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Indigeneity as Cultural Resistance:  
Notes on the Palestinian Struggle  
within Twenty-First-Century Israel

“We are not [red] Indians,” Yasir Arafat declared when presented for the first time with the notion of the Palestinians as an indigenous group (quoted in MacLeod 1987). Understandably, the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) dreaded the political implications of comparing the Palestinians to indigenous groups that lost the struggle for sovereignty and independence—particularly, to a group that was already enclaved in reservations and pushed to the social and geographical margins of the American reality. And this is a group, one should hasten to remark, that, nonetheless, is still struggling and has not, all in all, accepted defeat.

In this article, I revisit this common objection, through the analysis of the current mode of existence and resistance among the Palestinian community in Israel. I argue that the recent political developments on the ground and the choices made by the community indicate the need to reconsider the objection to this label on conceptual and political levels. In fact, it may be possible to argue that indigeneity, in the present climate, is a powerful tool that can enhance the project of the liberation of Palestine as a whole and that of the Palestinians in Israel in particular.

I argue that indigeneity became a signifier of the cultural Palestinian struggle within the state of Israel, with possible implications for the Palestinians in parts of the West Bank in areas B and C and the greater Jerusalem area. In this context, it is important to stress that indigeneity in this article is treated not as a fixed identity but rather as a dynamic identity that one can grow into (Clifford 2001).

I first ponder over the complex relationship between the two possible framings of the Palestinian struggle as either indigenous or national (or both). Then I look at the reality on the ground and, in particular, note the death of the two-state solution as a particular development that reintroduced the paradigm of indigeneity as a useful description of the Palestinian struggle in Israel and beyond. I end the article with pointing out several projects and local struggles that manifest the shift toward indigeneity as either a second-best option or a complementary aspect of a bottom-up redefinition of the liberation struggle in historical Palestine.

### **Nationalism versus Indigeneity**

Since indigeneity became a scholarly concept and an analytic prism employed for the Palestinian case, it was challenged by scholars and became a bone of contention within the area of Palestinian studies. The origins of the debate are a bit peculiar. It should have been triggered by the almost consensual and enthusiastic scholarly embrace of the settler-colonial paradigm for analyzing the Palestine case study. It would have been a logical assumption to define the Palestinians as either natives or indigenous if the Zionists were depicted as settlers. However, the debate was prompted when scholars started to study one particular group of Palestinians through the lens of indigeneity: the Bedouins of the Negev (see, e.g., Amara, Abu-Saad, and Yiftachel 2012; in particular, Stavenhagen and Amara 2012). The main fear was that any framing for one Palestinian group that is different from those framings employed for other groups contributes to the fragmentation of the Palestinian people through the means of what one scholar has called “divisive classification” (Yiftachel 2008).<sup>1</sup> The danger is that such a practice will tally with the Israeli policies of dividing the Palestinians into religious and cultural minorities and question their national cohesive identity.

However, the discussion about applying indigeneity to the Palestinians is a more general debate, not just about the Bedouins. The principal conceptual concern among the scholars who object to this designation is the limited nature of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (adopted in 2007) when applied to the Palestinian struggle, as

this declaration does not include clear support for a struggle for independence and a sovereign state. It is also possible, although this was never stated explicitly, that due to the dominant stereotypes on primitivism and the vulnerability of indigenous people, those scholars had reservations regarding the use of the argument (Nasasra 2012).

One of the most detailed challenges to the indigeneity framework has been voiced by Nadim Rouhana (2015). He claims that the Zionist settler-colonial project is different from what he calls “triumphed” settler-colonial projects—in which the natives were conquered and subdued, such as in North America and Australia. Since Zionism has not as yet “triumphed,” the struggle against it is still national and within it the Palestinian struggles inside Israel are part of it. He therefore prefers to use “homeland nationalism” to designate the efforts of Palestinians in Israel to reclaim Palestine as their homeland (without denying the right of the Israeli people in a decolonized state). For Rouhana, this “homeland nationalism” complements the broader Palestinian nationalism of claiming Palestine as the homeland of the Palestinian people. It seems Rouhana is worried that the framing of indigeneity will reduce the Palestinian struggle inside Israel into a cultural, instead of a political, struggle and would cage them in minority studies rather than in that of liberation and national studies.

This is a good moment to explain what is meant here by *cultural* as opposed to *political*. As Edward Said clarified so brilliantly (and relying on previous arguments by Walter Benjamin) in his *Culture and Imperialism*, there are narrow and expanded definitions of *culture*. The narrow definition relates to the aesthetic and literary assets of a society: “Culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought, as Matthew Arnold put it in the 1860s” (Said 1993: xiv). While the latter sees culture as the theater of life: “In this second sense culture is a sort of theater where various political and ideological causes engage one another. Far from being a placid realm of Apollonian gentility, culture can even be a battleground on which causes expose themselves to the light of day and contend with one another” (xiv).

In many ways, *cultural* in the eyes of the settler state is within the former definition, while the indigenous population regards it within the latter. Sometimes the regime suspects that the wider definition is hidden behind the narrow one (as we shall see with the Israeli Nakba law), but, more often than not, this somewhat fluid dichotomy enables resistance.

It is worth remembering the apprehensions voiced above about the possible submission of the political project to a narrow definition of cultural struggles. However, this article contends that the cultural struggle is not an

antithesis, or alternative, to the political one, but is the preferred one in the new reality of this century. Moreover, as an indigenous cultural struggle, it is as potent as the political one (which, in any case, has not been very successful so far). Palestinians in Israel never questioned their psychological and national belonging to their homeland, but they are searching for how to cope with the unfolding reality in this century. As this article will show, the wish for decolonization remains the same, but the nature of the struggle has changed in certain parts of the community.

Other critics go further in their concerns. For some, the framing of the Palestinian people within the settler-colonial paradigm seemed a “manifestation of a resistant approach to the Palestinian political project” (possibly because it was seen as linked to postcolonial studies) (Amara 2016).

However, even though scholars critique the application of the settler-colonial or indigenous frame to the Palestinian case study, there is recognition that Palestinians share a common fate with quite a few indigenous peoples. Mahmood Mamdani, although foregrounding many of Rouhana’s concerns, makes a useful comparison between the Native American and Palestinian predicaments. Mamdani (2015) suggests that in both cases the main struggle between the settler states and the natives was about citizenship and land. Both indigenous communities (and here he refers not necessarily to the Palestinians in general but to those in Israel) employed legal and civil means to change their status within the settler state. The legal struggle for citizenship rights in both contexts reflects the settlers’ view of indigeneity: American Indians were “declared” citizens in 1924 with the Indian Citizenship Act; thus they were considered naturalized citizens, as distinct from those who gained citizenship rights through birth. Palestinians in Israel were declared citizens in a similar act, the 1952 Nationality Law. This law immediately created two types of citizenship: one by virtue of a “birthright” for Jews and one for Palestinians by a process akin to naturalization. In both cases, the natives were depicted, or framed, by the settlers as aliens who needed to be naturalized. The struggle against this particular injustice can therefore be better understood within native and indigenous studies than within conventional national or nationalist analyses (Povinelli 2002; Simpson 2014).

The more theoretical scholars of settler colonialism, such as Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini, include Palestinians in general, and those in Israel in particular, within their comprehensive and comparative study of settler colonialism. Veracini (2006, 2013) singles out the comparison with South Africa and the status of the Palestinian citizens of Israel with that of nonwhites under apartheid.

Those insisting on employing indigeneity as a useful lens to interpret the predicament of Palestinians in Israel stress that the application of the “indigenous framework” does not affect the subjective Palestinian sense of identity. Indigeneity stems from a more complex and dialectic process in which the native people respond to their role or place within the settler-colonial narrative and policies (and therefore whether these policies are successful or not is far less important than their intent and purpose). Thus the comparison to the Native Americans does not focus on success or failure but leans toward comparing the place (or rather the absence) of the indigenous within the ethos of both settlers’ communities: the savage Native American who will disappear with the completion of the “errand in the wilderness” of the white settlers in North America and the primitive Arab who will wilt under the Zionist project of the “blooming of the desert” (Cheyfitz 2014). This process tallies well with James Clifford’s (2001) definition of becoming indigenous mentioned earlier.

These images have a profound impact on Israeli policies, and the Palestinian community in Israel has to react to them, as this is a matter not just of national dignity, which indeed it is as Rouhana argues, but also of indigenous survival.

### **Indigeneity as a Response to Unfolding New Realities**

Israeli politics has undergone a drastic transformation in this century. The regime became more nationalist, religious, and extreme. The orientation is toward a unilateral expansion of the state over the occupied territories and a fierce struggle against any manifestation of Palestinian national sentiment or agenda within areas defined as Israel proper (which keep expanding westward daily).

These processes of land expropriation, informal and formal annexation, and imposition of Israeli law in various parts of the West Bank have inflicted a final deathblow on the two-state solution. However, in the scholarly world, and in Palestinian politics, there is still a clear distinction between the Palestinian struggle for statehood in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian civic struggle inside Israel. In fact, to this very day, the Palestinian leadership on both sides of the Green Line, notwithstanding their cooperation and constant dialogue, regard their struggles as distinct and different (Bishara 1993).

The implication of such a position is that the Palestinian citizens in Israel do not take an active part in a classical anticolonialist struggle, while

those in the occupied territories still hope for such a struggle to succeed. The Palestinians in Israel thus did not choose the option of driving the settlers and their political structure out of the homeland (as, in a way, the Palestinian national movement attempts, so far unsuccessfully, to do in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip).

As Azmi Bishara (1993) commented years ago, the Palestinian strategy in Israel, from the very beginning, was not to destroy the Jewish state from within or to gain sovereignty. This recognition led scholars such as Amal Jamal (2011) to employ subaltern studies for highlighting the *indigeneity* of the Palestinians in Israel (a term that is not commonly used by scholars analyzing Palestinians in the occupied territories).

These discussions highlight the need for a clear distinction between *indigenous* and *native*. Although one should say that, while the scholarly world insists on these distinctions, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and activists use the two interchangeably. In this article, *native* is a more neutral, static term that defines location and attachment, almost an ecological statement, of a group or a society. *Indigenous* is an evolving position of empowerment and resilience against the discrimination and oppression of the natives. This is the framework in which communities express their identity and knowledge. Scholarlywise, indigenous studies attempts, as much as it can, to research these communities through an understanding of the communities' own agenda.

Thus the Palestinians in Israel are instantaneously indigenous, native, and a national minority—hardly a comfortable situation in a world that cherishes binary and clear boundaries of politics and identity. They are also separated from the other Palestinian groups and yet live in a time when they are reintegrated with the Palestinians in the West Bank due to the Israeli policies of expansion and colonization. There is not yet a census of how many Palestinians from Israel work, study, and live in the West Bank, but the growth is exponential.

National rights can include the right for a Palestinian state next to Israel; however, indigenous rights can go much further. They include the demand for redistributing landownership and wealth, as well as a decisive voice in shaping the immigration policy of the state and the definition of its symbolic nature. In the Philippines, for instance, such a struggle resulted in a legal reform in the country's laws of landownership (Molintas 2004). In Ecuador, they contributed to general land reforms and changes in human and civil rights agendas (Peña 2015).

Not surprisingly, the willingness to adopt indigeneity as a social and political frame is more acceptable among the Palestinian community inside

Israel than among the Palestinians in the occupied territories, where quite a few still adhere to a national liberation agenda of an independent Palestinian state next to Israel. For the latter, as Veracini (2006, 2013) has argued, the conditions can still be depicted as a classical colonial situation (in which there is a mother country to which the settlers can return and the homeland can be fully liberated from their presence). Probably the Palestinians would then be more Indians (from India) and less native American (Arafat's red Indians).

The visions of possible future developments, in some cases political solutions, have an impact consciously or unconsciously on the present-day analysis. For Palestinians inside Israel, be they activists or scholars, or both, neither full independence nor a complete territorial decolonization (of the twentieth-century kind) is a realistic goal. In such a context, indigeneity becomes another form of self-assertion, indeed struggle, against the settler state of Israel.

This willingness to define oneself as indigenous can clash with more explicit national self-definition. The tension is eased due to the impact of another process on the Palestinian population inside Israel in recent years: a certain despair regarding the prospect of substantial political solutions in the foreseeable future, on the one hand (namely, of any chance of a solution to the Palestine question), and, on the other, a determination to work more locally and less ambitiously against a settler state that with every passing year becomes less tolerant and more discriminatory.

Both processes of political despair and bottom-up activism result in avoiding macro political and ideological projects that can endanger the community. The claim of indigeneity is understood far less as a threat by the powerful settler state. Since its manifestation is more cultural than political in the eyes of the regime, it is allowed more space to develop, as we shall see in the examples later on.

The transition from political to cultural activism by the civil society is not a conscious attempt to substitute or avoid the need to redefine the project of liberating Palestine in this century. This is a pragmatic adaptation in light of one hundred years of failing to liberate the homeland, while facing existential threats from the neo-Zionist state of Israel in the twenty-first century.

There seems also another impulse that connects the unfolding realities to the search for new civil and scholarly understandings of the struggle. One salient unsuccessful struggle of the Palestinians in Israel was the attempt to internationalize their cause. Neither the PLO nor Israel allowed the case of the Palestinians in Israel to be discussed in the peace process. The international community regarded the relationship of the Jewish state with its Palestinian minority as a domestic issue. The PLO in the 1970s explained this

exclusion of the Palestinians in Israel from the overall national struggle by stating that each group of Palestinians knows best what kind of a struggle they should conduct according to their specific context. That has never undermined the PLO's standing among Palestinians in Israel, as is so accurately and beautifully manifested in the poetic correspondence between Mahmoud Darwish and Samih Al-Qassem (1990).

Within the framework of the conventional Palestinian national struggle, the Palestinians in Israel were not an international concern but a domestic Israeli problem. Framing this minority as indigenous associates it with the global struggle of indigenous people and therefore internationalizes their cause. The international dimension of the comparative study on indigeneity was highlighted by the case of Steven Salaita (2015), a Palestinian scholar in the United States who compared American Indian literature and political history with that of Palestine. In his work, and in the campaign that ensued in the wake of a university decision to withdraw its offer of employment on ideological grounds, the international connection between the victims of both settler-colonial projects showed that academically and politically this is a valid and useful struggle. It recruited many in the complex matrix of American ethnicity and multiculturalism to the Palestinian struggle, where in the past they were distanced from such solidarity and support. This had probably already been recognized before due to Said's influence on native studies in America and his twin scholarship on orientalism and Palestine, which reinforced these links and made them a potent factor in the struggle for Palestine in the American and international public spaces.

The recognition of this international dimension has already intensified in the US joint solidarity activity between indigenous groups and the Palestinians. For example, the Palestinian Youth Movement–San Diego and *Colectivo Zapatista* came together in fall 2013 for a five-kilometer run along the United States–Mexico border. The general background was drawing parallels between the settler-colonial projects in Mexico and Palestine (PYM-SD 2016).

A distinction has to be made between indigeneity as understood within the liberal Zionist position that grants cultural autonomy to Palestinians and the nature of the cultural struggles described here. Liberal Israeli bodies, such as the mainstream Association for Civil Rights in Israel, see their mobilization on behalf of the Palestinian citizens in recent years as a struggle over the soul of Israeli democracy. This is similar to the anti-occupation Jewish movement that wishes to end the occupation because of the moral damage it causes to the Jewish state. The indigenous struggle for the Palestinians in Israel as elsewhere, however, centers on their attachment to



the land. The Israeli democracy, or alleged democracy, can hide its settler-colonial nature in many aspects of life, but not on the question of landownership. As the Palestinians in the north of Israel say, the land speaks Arabic in the Jewish state. Democracy is not an end in itself, but a means of ensuring first of all the survival of the indigenous population, then its equality, and finally its role in shaping the future solution of Israel/Palestine.

I identify below several projects that illustrate the indigenous cultural resistance of Palestinians in Israel in this century, which takes precedence over old forms of resistance and navigates carefully, one can say precariously, between respect for the national struggle and its legacy, on the one hand, and the need to find new forms of struggle, on the other.

### **The Cultural Struggle of the Indigenous Palestinians**

Cultural resistance has become quite a common scholarly reference in cultural studies. As with so many such references, it has multiple meanings and usages (Kršić 2005). I find Roland Bleiker's (2000: 278) one of the most appealing when he conceptualizes dissent and cultural resistance as being "located in countless non-heroic practices that make up the realm of the everyday and its multiple connections with contemporary global life." Cultural resistance underscores how various cultural practices are employed to contest and combat a dominant power, often constructing a different vision of the world in the process. For Antonio Gramsci (1971: 229–39), power resides not only in institutions but also in the ways people make sense of their world; hegemony is a political and cultural process. Armed with culture instead of guns, one fights a different type of battle. Whereas traditional battles were "wars of manoeuvre," frontal assaults that seized the state, cultural battles were "wars of position," flanking maneuvers, commando raids, and infiltrations, staking out positions from which to attack and then reassemble civil society.

It is precisely in the popular cultural resistance that indigeneity plays an important role, outside the framework of national resistance (which, in any case, for Palestinians in Israel is almost impossible today). In contrast, "traditional" or "Arab" frames for social mobilization are not associated with challenging Jewish statehood or sovereignty in the eyes of the regime. The main resistance to the indigeneity framework comes, as is evident in the struggle in the Negev, from Israeli scholars who are embedded in the settler-colonial project and do all they can to de-indigenize the Palestinians in the academic discourse. The Israeli government, by comparison, is far more

simplistic in its approach and regards only clear-cut national framings of the struggle as a danger to the Jewish state.<sup>2</sup>

As the case studies below will illuminate, the efforts to de-erase the settler-colonial state imprint, which have become the major foci of the cultural resistance inside Israel, are quite clearly based on a sense of indigeneity. These current practices can be analyzed as a new shift of emphasis, which responds also to the drastic changes on the ground and lack of vision in the wider Palestinian national movement in recent years. As mentioned, such a function of cultural resistance had already been recognized by Arnold, who had noted that it emerged at a time of chaos and indecision at the top.

It is worth noticing further that several features of our time blur national and indigenous struggles in a way that might be less detrimental to the national project and beneficial to the community on the ground. As Stephen Duncombe (2002) remarks, with the immediacy of global media the local becomes national and at the same time global. Duncombe offers another useful entry point on cultural projects: he sees cultural resistance as a space for developing tools for political action, a dress rehearsal for the actual political act or as a political action in itself, which operates by redefining politics. We shall see the potential relevance of this notion in the case of the perpetual Palestinian demand of the right of return.

### **De-Judaizing the Judaization**

The Palestinian minority in Israel has struggled since 1948 and onward to survive physically and economically on the land—an objective obtained successfully so far. On another level, the Palestinian community has strived to assert and defend its indigeneity in a state that regards its existence as a threat to the alleged Jewish indigeneity that lies at the heart of the Zionist justification for the colonization of Palestine.

Time is an essential factor in shaping clearly strategy and visions. This is true not only for the different positions of the political and intellectual elites of the Palestinian minority but also for Palestinian society as a whole. Thus protecting the indigeneity as a set of rights and attachment can be the principal cultural struggle against a regime that has the appearance, and some practices, of a liberal democracy, but, in essence, the latter is a tool of a settler-colonial movement that has not as yet completed its overall objective, or implemented in a satisfactory way, its vision of a Jewish state in Palestine.

The Israeli double project of indigenizing Jewish society while de-indigenizing the Palestinian minority in Israel began in 1948 and has not ceased.

The Galilee is the main space where this double process has been taking place. It is called by official Israelis the project of the “Judaization of the Galilee.” In this Israeli campaign, the Galilee is presented as a cradle of the Jewish nation, providing the one narrative and obliterating the other. The Judaization of the Galilee necessitates not only settling the Galilee with Jews but also altering the landscape so that Jews would no longer be considered settlers in the Palestinian Galilee. The establishment of national parks around sites that were regarded as important for the Jewish national historical narrative served to foster a Jewish self-perception of indigeneity. Only one-tenth of the trees planted by the Jewish National Fund were species indigenous to the region. Nowadays Israeli environmentalists decry the destruction of the local ecosystem by the proliferation of European pine trees.

Notwithstanding the ecological disaster caused by this project of indigenization and de-indigenization (to the fauna, flora, and water resources), it is portrayed officially as a successful transformation of the Jews in the region into the indigenous population in the Galilee and the transmutation of the native Palestinians into settlers.

The process of creating Jewish indigeneity in the Galilee involved also the retelling of the Galilee’s history, erasing other Arab Palestinian signifiers from the landscape. However, as a very perceptive undergraduate researcher noted, this produced a conundrum (Lekach 2015). If the Galilee was perceived to be an ancient Jewish land that was to be redeemed by its native sons, there was a functional need to leave those parts of the landscape that signify the antiquity of the Galilee intact. The signifiers of the ancient Galilee were located in emptied Palestinian villages and quarters. This revision of spatial narrative thus produced a paradoxical reality: the space in which much of the indigenous cultural resistance in the Galilee takes place and, therefore, its areas of activity are parallel to the Israeli tourist and educational effort. And thus, for instance, the ancient archaeological sites of Safuriyah and Bir’im are the spaces in which young Palestinians chose to declare their right of return as a second generation of internal refugees.

So far, the counter indigenous resistance is not counted for much by the Israelis themselves, and this is the reason why it can still prosper and be expanded. The focus of Palestinian counter policy is the commemoration of the catastrophe, the Nakba, and consists of efforts to reconstruct life and landscape as it was before the catastrophe. Official Israel does not regard 1948 as a catastrophe, but for now it does not see the connection between reconstruction of erased life before 1948 and the commemoration of the catastrophe.

I examine more closely below some recent projects that present this kind of cultural resistance where indigeneity is a powerful motif. They indicate a possible trend of bottom-up and nonheroic daily resistance to a Jewish state, which more than ever before is determined to wipe out the Palestinian indigeneity. As noted, this comes at a time when national leaders are at a strategic juncture given the demise of the diplomatic effort and the lack of clarity of the purpose of the struggle from here onward.

### **Cultural Graffiti**

In several villages in the Galilee, there are murals on private homes and public buildings that draw the pre-1948 village scenery. Once they were drawn in one village, they were emulated elsewhere. They are drawn by local people, encouraged by cultural NGOs and local municipalities. The murals convey a very clear message: different communities coexisted in peace before the Nakba.

In many ways, the murals are a virtual attempt to reruralize a community that was long ago forced to abandon agriculture and commerce as a way of life. Today these villages have little agriculture left in them due to the process of semi-proleterianization imposed on them and the spatial policy of Israel that deruralized these communities (including prohibiting the growth of certain traditional herbs that were vital for the cycle of life in the village) (Al-Haj 1995: 16–17).

In general, graffiti is described as a means to share values, ethics, and codes of behavior. The theoretical literature on graffiti depicts it as an urban and suburban phenomenon, while in Israel and Palestine it is mainly rural. Scholars writing about youth graffiti see it usually as part of youth delinquency. Among the Palestinians in Israel, it is precisely the opposite—graffiti is a manifestation of Palestinian youth commitment and struggle.

### **Reconstruction as Cultural Resistance**

Mural painting was accompanied in some villages, such as Kafr Yasif, with the reconstruction of the old village piazza, and in some houses people were scraping the new mortar on old walls for the purpose of discovering the old style of building construction (which provided cool houses in the summer and warm ones in the winter). Very few architects and constructors today are capable of building in such a way—an artisanship that was lost together with other cultural knowledges in the Nakba.

That may explain the struggle by various Palestinian individuals and NGOs to have old Palestinian houses, the few that remain in urban spaces, recognized as heritage sites by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In downtown Haifa, local organizations are trying to dissuade the local municipality from demolishing these houses, such as the house of Emil Touma, who was one of the leading intellectuals and journalists of the late mandatory and early statehood period.

In the last year and a half, the cultural NGO al-Manar (situated in Majdal Krum) together with the firm al-Arkan (located in Kabul) embarked on a unique project that combines reconstruction of the past heritage of Palestine as a legacy for the future. The project is called Hadara (Civilization) and has three stages. The first stage has already been completed: the reconstruction of an archetypal pre-1948 Palestinian village. In 1948 half of Palestine's villages were destroyed within nine months of the Nakba. The lost Palestinian villages are not the same villages that can be seen today all over Israel/Palestine. The pre-1948 Palestinian village was a place where people of different religions lived together and where agriculture was the main source of subsistence. The village was organically connected to the ecological cycle of life in the country, respecting its flora and fauna and utilizing well and responsibly its water resources and natural herbs, and was built according to the topography and climate of each region. The reconstructed villages draw on the support of eyewitnesses from the period, photographs, and narratives. A group of highly professional artisans from Russia and Ukraine, along with local architects and historians, helped build them, and they are now ready for mass production.

The uniqueness of this project lies in the fact that the reconstructions are made of materials that come directly from the destroyed villages: organic, authentic, natural materials that are part of the heritage. Terraces are built with stones from the destroyed villages; trees and herbs are extracted from the original sources. Even the coloring of the houses is made of a paint mix that comes from natural resources.

In the short term, the team has developed "the Palestinian home," a model of a village house that is open at the top and contains traditional artifacts from the period. The team has already distributed the models in Palestinian schools in the Galilee and Wadi Ara. They are located at the entrances of the schools, surrounded by posters that highlight aspects of pre-1948 rural Palestine. These models will also be supplied to schools in the West Bank. Exilic communities are the next stop for this project: the expectation

is that tailor-made projects will be ordered in a quest to reconstruct specific villages or neighborhoods.

The team is looking to expand research into the ways Palestinian villages functioned in the past, as a model for the future. Towns as well should be transformed and their original Eastern Mediterranean nature recovered. The team strongly believes that this *hadara* (cultural heritage) is first and foremost the heritage of the indigenous Palestinians. However, they are keen also to teach this heritage to the settler society because, if reconciliation could ever be attained, this history will also be the history of the settlers. To put it in a more dramatic way maybe, those who destroyed the villages and those who lived in them will have a shared future and past, should genuine reconciliation be achieved.

This project thus is cultural in nature and focuses not on sovereignty or liberation, the principle signifiers of a national discourse, but on rectifying the dislocation and depopulation of indigeneity by reconstructing the architectural face of that indigeneity.

### **The Educational Battlefield**

Education is another important space for indigenous cultural resistance. The struggle in this domain is carried out, or rather navigated through, very cautiously, as all branches of this system are under Israeli scrutiny and have been monitored since 1948 by the Israeli secret service, which vets teachers and headmasters alike, as well as any changes in the curriculum.

The struggle is consciously one for educational autonomy, within the present regime. In the past, teachers who challenged the curriculum by teaching the Palestinian narrative paid a high price of exile and imprisonment. Today they need to navigate between the regime's refusal to recognize the Palestinians in Israel as a national minority and the latter's own refusal to accept the imposed Zionist narrative of the Israeli educational system.

The importance of indigeneity for the struggle of Palestinians in Israel was also clearly articulated in "The Vision Papers" composed by the Palestinian political and intellectual elite inside Israel. These were several documents summarizing the Palestinian minority's aspirations and vision, as "a native national group (and minority according to the relevant definitions in international law)" (Follow-up Committee of the Arabs in Israel 2007: 10). Several times in these documents, the indigeneity of the minority is mentioned as the main moral and legal basis for equality and international protection.<sup>3</sup>

The authors of these documents, who included heads of NGOs, politicians, and academics, demanded "cultural educational autonomy." The

demand was made since “the Arab Palestinians in Israel—as natives—have the right to run their own educational system” (Ozacky-Lazar and Kabha 2008: 170–78). The document elaborates further the educational demands to found a “territorial cultural statutory autonomy, which will include a separate educational authority within the Israeli Ministry of Education” (Follow-up Committee of the Arabs in Israel 2007: 25). The structures requested are familiar—they are borrowed from Canada and the Swedish minority in Finland. However, to understand why this is about indigeneity and not just national rights, it is worth pointing out that in a way such a structure already exists; namely, a separate educational outfit for “Arabs” is part of the Israeli Ministry of Education, but it is one that of course has a different cultural vision. Without defining this brand of aspirations within the settler/indigenous binary, it will be very difficult to see any fundamental difference in the power relations between an Israeli Zionist Ministry of Education and its Arab educational outfit (as it is now) and an autonomous one (as envisaged in the vision papers).

The Arab follow-up committee is the main representative body of the Palestinian minority in Israel, composed of members of Knesset, all heads of local councils and municipalities, and heads of NGOs. This body expanded an effort begun years ago by an NGO, the Ibn Khaldun Center, to shadow every textbook and official program of the Israeli Ministry of Education with a counter textbook and program, which teachers could use in any way they deemed right. For instance, when the Israeli Ministry of Education provided a booklet of one hundred basic notions about Zionism as part of the curriculum, the NGOs countered by producing one hundred basic notions about Palestine (Ghanem 2006).

There is not, as yet, comprehensive research on the educational efforts by educators and parents in the community to circumvent the official curriculum. It appears in informal homeschooling that provides the alternative narrative to the official one (sometimes also conveyed by brave teachers). What does exist is a local Palestinian academic effort to deconstruct the Arab school curriculum in Israel as a “tool for de-educating indigenous Palestinians” (Follow-up Committee of the Arabs in Israel 2007: 25). The danger of producing an overtly national narrative is replaced by providing an indigenous one. It should be noted that, while the liberal Zionist project tries to universalize both the Jewish and Arab narratives (by stressing human and civil rights, but ignoring indigenous rights), Palestinian activists and NGOs focus on indigeneity as a cultural project from below, against the erasure of the settler-colonial project’s false universalizing tendencies (Ozacky-Lazar and Kabha 2008).

### Indigenizing Natives and Settlers in a Segregated Space

The vision papers devoted considerable space for discussing landownership and rights. This is indeed still the most pressing issue for the Palestinian community in Israel. In the early years of the state, the Communist Party led a national struggle to save Palestinian lands from an Israeli policy of expropriation, especially in the Galilee. The struggle continues as a civic one, with a strong emphasis on expropriation, and severe inhibitions on buying land, being a violation of the indigenous rights of the minority.

There are, however, two ways of living in a mixed community nowadays in Israel. The first concerns Palestinians who live in an originally mixed town and are discriminated against on all levels of municipal and governmental services. There the indigenous struggle is about regaining space for expansion according to the population's needs, demolishing segregating walls, safeguarding Arabic names of streets and neighborhoods, and overall improving the physical infrastructure. In recent years, in Acre and Jaffa the struggle was mainly against the governmental policy of silent de-Arabization and transfer of these Arab neighborhoods. The town of Ramla also is a case in point. There Palestinians are resisting a municipality that deems them aliens and a *mitrad*—a “nuisance” in Hebrew—a term used for physical objects such as garbage. More ominous is the fact that the Palestinian neighborhoods are not included in the overall municipal strategic planning (Falah, Hoy, and Sarker 2000).

The second way of challenging spatial segregation is by moving into what was meant to be exclusive Jewish towns. There is no way of knowing how many Palestinians have succeeded in moving into towns and settlements in the Galilee that were designated by the state as exclusively Jewish. The estimates are that seventy thousand live in either officially Jewish spaces or traditionally Jewish neighborhoods in mixed towns. What is less striking is the increase in the number of Jews in Palestinian villages. This latter phenomenon is even more subversive within the settler-colonial and segregating structure of present-day Israel (“Jews Prefer to Live in an Arab Village” 2013).

However, there is also a socioeconomic dimension to this challenge. Poor Jews move to Arab areas because they are more affordable, while Palestinians who are higher earners move to the exclusive Jewish space, by the sheer force of the market. The latter are those who can afford paying double, and at time triple, the normal rent that Jewish house owners demand from them. This wish to live in these particular spaces corresponds also to the overall demand to remain within the pre-1967 Israeli borders, in the eventuality of a two-state solution (Raved 2012).



The government has attempted to stop such developments. There is an explicit discourse in Israel, which has been translated into recent legislation, to “save” the Jewish towns and settlements from further Palestinian “invasion.” One such legal act is the Acceptance to Communities Bill of 2011, which formalizes the establishment of admission committees to review potential residents to communities of up to four hundred family units in the Negev and Galilee regions, where the Palestinian population in Israel is largely concentrated. The law is meant mainly to prevent Palestinians from settling in Jewish communities.

### Acts of Commemoration as Cultural Struggle

Commemoration of the Nakba by Palestinian citizens of Israel is now a consensual annual act, manifested in a march of return, by thousands of people, to one of the many destroyed 1948 villages. It is attended by all the Palestinian politicians and has become a focus of cultural, as well as political, struggle against the 2011 Israeli Nakba law, which prevents any public funding to anybody who commemorates the 1948 events as a *nakba*.

In the wake of the failure of the 1991 Madrid conference to broach the subject of refugees, the Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Internally Displaced in Israel (ADRID) was founded to organize a march of return to the site of a different village every year on May 15, to place the issue on the Israeli public agenda.

By the early 1990s, annual commemorations of the day by Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel held a prominent place in the community’s public discourse. It is now coordinated with other Palestinian groups in Palestine and around the world. The demand of the return of internally displaced refugees to their villages even before a general right of return can be executed is a concrete claim, articulated in the 2006–7 vision papers of the Palestinian community in Israel.

The indigenous dimension of the commemoration is accentuated by the Jewish, in particular liberal Jewish, objection to it. One of the gurus of liberal Zionism, professor Shlomo Avineri (2012), criticized it as an act of delegitimizing the state, since he saw the commemoration as a hidden wish to solidify a stronger national movement for Palestinian citizens as a foundation for nation building all over historical Palestine.

ADRID’s vision of the future is to create clear educational and cultural spaces of de-erasing what was wiped out in the 1948 Nakba. It does this through constant exploration of the legal possibilities of return to demolished villages and examining the possibilities of compensation. Its struggle

includes aspects that are very familiar from other indigenous struggles, such as the demand for this collective memory to be part of the identity and ethos of any future political outfit that will come out of a process of reconciliation and peace. The very term *internal refugees* is closely attached to a human and civil rights agenda, and much less to a national one, and it is once more an insistence on indigeneity that enables bridging over the possible concern of denationalizing the struggle, which has implications for the struggle of Palestinians in refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria and Palestinians who might find themselves in a new reality if Israel annexes area C in the West Bank.

### Conclusions

The daily, cultural, and existential struggle of Palestinians in Israel has been and will continue to be depicted by Palestinians themselves as a national one. However, as this article suggests, the dramatic changes on the ground demonstrate that a “settlers/indigenous” binary lies at the heart of the Palestinian struggle in general and that of those inside Israel in particular.

The international legitimacy of the Jewish state (unlike the illegality of the 1967 occupation) produced a specific strategy and struggle by the Palestinian minority in Israel. The political elite in this minority still operates within reference to the two-state solution, hence the struggle inside Israel for collective national right and democratization. However, the death of this solution and the formation of a de facto one state, a variety of the South African apartheid model, brought changes in the civil and cultural struggle of the Palestinians inside Israel that might also affect those who live in Jerusalem and area C in the West Bank, which is incrementally annexed to Israel.

These individual and small-group struggles will continue, pending a redefinition from above of the Palestinian liberation project that fits the new reality and does not rely anymore on nostalgic national notions of the 1960s and 1970s. While this political void persists, we can observe on the ground inside pre-1967 Israel a struggle stressing indigeneity, first, as an alternative to banned national activity and, second, as an acknowledgment of the settler-colonial nature of the regime and possible ways of colonization in the future.

Designing and teaching, even if informally, alternative school curricula or working on Nakba commemoration and return processions are struggles for indigeneity against the attempts of indigenization of the Jews that not only come at the expense of the natives but are meant to continue their displacement and destitution. Thus space, place, and countersettle-

ments are the means of the modern-day struggle against the settler-colonial state, precisely where it seemed to triumph, to use Rouhana's (2015) definition, and not only against the occupation in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip, where it is still faced by modern-day national liberation struggle. However, the Israeli unilateral annexation of large parts of the West Bank since 2000 dims the boundaries of post- and pre-1967 Israel and hence will expand the options of struggle within, for instance, a possibly annexed West Bank or partially annexed West Bank to Israel.

The Palestinian struggle is and will continue to be a struggle against the privileges granted to the settlers over the natives, including in the private sectors, which in the past were informal and now have been officially legislated. However, as long as the democratic game is played in Israel, an Islamic movement can win (as it did in the municipal elections in certain places) and create a countercultural religious space in the public arena that is both religious and national. Once Israel outlawed the Islamic movement, it became clear that countercultural spaces defined in either national or political Islamic terms would not be tolerated by the state. The direction of the Islamic movement since then is clearly toward the creation of religious spaces as "traditional" and "Islamic cultural" centers as an indigenous, rather than a political, right. This must be read as a strategy of survival against, rather than submission to, Israeli settler-colonial erasure policies. Such cultural resistance, as has been shown, is daily, routine, and everywhere. It is performed in the community centers (*matnas*, as they are called in Israel, which interestingly are funded and controlled by the state), in the youth and football clubs, in the sites of informal education, in theaters, and in films. When the only Palestinian theater in Israel attempted to adopt a more national repertoire, it faced the wrath of culture minister Miri Regev, as did the Arab-Jewish theater in Jaffa for similar "offenses."

The future will tell whether present-day Israel, with its nationalist and extremist ideology, will try and block any activity that is defined as indigenous and label it as either nationalist or terrorist. This will expose Israel further as a nondemocratic state.

Yet the institutions are there, and the repertoire is still that of demanding basic rights and a normal life, which the settler society denies to the natives of Palestine. Demanding normality may seem a modest claim from a radical perspective, but these demands are existential within a settler-colonial and apartheid setting. Unlike the political elites on both sides who associated equality with a grand political solution, the daily cultural struggles by Palestinians, who have lived in Israel for more than seventy years, are cen-

tered on the discourse of rights by calling for equality now and in the name of civic and indigenous rights. There is a struggle for equality as much as for national liberation. It goes beyond the demand for equal rights; it is an antidote to the dehumanization ingrained in a settler-colonial project—a call for humanizing the Palestinians in Israel.

## Notes

- 1 Oren Yiftachel (2008) discusses this point at length.
- 2 It should be noted in this respect, the importance of the volume edited by Rebecca L. Stein and Ted Swedenburg (2005), which opened the way for seeking the role of cultural studies in general and popular culture in particular, by examining the Palestinian case study. In a similar vein, such connection about the role cultural resistance places beyond the national or political boundaries was recognized earlier on by Helga Tawil-Souri (2009: 181–85).
- 3 The documents appear in full in Ozacky-Lazar and Kabha 2008.

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