* were simply positions on a board game (and here I agree with Mack that nativism is a competition for victimhood—antiracism is not).

The work of indigenous critique is to restore to these words their proper history, context, and meaning. Making this move requires a critique of indigeneity as a naturalized expression of identity based on first or prior occupancy. To be clear, this is not meant to relativize or counter indigenous claims to sovereignty in the U.S., Palestine, and other ongoing settler colonial projects. Rather, it is an attempt to divorce such political and historical claims from an understanding of indigenous identity as native belonging.

At the same time, I also use “indigenous” in an empirical sense in the book to refer to the descendants of those present at the time of Eurocolonial conquest. Here I am following the lead of activists and scholars who are rightly critical of injurious colonial terminology (“Indians” and its many derivatives) even though I also acknowledge the paradox that indigenous remains a Latinate term first used in a colonial context. Barring the question of transcription, using self-designations such as Chumash and Apsaroke might afford one way out of this paradox, and I use these names when appropriate. But using self-designations does not always allow for the kinds of solidarity that I analyze under the expression “transindigenous identification,” between indigenous Americans and Palestinians for example. The term “indigenous” remains caught in

the violence of colonial naming, but it captures forms of solidarity across the colonial continuum, between those who have been “indigenized,” to borrow a phrase from the PIR, and their allies, who are not necessarily indigenous, even in this expanded sense.[3]

The lexical instability of the term “indigenous” partly explains, I think, Gemma King’s circumspection about the place of “white European voices such as those of Jean-Luc Godard and Jean Genet” in the book. I agree with King that Godard and Genet are not indigenous in any of the senses I explore in the book. On the contrary, they were both highly aware of their “privilege,” and even more so of their complicity in the Eurocolonial adventure.[4] This position of privilege and complicity is the starting point for what, borrowing Jacques Rancière’s terminology, we might call their “disidentification” with the French state and their “impossible identification” with Algerians, Palestinians, and migrant workers.[5] By advocating for what Rancière calls the “cause of the other,” Genet and Godard denaturalize what it means to be French or indeed European. They also make visible the ways in which Europe has defined itself against Islam, from the Crusades to the Reconquista of Spain—which coincides with the conquest of the Americas—and the Bosnian war. Mehammed Mack’s invitation to expand this framework even further to the beginning of the Muslim occupation of Europe in the eighth century is well taken, given the obsession with so-called Islamic invasions in anti-immigrant discourse.

This is not to lionize either Genet or Godard as an irreproachable *juste* or to conflate their subject position with that of Algerians, migrant workers, or Palestinians whose cause they supported. In this respect, I share some of Mack’s reservations about Genet’s politics of betrayal—he famously claimed that he would abandon the Palestinians the day they had a state of their own—although one might wonder if this provocation was intended to test the sincerity of his European interlocutors (did they really want the Palestinians to have a state?) and, more importantly, warn against the perils of nationalism, as advocates of Palestinian rights such as Edward Said tirelessly did. But Genet and Godard are crucial to the story of natives against nativism precisely because their works dismantle the naturalized understanding of Frenchness that is the foundation of anti-immigrant discourse. The colonial lobby, the OAS (Secret Armed Organization), the Front National, and the French state understood the dangers these dissident artists posed and acted in kind by protesting their plays and banning their films.

That one must remain vigilant about the risks of instrumentalizing the migrant or Palestinian cause goes without saying, and I attend to the pitfalls of what Irmgard Emmelhainz dubs “revolutionary tourism” in my chapters on Genet and Godard.[6] The same is true, I would add, of solidarity movements within migrant communities or antiracist movements, regardless of the identities and subject positions of those involved. The example King provides, the film *Brûle la mer*, is a case in point. The Tunisian co-director, Maki Berchache, is not off the hook because he started filming as an undocumented migrant. His identification with the Palestinian cause is a romantic one, based on what he imagines to be a shared language, culture, and political horizon. But his Palestinian comrade, Shadi Al Fawaghra, who unlike Maki does not have the benefit of citizenship, gently puts him in his place: it’s not the same story.

Delijani wisely cautions against collapsing the Palestinian struggle with the migrant question at a time when the possibility of Palestinian sovereignty seems to be vanishing before our very eyes.

In the 1970s, the nascent Palestinian revolution made sovereignty seem like an achievable goal, in the image of the Algerian revolution a decade prior. That militant enthusiasm sounds dated and naïve today. As Delijani notes, it also obscures the specific forms of colonial governmentality that have seemingly foreclosed the possibility of Palestinian sovereignty. But it is important to acknowledge the pitfalls of transindigenous identification without diminishing the important role that international solidarity has played in putting the Palestinian question on the map, in spite of relentless efforts to erase it. Indigenous critique makes visible both the political potential and pitfalls that underlie solidarity practices, without preempting the radical forms of critique such as catachrestic forms of identification allow.

Perhaps the expression “indigenous critique” suffers too much from lexical ambiguity, caught between an empirical attachment to history and a critique of naturalized identities. But I chose it precisely because it is capacious enough to hold all these things together. Maki is indigenous in the sense that he is Tunisian and thus a former colonial subject of France, and because he is a refugee of post-revolutionary Tunisia, and because he becomes French in the process of making the film, but in a way that is not legible to those who define Frenchness in ethnonational terms. Indigenous critique lays bare the overlapping threads of this story. It is not the same story as Shadi’s, and yet both are part of a larger framework that includes the Palestinian and migrant questions.

The book takes seriously the radical potential of pro-Palestinian movements not only to shift the world’s attention onto the predicament of Palestinians—that it has, undeniably so—but also to cast new light on the Palestinian question. The antiracist activists and artists I analyze in the book are committed in various ways to the goal of Palestinian sovereignty, as are solidarity activists today. But they also show that the Palestinian question is part of a wider colonial framework, and that the extreme forms of violence that Palestinians continue to be subjected to are not only relics of past forms of colonial governmentality (the genocide of indigenous Americans, the brutal war to maintain French Algeria), but obey nativist logics that are also at work in the transformation of *indigènes* into immigrants in the Global North. Seeing Palestine as part of a colonial continuum that includes the ongoing migrant question does not preclude support for the Palestinian cause on its own terms. On the contrary, I would argue that solidarity work must be grounded in both identification and difference. It is not so much that migrant workers *are* the Palestinians of France, in Frédéric Maatouk’s catachrestic metaphor. Rather, the asymmetrical encounter produced through solidarity work offers up new perspectives on both the migrant and Palestinian questions, placing these decades-old questions in a wider frame that allows activists and artists to draw vectors across the colonial continuum.

Delijani’s insistence on the theatrical dimensions of Palestinian solidarity aptly points to the play at work in such forms of identification. While there is a risk that such forms of play obscure the actual speech of indigenous subjects (I am thinking here of Darwish’s poem “The ‘Red Indian’s’ Penultimate Speech to the White Man,” and its performance in Rouabhi’s scenography and Godard’s *Notre musique*), it is important to note that the artists and activists I analyze in the book do not claim to speak for the Palestinians. Performance precisely draws attention to the fact that they are speaking as, rather than for, the Palestinians (or, in Darwish’s case, speaking as if he were *al-hind al-ahmar*, a “Red Indian”). Performance makes visible what, in the context of the Algerian revolution, Rancière calls “impossible identification” with the cause of the other. This

impossible desire is the starting point of a political relation to the other that is grounded in difference, not sameness.

One of the principal aims of the book is to counter the ubiquitous notion that antiracism and Palestine solidarity are foreign imports in France, a notion best captured in the expression “*l’Intifada des banlieues*,” which was used to refer to the urban uprisings triggered by the deaths of Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré on October 27, 2005. While I agree with Delijani on the importance of tackling the rise in Islamophobic discursive and material violence in France and attend to the instrumentalization of Islam in anti-immigrant discourses where relevant (for example in the expression “*islamogauchisme*,” coined by Pierre-André Taguieff to conflate anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism[7]), my focus on the book is on analyzing antiracist and pro-Palestinian movements on their own terms. Against the relegation of Palestinian solidarity to Arab and/or Muslim complicity, I show that for the past fifty years migrant rights and antiracist activists, Beur and banlieue writers, and some of the most canonic figures of French arts and letters have rallied for Palestine and brought the Palestinian question to bear on a radical critique of white identity politics. I use this latter expression pointedly: one of the things indigenous critique does is to work against the relegation of antiracism to identity politics or *wokisme* in a willful erasure of a decades-long history of French antiracist praxis and thought.

Natives against Nativism is a book about antiracism and Palestine solidarity in France from the 1970s to the present. What’s become clear to me in the past few months is that it’s also a book about the suppression of pro-Palestinian speech. In the 1970s, the French state deported migrant workers who rallied for Palestine. The ongoing attempts to ban solidarity protests and the deportation of feminist Gazan activist Mariam Abu Daqqa on November 14 are but the latest examples of state efforts to frame the Palestinian question as a foreign import rather than as a distinctly French question. Palestine solidarity, too, has become a litmus test for French indigeneity in the sense of native belonging: if you’re pro-Palestinian, you’re not really French. This foreignization of Palestine solidarity is part and parcel, I argue, of the foreignization of racialized subjects in France since the 1970s.

And yet Palestine solidarity has only grown since the days of revolutionary enthusiasm, from the 1983 Marche pour l’égalité et contre le racisme, where protestors wore the keffiyeh in honor of Palestinians killed during the 1982 Israeli siege of Beirut and Phalangist massacre in Sabra and Shatila, to the massive protests that are held weekly against Israel’s current onslaught in Gaza, which as I write has killed more than 23,000 Palestinians in just three months. In France as in the rest of the world, Palestine solidarity seems to be growing in inverse proportion to the facts on the ground, which continue to narrow the possibility of Palestinian futurity, let alone sovereignty. That Palestine solidarity continues to be perceived as a threat to the postcolonial state demonstrates the continued relevance, and urgency, of the Palestinian question in France and beyond.

NOTES

[1] Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

[2] Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and, Olivia C. Harrison, "France, a Settler Postcolony?," *Middle East Report* 302 (2022), <https://merip.org/2022/05/france-a-settler-postcolony-2/>.

[3] "Nous sommes les indigènes de la république!," Parti des indigènes de la république, January 2005, www.indigenes-republique.fr.

[4] Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: New York Review of Books, 2003), p. 12.

[5] Jacques Rancière, "The Cause of the Other," trans. David Macey, *Parallax* 4/2 (1998): 25-33.

[6] Irmgard Emmelhainz, "From Third Worldism to Empire: Jean-Luc Godard and the Palestinian Question," *Third Text* 23/5 (2009): 649-56.

[7] Pierre-André Taguieff, *La nouvelle judéophobie* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2002).

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