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The Ethics of Intercultural Approaches to Indigenous Studies: Conjoining Natives and Palestinians in Context

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Abstract:

Salaita argues that the project of Indigenous Studies is inherently comparative, citing numerous examples of productive intercultural scholarship, he explores historical, cultural, and political relationships among Native North Americans and Palestinian Arabs to illuminate some of the ways that comparison offers the potential for new directions in both scholarly and activist communities. He contextualizes this analysis with a broader discussion of the ethics of scholarship in Indigenous Studies, paying special attention to the relationship of nationalistic commitment to intercultural methodologies.

As Indigenous Studies expands in both geographical scope and methodological approach, questions arise about the coalescence of multivalent scholarship into an institutionalized academic field. It appears at times that engagement with Indigenous peoples is incompatible with entrenched academic ethos. Despite the disparity between academic convention and material communal needs, Indigenous Studies has grown tremendously; its growth thus presents its practitioners with a series of critical issues. One of those issues is ethical. Or, to put it another way, we are faced now with questions about the ethical imperatives of the project of Indigenous Studies as an institutionalized enterprise. Ethical matters, of course, are crucial to all academic endeavors; it might therefore appear unduly ambitious to examine discrete ethical matters vis-à-vis a specific area study. Yet it is precisely because of the movement by Indigenous scholars toward disciplinary discreteness that we need to disengage broad academic ethics from a universalist position and apply them directly to the imperatives of doing work in Indigenous Studies. In a variety of circumstances, these ethical questions arise when we consider how it might be possible to traverse the disparity between academic convention and material communal needs.

This article will focus on the ethics of intercultural work, which is increasingly becoming a methodological choice in Indigenous Studies. Indeed, the very project of Indigenous Studies is fundamentally comparative, relying as it does on more than geographical separatism, but also on a conceptual and philosophical dissociation from a host of colonialist undertakings, like neoliberalism and military occupation. Communities around the world that articulate a commitment to such a dissociation will likely find an amiable project in Indigenous Studies, and so the field is necessarily transgressive. The fundamentally comparative nature of Indigenous Studies also results from the moral and geopolitical rejection of nationhood as defined by the parameters of the postcolonial nation-state as it was imagined by the European settlers who carved borders where there were none, a rejection that at least tacitly emphasizes transnationalism. In what conditions, then, can we erase physical and intellectual borders while maintaining a steadfast communal commitment? What are the moral and political limitations of comparative work? And how ...most important, do we articulate a dynamic ethical paradigm...geared toward and appropriate for the inherently comparative nature of Indigenous Studies?

I want to examine these questions through discussion of Native North Americans and Palestinian Arabs, peoples who continue to resist settler colonization—the permanent transferral of a foreign population into a new land wherein the settler confers to himself privileges he withholds from the natives—and who on that basis have been subject already to comparative analysis (Syracuse 2006). Natives and Palestinians offer a number of interesting comparative possibilities, and by invoking them I will endeavor to cover a series of relevant intellectual and ethical issues. Comparative work is not necessarily the same thing as intercultural work although the two terms often stand in for one another. I use the term “comparative” descriptively and not prescriptively: it describes the methodological process of juxtaposing different communities for the purpose of comprehensive engagement. I use the term “intercultural” prescriptively, as an ethical and political adjuration: it denotes a more profound involvement in the outcomes of a comparative methodology. It is because of this connotative investment in communal polities that I prefer the term “intercultural” or “inter-communal” to “transnational” or “multiethnic.” In this usage, “intercultural” designates a correlation of national communities with distinct cultural entities and thus affirms the probity of Indigenous struggles toward sovereign nationhood. I draw from the term “culture” as it is generally used in my field, English Studies, where it connotes the complete local phenomena that produce certain meanings and thus constitute the ceremonial and political substance of a community in total. In particular, I want to emphasize that Natives, Palestinians, and other victims of settlers colonization do not merely relate to one another based on the presence in their lives of colonial states, but share more deeply-rooted affinities worth exploring. In the sections that follow, I will analyze the conditions in which Natives and Palestinians can be compared, examine the contextual issues that underline the comparison, and assess the resultant complex of ethical matters as they inform Indigenous Studies more broadly.

The Globalized Indian

In *The Truth about Stories*, the Cherokee writer Thomas King critiques James Fenimore Cooper’s use of implicitly racist imagery, contained in the title of the book that arguably is his most offensive literary failing. Such a critique is not surprising; lots of Indians have talked back to Cooper and his many fellow travelers. What King concludes is of most interest:

In the end, all Cooper is doing here is reiterating the basic propagandas that the British would use to justify their subjugation of India, or that the Germans would employ in their extermination of Jews, or that the Jews would utilize to displace Palestinians, or that North Americans would exploit for the internment of the Japanese, or that the U.S. military and the U.S. media would craft into jingoistic slogans in order to make the invasions of other countries—Grenada, Panama, Afghanistan, Iraq—seem reasonable, patriotic, and entertaining to television audiences throughout North America (King 2005, 105).

With this observation, King globalizes Natives, judging as analogous the use of dehumanizing colonial discourse in North America and around the world, in different time frames and continuing today as with Israel’s displacement of Palestinians. Of particular interest in King’s passage is the implicit belief that representations engender material consequences and that stories create a reality that can be celebrated or exploited. Words, in this schema, not only matter; they have the ability to condition reality and thereby influence history, in two senses: by inventing a past and determining the course of a people’s destiny.

King’s observation foregrounds the strongest basis of doing intercultural work focused on Natives and Palestinians. It is the discursive qualities of their entanglement with foreign settlers that renders comparison of these communities a morally and intellectually fruitful task. Natives and Palestinians have not only been victims of settler colonization, but of a distinct form of settler colonization. This point is unduly general, of course, given the fact that the colonization of North America has been a heterogeneous affair; even Zionist colonization of Palestine, a much less complicated phenomenon, has been conducted with different, sometimes competing, motivations and strategies (Masalha 2000). Nevertheless, Indigenous peoples in North America and Palestine were subject to an incursion of foreign settlers who, no matter their specific political moorings, relied either obliquely or explicitly on a notion of chosenness to justify their settlement. It is this discursive belief of being exceptional, of being motivated by forces larger than the individual, of fulfilling a historical destiny, that produced a discrete form of colonialism, one that surpasses garrison violence. This discrete form of colonialism also occurred in parts of Latin America, Algeria, Australia, southern Africa (Zimbabwe and South Africa), and throughout the

Pacific. I have plucked Natives and Palestinians from this rolodex of the dispossessed because of a particular discursive phenomenon that is not merely comparable, but dialectical: the utility, indispensability, and dogmatism of a Holy Land ethos in the project of nation building in the United States and Israel, which actually traverses the Atlantic and enables a mutually constitutive settlement project (Newcomb 2008).

This dialectic has entered into political conversations in Indian Country and Palestine. On *CounterPunch*, for example, Robert Robideau reduces it to a straightforward moral proposition: “The state of Israel sets [sic] on land that was originally Palestinian but Zionist movements in Europe and the United States claimed that ‘the land was given to them by God’ and their belief that their race possessed some ‘natural superiority’. Euro-Americans pray to ‘god and country’ and teach their future generations to pray homage to the gangsters, outlaws and thieves who stole the country from Indian nations in god’s name” (Robideau 2006). Tim Giago, a former president of the Native American Journalists’ Association, offers a similar argument: “If one wonders why the Palestinians resisted [Israel’s] occupation with all of their energy for so many years, one only has to look at the resistance of the indigenous people of America that lasted for nearly five centuries” (Giago, *Native American Times*, August 22 2005). The Palestinians have likewise turned toward Native America as a site of political inspiration, and have done so with regularity. In fact, that inspiration has been enacted in actual resistance activities, as when a crowd of Palestinians gathered at Huwwara checkpoint in the West Bank dressed as Indians, carrying a banner addressed to the visiting American Secretary of State: “The Indian wars are not over, Mrs [Condoleezza] Rice... We are still here, too!!” This sort of playacting relies to some degree on a caricatured image of Indians to be recognizable, but, despite that problem, it is a remarkable example of how a contextualized history can guide innovative political action. The announcement that “the Indian wars are not over” conjoins ostensibly discrete events into one historical lineage and impugns the United States’ failures vis-à-vis Israel. More crucially, though, it also implies that the failures are both structural and imminent, resultant of an innate moral bankruptcy extending back to its origin, like Israel’s, as violently expansive.

The dialectic has also been taken up by scholars. In 2000, for instance, the Center for Bedouin Studies and Development at Ben-Gurion Desert of the Negev and the Center for Comparative Education at UCLA collaborated to assemble a conference entitled, “The Future of Indigenous Peoples: Strategies for Survival and Development,” a gathering that placed considerable emphasis on intercultural relationships between Natives and Palestinians (Champagne 2003). In his essay in *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, Robert Warrior explores his development as a scholar as an example of useful intercultural pursuits. Warrior discusses the genesis of his intellectual occupations and the terms of his investment in Native Studies in the context of his relationship as a graduate student under the tutelage of Edward Said. Although Warrior does not explicitly identify the dispossession of Palestinians as a factor in his understanding of Native America, his indebtedness to Said for a series of discoveries indicates that a transaction between North America and Palestine is not only viable, but apropos of the potential of intercultural work to engender new directions in Indigenous Studies (Weaver, Warner & Warrior 2006, 179-223). The lesson is valuable: comparison need not be explicit; it can arise as an immanent element of thinking about power and how it is solidified and maintained around the world. As Warrior notes, “I am reminded of the difficult truth Said confronts..., a truth that Palestinians, Native Americans, and other indigenous people around the world share. That is, we are a people who live in shadows of defeat under the sign of modernity” (Weaver, et.al. 2006, 219).

At present, a substantial amount of comparison—immanent and explicit—is being performed by Indigenous scholars. Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s well-traveled *Decolonizing Methodologies* draws from global source material, a feature matched by its content, which often treats Indigenous communities extraterritorially, that is, outside of demarcated physical spaces (Tuhiwai Smith 1999). Another intercultural project, Chadwick Allen’s *Blood Narrative*, shows us a different way to produce comparative work. Allen does not proffer an extraterritorial or a cosmopolitan methodology; rather, he invests his analysis with a specific framework and then applies that framework to distinct communal polities, the New Zealand Maori and American Indians. In so doing, he illuminates some of the ways that settler colonization, despite its temporal and geographical asymmetry, inevitably relies on universal strategies and usually follows a predictable trajectory (Allen 2002). Taiaiake Alfred explores these sorts of intercultural matters as they affect political activism. Alfred argues that a newly globalized economy has altered the possibilities for effective resistance in Indigenous communities, suggesting that “the landscape of politics has changed fundamentally since the 1970s, and failing to adapt to the new global geopolitical context renders our entire institutional structure absolutely useless” (Alfred 2005: 235). This new reality, whose most noteworthy feature has been the preservation through an evolved geopolitics of

basic colonial structures, renders intercultural relationships an ineluctable aspect of the political and intellectual landscape. The mandate now is for Indigenous peoples to define how they will manage and enact their shared resistance to new forms of colonization.

Returning to Natives and Palestinians, we can develop a more specific understanding of how intercultural work participates in that mandate. To get a better sense of why Natives and Palestinians share a set of circumstantial histories, it is useful to explore how agents of colonial power use comparisons to facilitate their support of Indigenous dispossession. A letter writer to the *Miami Herald*, for example, finds in Natives an effective symbol of Palestinian irrationality. I quote his letter in full: “The Aug. 1 story *Gaza pullout holds promise, risks* says that Israel has helped hundreds of thousands of its citizens set up homes on occupied Palestinian land. Ignoring the fact that there never was a state of Palestine, are all of the homes set up in the United States sitting on occupied Indian land?”(Buckner 2005). This sort of claim, which can be found periodically on the political right and left, relies on implication in the absence of forthrightness: it is outrageous to imagine that the United States, despite having removed an Indigenous people, is in any way illegitimate; why, then, would we imagine that Israel might be illegitimate despite having done the same? The fact that the writer (rightly) expects his readers to recognize the implication and its moral position illustrates that colonial discourse is not only portable, but interconnected and ultimately normative.

Using different rhetoric, but relying on the same moral position—which can be summed up by the cliché “to the victors go the spoils”—Richard Cohen urges us not to cry for the Palestinians:

Israel is, as I have often said, unfortunately located, gentrifying a pretty bad neighbourhood. But the world is full of dislocated peoples, and we ourselves live in a country where the Indians were pushed out of the way so that—oh, what irony!—the owners of slaves could spread liberty and democracy from sea to shining sea. As for Europe, who today cries for the Greeks of Anatolia or the Germans of Bohemia? (Cohen 2006)

One thing separates this sort of argument—which is accurate, notwithstanding its heinous morality—from the comparisons offered by Natives and Palestinians themselves. Cohen and likeminded commentators forget something that is so elementary and obvious that it would be impossible to overlook if people did not actively strive to overlook it: the Indians are not actually “out of the way.” Nor have they abandoned their land claims. Their arguments assume that Indian dispossession is permanent and that the linear history to which they subscribe is impermeable. Natives and Palestinians are not asking anybody to cry for them, but they are demanding that those who purport to determine their future not remove them from history altogether.

Inscribed tacitly in the narratives proffered by Cohen and the *Miami Herald* letter writer is a recognition that Natives have come to personify the world’s long history of settler colonization. Among the chattering classes, imbued at least implicitly with fealty to neoliberal interventions, Natives are always available to rationalize various forms of displacement, based on the supposed infallibility of the American project. Among Indigenous peoples, on the other hand, Natives have come to personify a different type of relationship to settler colonization, one that signifies intrepidity and resilience. This disparity connotes more than a mere difference of outlook; it also bespeaks a difference of ethical perspective. Whereas agents of colonial power like Cohen juxtapose Natives and Palestinians in order to mutually disenfranchise both groups, Indigenous peoples pursue intercultural juxtapositions for numerous reasons, but with the ultimate goal of mutual empowerment. The ethical difference is crucial for more than intellectual reasons. To highlight it presupposes a belief in the need and ability of Indigenous Studies to function in realms of material politics. The ethics of intercultural work, then, speak directly to the very existence of an Indigenous Studies.

Beyond the potential material utility of comparison, pursuing intercultural work presents compelling intellectual possibilities. Assessing the discourse of settlement in Palestine alongside that of North America allows us to assimilate into professional spaces phenomena that are intertwined on the ground. It is not just commentators and intellectuals who, with different intentions, theorize commonalities among Natives and Palestinians. Policymakers have also detected those commonalities. David Ben-Gurion, Zionism’s statesman and the founding Prime Minister of Israel, is on record inspiring the Yishuv (the community of pre-1948 Jewish settlers) to make the land blossom and overcome the local savages, as their fellow Europeans had done in North America vis-à-vis the “Red Indians.” Moshe Dayan, the late Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defense Forces [IDF], likewise found it rhetorically effective to invoke

American ideals of expansion (Salaita 2006). On the American side of the Atlantic, we can find innumerable examples of policymakers drawing lessons from their nation's settler past in dealing with the Arab World. Franklin Roosevelt conceptualized friendly Arab leaders such as Ibn Saud as noble savages, a direct reference to an historical epoch, but also a way of staking out a particular style of interaction (Heikal 1996, 61). In more explicit fashion, in 2007 Army Sergeant Eli Painted Crow, a Yaqui, revealed on *Democracy Now!* that the military refers to enemy territory in Iraq as "Indian country" (Goodman 2007), a term also in use during the Vietnam War (Holman CAP). These examples do not represent isolated curiosities. The American fascination with the Holy Land and "restoring" it to the Jews is a peculiar Protestant phenomenon that has existed since the 19th century, one that shares a causal relationship with expansionist attitudes vis-à-vis Indians (Obenzinger 1999).

The basis for comparing Natives and Palestinians, then, is not primarily cultural, although, as with all Indigenous populations, there are legitimate ways to explore parallel cultural practices. (By "culture," I refer here rather crudely to social organization and ceremonial practice.) In contextualizing Natives and Palestinians with comparable experiences of settler colonization, I mark out a specific temporal framework that does not on its own reference pre- and post-colonial histories and lifestyles. The act of comparison thus focuses on political determinants. By "political," I refer here narrowly to actions that facilitate colonization, resistance, and non-ceremonial interaction. Those political determinants are largely discursive, arising from the rationalizations settlers employed in North America and the Holy Land to render themselves exceptional pioneers on sacrosanct missions. One result of this particular basis of comparison is the fact that intellectual focus will be oriented around the settler and not the Indigene. In the following section, I shall examine this concern, along with some attendant issues, by treating them as germane to methodological ethics.

Comparison and Nationalism

The question is inevitable: is comparativism incompatible with nationalism? Certain pluralist activists and intellectuals have suggested that it is. I will have to argue the opposite, that comparativism can facilitate a healthy nationalism. Before I enter into that argument, however, it might be useful to assess the issue of difference in intercultural work, from which the question arises.

The comparison of Natives and Palestinians is not a comprehensive undertaking. There are limits to the scope of phenomena that can reasonably be compared, and acknowledging those limits allows us to retain a meaningful interest in national aspirations. I do not find it useful to list the crucial differences—culturally, historically, and politically—among Natives and Palestinians; it is better to treat those differences as a pervasive assumption. The existence of difference *ipso facto*, however, does not preclude coherent intercultural work. When one is dealing with discrete communities—and Palestinians are distinct to North America's Indigenes historically and geographically—it is rare that one subject of comparison is *just like* its corresponding object. However, the goal of intercultural work is not to identify exactitudes; it is to discover phenomena analogous to the degree that its correlative qualities allow us to better understand matters relevant to the communities that are being compared. In the case of Natives and Palestinians, we can develop a set of precise comparisons if we take as a point of departure the messianic discourse to which both groups were subject upon the onset of foreign settlement (Young 2007, 10). This point of departure opens up other moral and intellectual possibilities, especially in terms of its ability to focus attention on the contingencies of the globalized Indian, or of the metonymical Palestinian who, like his Indian brethren, stands in for a variety of political actions, ranging from the quintessential terrorist to the intrepid resistor.

The greatest challenge to this sort of methodology is ethically oriented, arising from the point I articulated above that comparison's primary focus is implicitly on the settler rather than on the Indigene. I take this concern seriously, especially in light of the growing methodological ethos in Indigenous Studies that emphasize communal empowerment. The concern assumes that primary focus on the settler is either problematic ethically or deleterious of Indigenous community-building; that assumption warrants further examination. The goal of community-building should remain paramount to Indigenous Studies. It is possible to retain and advance this commitment through analysis of European colonial discourses, particularly those that are portable or dialectically related. These discourses not only gained their power through a relational progression; they transformed Indigenous communities in specific ways. For Natives and Palestinians, some of those transformations are archetypically comparable—for instance, the use of indiscriminate violence as an anti-colonial strategy (Neumann 2002) and the development of narratives of

peoplehood contradistinctive of the duress of modernity. We learn more about each community by tracing out their histories in certain ways. As Dale Turner argues, “indigenous intellectuals engage European ideas both as a *philosophical* exercise and as a *political* activity. It is not enough to simply engage European thought on its own terms; indigenous intellectuals need to critically engage European ideas, methodologies, and theories to show how they have marginalized, distorted, and ignored indigenous voices” (Turner 2006).

Comparative scholars in Indigenous Studies are tasked with sorting out whatever balance exists between intercultural and national commitments. As I pointed out above, I believe in the ability of careful intercultural work to facilitate Indigenous nationalism, a term I use in concert with the thorough definition articulated by Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior in *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (Weaver et al. 2006). This goal is possible through ethical choice and actually has little to do with the disposition of intercultural work itself. In other words, if a scholar is committed to the national aspirations of the Indigenous communities he or she studies (and thus interacts with), then intercultural work will not preclude or forestall that commitment. The obligation is to be trained ethically on the communal features that inspire comparison in such a way that they subsist within the framework of extant anti- and decolonial activities. It is not difficult to perform this obligation when working with Natives and Palestinians because of the preponderance of anti- and decolonial imperatives vital to each community on both activist and intellectual levels.

If I could speak for a moment about this issue in a personal context, I would like to illuminate this argument using my relationship to Palestine as an example. I am Palestinian on my mother’s side, but it requires a circuitous geography to connect me back to Palestine: my mother was born and raised in Nicaragua, part of the sizable Palestinian community in Central America, a community whose arrival in Latin America was a mixture of voluntary and forced emigration. My father is from a Jordanian family, part of the small community of tribal peoples who lived in the mostly arid region east of Palestine before that land was colonized by Britain, pervaded by Palestinian refugees, and became a nation-state known as Jordan. Yet I am, by genealogical and political definition, Palestinian. My mother and grandmother’s blood connects me to the same place that binds us all—ancestor and descendant—together. Entering into Palestine heightens this connection: putting foot to Palestinian soil is the quintessential act of coming home. It is not only blood that ties me to Palestine, though: it has been a part of my life politically since I was a teenager. It is possible to commit oneself to a people or a part of the world beyond filial ties. I have done this with Palestine. The seriousness of that commitment inevitably led me to an engagement with Native America.

This is, I suppose, a personalized exordium to the point that I am a devoted advocate of Palestinian nationalism. Again, I use the term in a specific incarnation, to mean nationhood and self-determination for the Palestinian people. In the past century, the Palestinians have been dispossessed of their land, repressed in every facet of their civic and political life, and subjected to a 40-year military occupation that Desmond Tutu has described as worse than South African Apartheid (Paulson 2007). Others around the world have faced similar forms of oppression. What stands out in the case of Palestinians is the fact that they are blamed inveterately for their own dispossession. Their oppressors, the Jews, not only have managed to cast themselves as victim in the Israel-Palestine conflict, they have justified that self-image through an assiduous emphasis on their specialness, which grants them access to exceptional privileges. This discourse exists in both secular and religious quarters; indeed, it is a central feature of the Israeli identity. The Israelis are not the first to have employed this sort of discourse, however. That distinction belongs to the European settlers in North America, particularly the Puritans, though groups as disparate as the pilgrims and the French are also implicated.

Once I discovered this commonality, having gravitated toward North American Indigenous narratives, it became clear that comparison need not be an abdication of nationalistic commitment. There are some contexts in which intercultural work can enhance that commitment by broadening our understanding of how the powerful manage to continuously reinvent greedy imperatives and duplicate the same unjust outcomes. Through interculturalism, I strengthened my commitment to Palestine and discovered a heretofore dormant commitment to Native America. Intercultural work, like any type of scholarship, does run the risk of reductionism or contrivance. There is no standard formula to avoid these risks. Rather, we must rely on a more abstract and subjective accountability to careful and ethically viable theorization. There are a number of factors that comprise a viable ethics.

Ethics and Indigenous Studies

We can begin with an ostensibly simple question: why an Indigenous Studies? Or, to put it more definitively: if Indigenous scholars and their non-Indigenous allies working in their communities feel strongly that a field of study oriented around those communities needs to break free of the traditional disciplines in which they have been housed, then what is it that an Indigenous Studies will offer as an alternate site of engagement that the traditional disciplines do not? Answering this question necessarily leads us to a discussion of ethics because the difference between an Indigenous Studies and the disciplines from which it will separate are fundamentally ethical.

Substantial discussion of those ethics has occurred already (Weaver et.al. 2006). Perspectives on the ethics of studying Indigenous peoples in the field of Native American Studies are varied and often at odds with one another. As we have seen, Weaver, Womack, and Warrior favour emphasis on nationalistic commitment, which Womack conceptualizes as separatism in *Red on Red*. Turner and Alfred proffer similar methodological prescriptions (Turner 2006). Noenoe K. Silva describes the nationalistic imperative thusly: “For those of us living with the legacies and the continuing exercise of power characteristic of colonialism, it is crucial to understand power relations in order to escape or overcome their effects and, further, to understand the resistance strategies and tactics of the past in order to use them and improve on them” (Silva 2004, 9). Elizabeth Cook-Lynn adheres to this imperative, but her nationalistic ethics are more narrowly defined; she prefers an approach that highlights “the specific kind of tribal/nation status of the original occupants of this continent” (Cook-Lynn 1996, 93). Other methodologies underscore some type of cosmological focus. Donald L. Fixico, for instance, speaks of engaging Indigenous peoples in terms of metaphysical characteristics: “In the mind of the American Indian, the subconscious and conscious work together in a partnership. This metaphysical dimension of Indian life has led to an easier acceptance of abstract ideas and dealing with abstract thought” (Fixico 2003, 70).

Although Fixico’s study provides a groundwork for Indian-centered methodologies, his generalized diction in speaking of “the Indian mind” indulges psychology and downplays material politics. It is a rhetorical choice that would likely displease Gerald Vizenor, who has long promoted an ardent anti-essentialist ethics in his scholarship and creative writing. In *Manifest Manners*, Vizenor mocks what he calls simulations of Indian culture. Of American Indian Movement (AIM) activists and phony Indian authors, he writes, “Some postindian warriors feign the sources of their own crossblood identities, the masks of a real tribal presence. Others, the wannabes, posers, and the missionaries of manifest manners, would threaten the remembrance of tribal identities with their surveillance and terminal simulations; the scriptures of dominance are the absence of tribal realities not the sources of a presence” (Vizenor 1994, 13-14). Eva Marie Garrouette, on the other hand, advocates an ethics of responsibility, which she calls “radical indigenism,” suggesting that tribal institutional review boards participate in and sanction the validity of academic research, a position that has drawn criticism from Parker and Warrior (Garrouette 2003). Perhaps the most interesting ethical paradigm arises from novelist David Treuer, whose book of literary criticism, *Native American Fiction: A User’s Manual*, is anti-essentialist to the point that it sounds a bit like Gerald Vizenor on speed. Treuer endeavors to disengage “cultural sensibilities or cultural truths” from the reception and interpretation of art. He claims, “Native American literature, if there is such a thing, does not constitute culture. It constitutes *desire* with seemingly culturally derived forms. To return to the opening statement of this essay, it is LITERATURE that creates the fantasy of the ‘NATIVE AMERICAN’—not the other way around” (Treuer 2006, 198-199).

Despite their apparent disparity, these perspectives actually share a common outlook: commitment to the project of Native American Studies as something that exists in communities as well as in universities. The overarching goal, then, is to be enmeshed in, or at least oriented around, Indigenous peoples when doing research apropos of their communities. I have degrees of agreement with the methodological ethics surveyed above, but do not find it helpful to evaluate each of them here. It will be more productive to extrapolate from them the observation that each perspective eschews Eurocentrism in favour of a privileged Indigenous voice. Certainly some will be more effective than others in performing this task. Treuer, for instance, adheres too strongly to a cosmopolitan aesthetic to contribute much to methodological nationalism; it is likely that he does not even want to engage questions of nationalism. In any case, the commitment to privileging Indigenous voices presents interesting ethical questions, and I would like to keep these varied perspectives in mind during the forthcoming discussion. The case I have articulated for the usefulness of intercultural work needs to be assessed in the context of methodological

ethics vis-à-vis Indigenous nationalism.

We can return to the matter of careful and ethically viable theorization within comparative methodologies. To even pursue an Indigenous Studies automatically intimates a reliance on comparison; the pursuit likewise intimates a shift into new space through an ethical imperative devoted to self-determination. Such an imperative is both possible and necessary, especially given the negative experiences Indigenous peoples have had when subsumed in Western scholarly paradigms. For this imperative to develop effectively, we need to identify which factors comprise a viable ethics. Although scholarly ethics inevitably will be open-ended and dynamic—as they should be, in order to avoid unfair injunctions—certain tenets can be consistently referenced and performed. I have in mind five in particular: 1) the treatment of Indigenous peoples as national entities and not merely as ethnic communities; 2) proactive analysis of and opposition to neoliberalism, imperialism, neocolonialism, and other socially and economically unjust policies, which not only affect Indigenous peoples most perniciously, but rely on Indigenous dispossession to fulfill their ambitions; 3) a separation from host disciplines that preclude Indigenous scholars from exercising self-determination; 4) commitment to the articulation of diverse Indigenous voices, which, albeit not always cooperative or veracious, need to be afforded priority; and 5) the conjoining of Indigenous peoples across borders but with respect for each nation's historical discreteness and religious/ceremonial traditions.

The fifth tenet is of special note. The power structures that benefit from and thus comprise inequitable neoliberal economics are necessarily integrated and rely on their coadunation to pursue what are, with only few variations, mutual interests. The variations arise when those power structures compete for exploitation of the same resources. In turn, the power structures that sustain neoliberalism in direct opposition to the healthy development of Indigenous communities have an intrinsic ability to keep those who are comparatively powerless isolated from one another. Indigenous peoples, then, have more than merely a moral basis for cultivating intercultural endeavors. Plenty of strategic reasons exist. For a concrete example, we can return to Natives and Palestinians. Their continued dispossession has been possible only through an alliance of power that is constantly fostered by the United States and Israel. Israel, in fact, is largely the invention of venerable colonial powers (Britain and France), and is now passionately subsidized by their interventionist successor (the United States). Conversely, Israel often undertakes perfidious activities on behalf of its American patriarch, including the torture of Indigenous and leftist activists in Central America throughout the 1980s (Chomsky 1988). Other examples of this profound alliance abound; taken together, they illuminate the basic fact that neither the United States nor Israel is an exceptional force of history despite the exceptionalist mythologies to which both adhere. By developing intercultural possibilities, Natives and Palestinians can better demythologize the fantastical narratives that make settler colonization possible. On their own, those narratives disunite Natives and Palestinians by delegitimizing Native claims to renewed land stewardship and self-determination in North America, thereby rhetorically disqualifying similar Palestinian claims. That disunity is accomplished through an implicit comparison of Natives and Palestinians, one that isolates them into a commensurate dispossession while simultaneously reinforcing the connection of the United States and Israel as countries deserving of uniquely special privileges.

In Native American Studies, the ethical tenets I put forward have been discussed widely. My goal is not to recapitulate those discussions, but to examine them in the context of interculturalism. In particular, I would like to argue that an Indigenous Studies best positions itself to succeed as both academic discipline and communal advocate by exploring its immanent comparative possibilities, especially those contradistinctive of the colonialist and neoliberal alliances working against it. To put it another way, if an Indigenous Studies is to cultivate a political commitment, a prerequisite of its distinctiveness, then it must continue to simultaneously cultivate a vision that can be transformative intercultural. The subject of transformation is not limited to Indigenous communities themselves, but also encompasses the objects of neoliberal power that cannot be separated from the Indigenous pursuit of viable self-determination. The ethics of intercultural work, then, are in their most basic form seditious: they cannot distinguish themselves from extant scholarly norms or entertain any type of activist mission without endeavoring to reorder unjust power structures. This proposition is not only intellectually tenable; it is ethically reasonable. To use a personal example, I would much rather read work that illuminates serious problems affecting Indigenous and offers intelligent possibilities for change. And I would rather produce scholarship that is more germane to people contesting Israeli barbarity than to the folks who scrutinize nametags at the Modern Language Association (MLA) Convention. That this sort of work, so common among Indigenous intellectuals, is considered by the scholarly establishment to be crude or punitive reveals less about the quality of the work than it does about the complicity of Western scholarship in neoliberal

centers of power.

Any discussion of ethics returns us to the question of disciplinary location. I will limit my comments to scholarship focused on Natives and Palestinians, focusing on how it might contribute to a deterritorialization of restrictive academic terrain. The study of Palestinians occurs in numerous fields, but is most often subsumed in, or associated with, Middle East Studies, a multidisciplinary area of study that covers a vast geography. I would like to suggest, however, that given the profound connection Palestinians share with other victims of settler colonization, both past and present, the study of Palestine will profit by participating more earnestly in Indigenous Studies. This suggestion holds for numerous reasons. Two stand out: the fact that Middle East Studies is embroiled in controversies almost exclusively involving the Palestinians; those controversies, initiated mainly by disgruntled Zionists, are inane morally, but have the practical value—from the standpoint of Israel's supporters—of inhibiting serious analysis of Israeli colonization and Palestinian resistance. The other pertinent reason has to do with ethical geographies: as a colonized population, the Palestinians share more in common with global Indigenous communities than they do with most of the groups and methodologies found in Middle East Studies. Palestinian scholarship obviously has a basis in that field, but it will remain hindered if it does not gravitate toward spaces that enhance rather than delimit strong engagement with Palestinian activists and anti-colonial movements.

Like the study of Palestinians, scholarship around Natives is multidisciplinary and transnational. Although Native American Studies programs have proliferated during the past twenty years, the field is still largely marginalized in American and Canadian universities. The question of interest here does not involve separating Native scholarship from Native American Studies, but to examine its relationship with the disciplines from which it emerged and subsequently separated, including anthropology, folklore, and other social sciences. There is also a question of the relationship between Native American Studies and the umbrella field of American Studies. Most Native Studies faculty would resist the subsuming of their work into American Studies or any sort of relationship in which Native Studies is positioned as a subset area study under the patrimony of American Studies. Although the relationship of Natives to American Studies is not fully analogous to the relationship between Palestinians and Middle East Studies, the resistance of the two groups to traditional taxonomical models of scholarship reveals comparable impulses. For Natives, this resistance does not mean that Native American Studies shares no intellectual and geographical affinity with American Studies; it does in numerous ways. The resistance often arises from a principled ethical position that Native Studies must be performed from within geographies of self-determination. The resistance is also strategic, though. It is based on the recognition that the ethical precepts of separation from traditional disciplines require scholarly practice unfettered by the orthodoxies and antagonisms of Western academic norms. As Gail Guthrie Valaskakis points out, despite the heterogeneity of Native nations, “common cultural currents run through the mosaic of Native nations that constitute Indian Country, expressing similar representations of land, spirituality, and governance that grind against the dominant discourse of North American culture” (Valaskakis 2005, 6).

These movements away from doctrinal scholarly paradigms, which are happening all over Indigenous communities beyond Natives and Palestinians, represent systematic reconceptualization of how research can perform inside and outside of university cultures. The goal is not to reduce Indigenous scholarship to intercultural methodologies. There are many cases in which a community needs to speak only for itself, with its own history and future in mind. A better and more feasible goal is to allow intercultural work to supplement communal need. It benefits Indigenous scholars when they are able to complicate disciplinary boundaries. Those boundaries are deeply unreflective of the communities they attempt to represent. Scholars and activists working on Palestine, for example, do not need to contextualize their work with Native histories and politics. In those instances when such a contextualization would be useful, however, they should seek to develop it in nuanced and intelligent fashion. Useful instances include the illumination of Zionism's relationship with what Hilton Obenzinger has dubbed “a Holy Land mania” in the United States; the conjoint interest of the American government in the continued dispossession of Natives and Palestinians; the destructiveness of neoliberalism and imperialism to global (and local) Indigenous aspirations; and the comparable modes of resistance offered by Natives and Palestinians in various decolonial activities.

The operative goal in the end is to continue to think about new and creative ways to cultivate an academic undertaking that is juxtaposed with material politics. It is a goal that should be taken up in every part of the world that is afflicted by the reaches of imperial power. In this way, Indigenous Studies can become a global site of engagement, one that actively redefines the concept and performance of

globalization. Despite an inspiring resurgence of Native communities in the past fifty years, to a large portion of Americans they remain objects of the past, either passive and unfortunate obstacles of a foreordained American history or the essentialized fodder of New Age exploitation. Without the ability to speak for themselves, Natives will continue to exist in a manner that suits white interests economically and psychologically. The Palestinians outnumber Israeli Jews, but cannot access any of their power. They currently are being strangled of lands and livelihoods; they have already been strangled of their history and humanity. I cannot think of two groups better suited than Natives and Palestinians to speak back to history, together, as God's invisible victims. Why an Indigenous Studies, then? The answer precedes the question: because the survival of our world depends on it.

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