

Steven Salaita, *Inter/Nationalism: Decolonizing Native America and Palestine* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016)

## *The Map is Not the Territory*

An outspoken critic of Israel and Zionism, Steven Salaita has always been a controversial figure in the American literary circle for his views on the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Like his other ground-breaking works, *Inter/Nationalism* is a refreshing contribution in the domain of Decolonial Studies, Critical Ethnic Studies, and Recolonisation Studies. His comparative approach to Palestine and Native American Studies provides fresh insights, methodological departures and the much-needed shift from Euro-colonialism to American and Zionist occupations and Palestinian *Intifada*. Such new positionings reinforce a critique of post-globalised forms of imperialism. The book also problematises the whole premise of the modern nation-state, itself a product of the colonial enterprise by distinguishing the sovereign nation-states from the idea of nations as communities.

Salaita's raging discontent and passion for decolonisation greet us as we go through the chapters which successively consolidate a new notion of transnationalism – of crossing borders but not in the way conventional transnational theories operate. This book is an experimental project to concretise emerging tendencies in American Indian Studies; a tendency that attempts to study decolonisation not just by comparing colonial discourses but by promoting decolonial dialogues centred around matters of Indigenous liberation. Salaita claims his project to be an activist as well as an intellectual document that pivots its paradigm around an interesting concept of Nation which is 'not an isolated organism but a radical entity' (xvi). It survives in relation to the destinies of other nations in this age of decolonisation. Therefore 'putting nationalisms into conversation and gradually into collective practice' (xvi) is what he intends to do in this project of theorising Inter/nationalism. Salaita explicitly analyses the term 'nationalism' to avoid any risk of misunderstanding. The different formulations of the term nationalism seem to leave him worried. His is not the kind of nationalism tied to the concept of the nation-state and born out of industrial revolution that go so often hand in hand with jingoism and imperialism (xvi). He envisages a dynamic structure of discrete, autonomous community, a collective that works in the interest of communities rather than corporations and institutionalised bureaucratic powers. Therefore, the Israel Palestine dyad refers to a difference between the nation-state and the nation, in which the former embodies concentrated coercive power and the latter, the assemblage of communities. This is how nationalism relates to Inter/nationalism in varied and important ways – a metaphor in which communities of Indigenous collectives such as American Indians and Palestinians and many such people-nations are interlinked in their common strivings for freedom and human rights. Such Inter/national affinities and dialogues are different from stereotyped diplomatic internationalism between different nation-states which are premised on statism and sovereign absolutism.

Without rejecting the progressive internationalism of the Left, Salaita conceptualises his

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Inter/nationalism in an experimental enterprise to challenge the conditions of decolonisation in Indigenous communities worldwide and envisions a solidarity in the struggle for better human relationships – a world that allows societies to be organised around justice rather than profit.

Salaita's study of Natives and the Palestinians as agents of decolonisation unfolds itself in the first chapter of the book, 'How Palestine Became Important to American Indian Studies'. Through the dissemination of common histories of colonisation and the participation of other dispossessed communities in the form of academic boycott, divestment and sanctions (commonly called the BDS movement), Palestinian nationalism has entered into transnational spaces. This along with other factors locate Palestine at a pivotal point of Inter/national possibilities where one can encounter the self-perpetuating incarnations of US history. This chapter argues for affinities between Palestine Studies and American Indian Studies as by engaging with 'performing inter/nationalism' (23), Indigenous scholars can converse with Palestine and can identify commonalities of colonial/occupational experiences. Salaita argues for deterritorialising traditional disciplinary boundaries and foregrounds the 'need to approach Palestine as a crucial site for global struggle and acknowledge the centrality of American decolonization in that struggle' (6).

The subsequent chapter on 'Boycotting Israel' discusses intensively the reactions and counter-reactions involved in the American Studies Association's resolution to honour the academic boycott of Israel. The most visible feature of Palestinian solidarity activity was the BDS – movements to promote academic and cultural boycott of Israeli institutions, divestiture and withdrawing sanctions by the state from those institutions. BDS in America has been taken up as a comprehensive grassroots movement. Beyond rejectionism, the movement includes 'the prevalence of college campuses as sites of action, emphasises the necessity of Palestinian voices, and disengagement from the orthodoxies of liberal Zionism' (31). Despite the vast difference between US/Canadian and Israeli colonisation, there exists a particular transatlantic bond, what Hilton Obenzinger calls a 'Holy Land mania' (65) which preceded the nation-state in America and Palestine. Therefore a 'boycott of statehood in the service of native nationhood' (59) is the purpose of BDS.

A more detailed and comparative study of the ideologies of ethnic cleansing runs throughout the third chapter of the book. The divine sanctioned right that justifies land theft underpins both Zionist ideology in Israel colonial occupation and 'Manifest Destiny' ideology in US colonial occupation. Andrew Jackson's advocacy of displacement of the wandering savage in his *Annual Messages* (1830) is reiterated in Ze'ev Jabotinsky's 'The Iron Wall' (1923) (83). The book reminds us how Jabotinsky advocates displacement but with 'polite' indifference to the Palestinians. By focusing on these unexplored areas, Inter/nationalism thus has immense possibilities to subvert these grand narratives that represent 'civility' and 'progress'.

Perhaps the most interesting read in the whole book is the chapter on 'Inter/national Aesthetics'. Salaita centres his reading here on Native writers narrating Palestine. Palestine, he concludes, is a theme outside its own physical geographical entity. The thematic relationship that emerge across nations substantiates the Inter/national discourse. Eric Violet Lee's poems trace connections between Native and Palestinian women while opening up critique of how injustice can

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be appropriated by the colonised when it lacks self-reflection: ‘you and me/ we’re the nation/ – you and me/ we’re the resistance’. The reference is clear in the lines ‘And this is for the mothers and daughters/ leading movements from Gaza to the grasslands’ – it refers to Indigenous women all over the globe (108). On the other hand, John Trudell in ‘Rich Man’s War’ suggests that in this era of colonisation, the rich man’s war is global. Imperialism requires militarism to accumulate foreign resources and wipe out victims in the process. Palestine exists within multiple geographies; it is a global phenomenon, a painful reality shared in histories of nations. Trudell shows how Central America is ‘bleeding’ – ‘[s]ame as Palestine’ – a specific connection exists between El Salvador and Palestine that drives the Inter/national dynamics into focus. Unlike Lee and Trudell, who emphasise the notion of Palestine as a global symbol for justice, Revard suggests there is a psychic benefit of disempowerment: ‘and last war’s victims of the Holocaust may/ be next war’s seekers of Lebensraum in Lebanon or the West Bank; The Palestinians are/ the ones in concentration camps these days’, he writes in ‘A Response to Terrorists’. The poem resounds of Inter/national paradigms as does Edgar Gabriel Silex’s interesting poem ‘Chief Nany Appears in the Holy Land’. The poem is exclusively devoted to ‘a Palestinian/ no legs, one hand ... in the end he used/ his only hand/ to shoot at soldiers/ advancing/ on his house ...’, but the title of the poem is framed around a historical figure who was a Chiricahua Apache wounded fourteen different times defending his land (123). In this way Native poetry regularly converses with Palestine, as in the poems of Mahmoud Darwish and Russell Means. Darwish binds the Native to a foreign history by positioning him as a narrator of Palestinian dispossession while Means speaks through the voice of the Palestinian binding him to the aspirations of the Native in his poem ‘The Red Indian’s Penultimate Speech to the White Man’ (126). Salaita is of the view that this need for exploring Palestine as a symbolic possibility emerges from a desire for liberation and national survival in Native poetry. Means’s poems unfold the unnaturalness of colonisation in the lapsed humanity of the coloniser. The series of pointed rhetorical questions in ‘The Song of the Palestinian’ urges the need for an unspoiled environment as against the forced conquests of territories: ‘Do you understand being free?/ Do you understand the sand?/ Do you understand the rivers?/ ... Do you understand the air you breathe?/ Do you understand peace of mind?’ (127). These writers, Salaita deduces, thus perform an important function of Inter/nationalism by bringing together Native America and Palestine as ‘mutual actors in a wide-ranging struggle to re-organise the world’ (131) through cultural and political colloquy.

By referring to Gilles Deleuze’s interview with Elias Sanbar, the founder of the *Journal of Palestinian Studies* in 1984, Salaita makes it clear why an engagement in American Indian Studies is important to understand the decolonisation issues of Palestine. He invokes the 2002 essay by Gyasi Ross ‘Why I, as a Native American, Support the Palestinian People’ to suggest that suffering is never local: ‘Every person who strives for humanity also has a strong interest in preventing those same atrocities from occurring in another place in another time to another group of people – in this particular situation, to the Palestinians’(160). This quotation concretises the author’s theory of Inter/nationalism. Conducting the work of Palestine solidarity in spaces that themselves are colonised thus renders the opportunities to examine Zionism not as an isolated phenomenon but enriches possibilities to penetrate into the roots of its origins. This powerful analysis of a method of

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unsettling settler societies through an original and inclusive theory of Inter/nationalism will indeed place Salaita's work as a significant contribution for challenging colonisation in our times.

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