

Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature

Volume 48
Issue 1 *Translating Multilingualism*

Article 16

2024

Olivia C. Harrison. Natives Against Nativism: Antiracism and Indigenous Critique in Postcolonial France. University of Minnesota Press, 2023.

André Pettman
University of Arizona, andrepettman@arizona.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/sttcl>



Part of the [French and Francophone Literature Commons](#), and the [Indigenous Studies Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Pettman, André (2024) "Olivia C. Harrison. Natives Against Nativism: Antiracism and Indigenous Critique in Postcolonial France. University of Minnesota Press, 2023.," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 48: Iss. 1, Article 16. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.2295>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

Olivia C. Harrison. *Natives Against Nativism: Antiracism and Indigenous Critique in Postcolonial France*. University of Minnesota Press, 2023.

Abstract

Review of Olivia C. Harrison. *Natives against Nativism: Antiracism and Indigenous Critique in Postcolonial France*. University of Minnesota Press, 2023. 296 pp.

Keywords

Indigeneity, Postcolonial Studies, French and Francophone Studies, Palestine, American Indian, Antiracism, Migrant Rights

Olivia C. Harrison. *Natives against Nativism: Antiracism and Indigenous Critique in Postcolonial France*. University of Minnesota Press, 2023. 296 pp.

Questions regarding migration, immigration, universalism, and “Frenchness” have been longstanding, central concerns of French and Francophone Studies, with their significance further magnified in the postcolonial era. In her expansive and illuminating study entitled *Natives against Nativism*, Olivia C. Harrison contributes to this discourse by examining French anticolonial solidarity and antiracist activism from the 1970s to the present. Throughout her study, Harrison trains her focus on two quintessential colonial subjects: the Palestinian and the American Indian. She argues that both have played crucial roles in antiracist activism and the articulation—and reactivation—of anticolonial critique in postcolonial France. This builds upon Harrison’s previous book, *Transcolonial Maghreb: Imagining Palestine in the Era of Decolonization*, which drew out the significance of the ‘Palestinian question’ to the postcolonial Maghrebi context. In *Natives against Nativism*, Harrison demonstrates how the American Indian also emerges from the archive of French antiracism as another embodiment of anticolonial resistance and a key source for anticolonial and antiracist struggle in France and the Maghreb.

Harrison tracks the appearance of these two subjects across an astoundingly diverse corpus, which includes novels, films, essays, posters, photographs, manifestos, and unpublished film and theater scripts. These sources include fragments of tracts and theater performances from the archives of different activist and militant groups; texts and films by canonical figures such as Jean Genet’s “Quatre heures à Chatila” (“Four Hours in Shatila”) and *Un captif amoureux* (*Prisoner of Love*) and Jean-Luc Godard’s *Ici et ailleurs* (‘Here and Elsewhere’) and *Notre musique* (‘Our Music’); works by unheralded figures like playwright Mohamed Rouabhi’s “El menfi” (‘The exile’); controversial writer Farida Belghoul’s novel *Georgette!*; and contemporary works including Maki Berchache and Nathalie Nambot’s film *Brûle la mer* (‘Burn the Sea’), Natacha Appanah’s novel *Tropique de la violence* (*Tropic of Violence*), and artist Ai Weiwei’s documentary film *Human Flow*. In mobilizing a corpus of such breadth, Harrison convincingly argues for the overlooked and significant role played by the Palestinian and the American Indian in the modern history of anticolonial and antiracist struggle in postcolonial France. In doing so, she also skillfully reconstitutes and historicizes the struggle for migrant rights in postcolonial France, demonstrating its remarkable intersectionality.

While the Palestinian and the American Indian constellate the chapters of *Natives against Nativism*, they are only occasionally addressed in tandem. What binds them together and frames the book’s chapters is Harrison’s concern with the notion of indigeneity. The book’s introduction examines the use of the colonial term *indigène* ‘native’ to demonstrate how claims to indigeneity have been

paradoxically deployed in France to undergird contemporary struggles for racial justice and migrant rights, and to work in service of white nativist claims. Indeed, Harrison clearly demonstrates how the use of *indigène* is both a provocation and a rallying cry for those residing on either end of the political spectrum. When taken up by decolonial and antiracist militants and activists, *indigène* becomes a tool of critique that both illuminates and condemns the violent colonial processes of racialization and segregation that originally produced the term. In pronouncing it in a contemporary frame, however, these political actors use it to stake a claim to indigeneity in postcolonial France, while also allowing for a “transindigenous” identification and solidarity across imperial formations. When deployed by the anti-immigrant, nativist French Right, *indigène* becomes a means of calling for the deportation of migrants. Thus, anticolonial and antiracist discourse is co-opted and weaponized to argue that only those with ancestral roots in France are native to the country and can be considered truly French.

Though Harrison delineates the ways in which these oppositional political subjects stake claims to indigeneity, the majority of *Natives against Nativism* is concerned with how decolonial and antiracist militants and activists draw on the notion in the discourse of their struggles—with Harrison’s discussion of Belghoul’s *Georgette!* and its appropriation by the nativist French Right as the sole exception. As such, while contemporary political discourse surrounding nativism functions as the book’s frame, its contents are more preoccupied with “indigenous critique,” defined as a sustained critique of the colonial conditions that produced indigenous subjects and an understanding of the afterlife of this subjectification in the postcolonial era. Harrison persuasively argues that all of her corpus’ objects perform indigenous critique, thus allowing her to show how indigeneity has been a crucial notion for antiracist and anticolonial struggle in its longer history, and broadening the temporal, historical, and political scope of its import beyond France and the twenty-first-century. The concept of indigenous critique holds great potential across disciplines, as it offers welcome nuance and specificity to discussions regarding postcolonial struggles and solidarities.

While the depth of its analysis and the breadth of its corpus are laudable, *Natives against Nativism* suffers somewhat from a lack of connective tissue between its chapters. While each chapter is clearly concerned with questions of indigeneity, antiracism, and anticolonial struggle, they tend to read as standalone essays that occasionally call back to one another, likely stemming from the fact that each was revised from a previously published article. Nevertheless, Harrison deftly shuttles the reader between different temporalities and geographical and historical contexts, a gesture befitting a text focused on transhistorical and transindigenous continuities. Furthermore, Harrison balances the complexity and granularity of her analyses with clear signposting of her argument and its central concerns. Thus,

while chapters may sometimes feel disconnected from one another, the reader never loses sight of the book's overarching focus.

Ultimately, *Natives against Nativism* is exemplary in its clarity, ambition, and rigor. It offers new readings of well-known sources and introduces readers to new artists and objects that are deserving of further scholarly exploration. Its most sterling achievement, however, is its unwavering commitment to presenting postcolonial subjects above all as political actors whose fight for rights, recognition, and dignity are deeply embedded in long histories stretching from the colonial period to the present day. Harrison's study reminds scholars how crucial it is to be attentive to these political actors, their histories, and their struggles if we hope to achieve a truly decolonized world.

André Pettman
University of Arizona