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Home Rule: National Sovereignty and the Separation of Natives and Migrants

Ali Kassem

BOOK REVIEW

Sharma, N. (2020). *Home rule: National sovereignty and the separation of natives and migrants*. Duke University Press, pp. 384. ISBN: 9781478000952

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Engaging in a historical-sociological analysis, **Home Rule: National Sovereignty and the Separation of Natives and Migrants (2020)** is a provocative intervention that thinks through the contemporary production of global order that Nandita Sharma terms “the post-colonial New World Order of nation-states.” Sharma explores the colonial and the post-colonial, belonging, nativeness, movement, and migration to offer a series of timely contributions across disciplinary fields.

Home Rule begins by thinking through the “separation” of natives and migrants as a “legacy of imperialism” and this separation’s entwinement with the movement from a world order of imperial states to one of nation-states. Drawing out the modern post-colonial world as deeply interconnected, the book builds on both historical and contemporary examples from various geographies to

identify a governmentality of control, exclusion, assault, and oppression as a foundational component of the modern logic of nation-states’ governance. Conceptualizing the nation-state as “the new racist typology and Nationals the new superior race” (p. 279), Sharma rejects the idea of nation-states as desired horizons as it situates them at the core of the production of global inequalities, destruction, and genocide.

Home Rule consequently argues that the “decolonization” movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the resulting establishment of nation-states are a reproduction of the colonial order under a different guise where the same content of exclusion across physical, social, and juridical scales were maintained and worsened. Sharma rejects the understanding of colonization as limited to “foreign rule” and

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invites a rethinking of what colonization (and decolonization) means beyond categorical interpretations of the native and the foreigner. Based on ample argumentation that is theoretically and empirically informed by transnational case examples, Sharma offers an extensive critique of twentieth-century decolonization's transformation into a "racist typology" of national sovereignty (p. 240). Consequently, Sharma rejects contemporary and ongoing liberation struggles pursuing the formation of an independent "nation." Argued to be reproducing the underlying rationale of contemporary governance and the legitimacy of this rationale on a global scale, such decolonization struggles are in fact articulating the continued reproduction of contemporary hegemonic global power structures from capitalism to anthropocentrism.

Consequently, decolonization's undelivered promises of a society of equals, of "development," and of social justice, Sharma advances, remain **undeliverable** so long as sovereignty and nationalism shape "resistance." **Home Rule**, in this sense, systematically argues that national liberation has stifled and made impossible the dreams and the demands of people across the globe rather than achieving them. The **global** threat from the continuous reproduction of this suppression is one of this book's most prominent arguments.

Another key theme running through the book regards movement and immigration. Working through a historical-sociological approach, Sharma argues that contemporary discourses around migration (and anti-migration) need to be traced back to the imperial discourses of autochthony, where the construction of "a people of a place" forms the founding condition of claims and rights making. Particularly troubled by the

growing portrayal of migrants as colonizers and as the blameworthy root of various nation-states' failures and problems across the Global South and the Global North today, Sharma works to disentangle the conditions of possibility on which such portrayals are (re)produced and to situate such conditions within imperial discourses binding a specific idealized set of people to space and spatialized power.

While **Home Rule** acknowledges the plural forms of current Indigenous politics, it argues that such politics are consistently structured and reproduced by a colonial logic of hierarchical exclusion. In this sense, Sharma presents a scathing rejection of the ideology where migrants and "foreigners" are excluded, or even constructed as "foreign," and calls for a radical delinking from such discourses and practices. **Home Rule** additionally, and aptly, warns that narratives of sovereign indigeneity unwittingly legitimize racist and exclusionary discourses across the globe, including right-wing and white supremacist claims to autochthony across Europe.

In line with her argument that the crises facing the world today are global in nature, Sharma holds that resistance must itself be global. Here, the need to denationalize "society" and the challenges it faces emerges as a key intervention across **Home Rule**, where a shift in thinking both contemporary problems as well as solutions beyond identities, borders, and geographies is vehemently advanced. In her concluding chapter, Sharma describes the desired politics of "postseparation" where we would refuse "to confuse categories of rulers with the people placed within them" (p. 268).

While Sharma's book gives little space to sketching alternative futures, it presents some notes on how such a future might (not) look. A key feature in this respect is the

abolition of nation-states, which Sharma sees unfolding through the abolition of borders. In line with this, sovereignty and differentiating political identities would also be abolished. Both “home” and “rule” are consequently radically excluded, as imagining a state form—a form of rule—appears impossible.

It is here, however, where the book’s key limitation lies: **Home Rule** does not offer a substantial engagement with the various modes of governance that have long existed, and continue to exist, beyond the various guises of Eurocentric modern/colonial logic(s) it very justly critiques. In doing this, it seems to miss what these forms of governance mean across various epistemes and cosmologies, at times reducing difference to the same and to a semblance, even a mimicry, of Europe. Ultimately, it seems to miss and dismiss much in sub-alternized knowledges and epistemes. In this sense, its depiction and engagement with practices of sovereignty, nationhood, and belonging across the world’s colonized peoples—from the Kanyen’kehà:ka (Mohawk) to Palestinians—remains wanting. Further, the book’s ability to offer or construct possible alternative futures aligned with the world views of such peoples remains significantly limited. With its unsatisfactory conceptualization of modernity and capitalism, ones that requires a potentially longer durée historicization traced back to 1492, these absences leave much to be rethought.

Much in Indigenous quests of homogeneity and national sovereignty is indeed problematic, as Sharma aptly shows. Yet these pursuits also hold much that is deeply dissimilar from the modern/colonial understanding. From the very conception of politics to the imagination of belonging itself, the (heterogenous and plural) epistemes that underwrite various anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles must not be hastily dismissed or reduced to a pure reproduction of Eurocentric oppressive structures. From the relation to land/earth to the ethics of relating to others within various Indigenous colonized spiritualities, a serious engagement with such knowledges on their own terms would have greatly developed, nuanced, and reinforced **Home Rule**’s many pertinent and timely critiques and contributions.

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