

BOOK REVIEW

Nandita Sharma. *Home Rule: National Sovereignty and the Separation of Natives and Migrants*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2020. 372 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$29.95. Paper. ISBN: 9781478000952.

In her recent book *Home Rule: National Sovereignty and the Separation of Natives and Migrants*, Nandita Sharma has delivered a very important work that brings political science, global studies, history, anthropology, sociology, and religion into a strikingly candid conversation. She uses nine chapters to argue that the nation-state as a unit of governance perpetuates socio-economic injustice through the bifurcation of humanity into autochthones (people of a place) and allochthones (people out of place). This epistemic and ontological violence is a result of nation-states securing their territories and populations through the erection of paper borders in the form of immigration laws and documents. The violence is epistemic because it naturalizes the system of citizen/migrant, adding it to the body of knowledge which is represented as evident as a tree planted in the ground. The violence is ontological because it dehumanizes migrants and essentializes their relative situation as part of their very being.

There is a larger argument embedded in the book. The nation-state system is a continuation of the racism, domination, and violence of European colonialism, a term Sharma calls the Post-Colonial Reality. The creation of nation-state nationalism shapes and solidifies an imagined community (à la Benedict Anderson) and thereby obscures the glaring socioeconomic disparities that render the masses a pliable and exploitable labor source. Sharma calls for a world without borders, nationalities, and quite sharply, without nation-states.

Sharma's argument is so far beyond the ability of the average person (including scholars) to imagine that she is required to render explicit the implicit through a brief, though detailed, walk through the last two centuries of the history of the West's dealing with the rest of the world. This wander through history gives us a genealogy of the terms, ideas, and conditions that we take for granted today. She points out that nation-states, nationalities, citizen/migrant, and passports (among other related things) have been "naturalized" in the thoughts of most of the world's population. Sharma

deftly handles this intellectual heavy lifting, producing a readable and organized argument.

After laying out her argument in Chapter One, Sharma takes the reader to a time when European imperialism was a burgeoning force in global politics. She then laboriously recounts how the nation-state system evolved in the latter years of World War II, starting with the end of slavery in the British Empire and the entry of “coolie” labor as its replacement. Sharma claims that documenting the movement of Asian laborers into the Western Hemisphere was Britain’s first step toward controlling movement. This evolved into the passport system in existence today, which depends on the idea of a nation-state controlling defined geographic space.

The weight of Sharma’s argument pivots on Chapter Five, which describes what Sharma calls the Post-Colonial Reality. In this chapter, she disrupts anti-colonial discourses by pointing out that the Post-Colonial Reality of nation-states has maintained the economic status quo, with European nations and their former settler colonies on top and the formerly colonized nations on the bottom, caught in a cycle of “development.” Sharma explains that the pipe dream of development will never happen because the nation-state doesn’t exist to serve the needs of its populations, but rather the needs, desires, and whims of big capital.

In the last few years of World War II, the US convinced Britain to ensure the opening of the Asian and African markets after the war in exchange for American help against the Germans. Sharma rips apart the legitimacy of the Bretton Woods institutions (World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), explaining how they were all created to enable capital (mainly American) to access the previously colonized markets. The consequence is the globally accepted nation-state system that facilitates the continued expropriation and exploitation of wealth from the world’s poorest nations by and for the benefit of capitalists and (by extension) their wealthy nations.

Sharma does not limit her critique to the governments of the West and big capital. She calls out the formerly colonized nations for mimicking their former metropolises with exclusionary immigration policies. She chastises the indigenous people of Canada and the US for producing exclusionary autochthonous discourses that replicate the violence of colonization. She then points out how the formerly colonized countries cannot provide services for their populations because of their debt payments to the Bretton Woods financial institutions. Most importantly, Sharma proposes a solution: a world without borders.

In the end, the strong arguments against immigration restrictions notwithstanding, this work is a poignant and forceful critique of global capitalism through a clear enumeration of the problems that it creates, maintains, and recreates. The ideological and physical violence of autochthonous discourses serve the forces of global capital by keeping the majority of the population (the labor force) in easily exploitable economic positions. Deprived of land,

the world's masses have only their labor to trade for the necessities of life. Sharma's work calls for an end to this system of exploitation.

I have never read a work like this. (I have yet to read Mahmoud Mamdani's *Neither Settler Nor Native*, which I hear makes a similar argument.) In her critique of nationalism, Sharma picks up where Benedict Anderson stopped and pronounces the dangers of the idea. In her critique of capitalism, she builds upon the foundation of Immanuel Wallerstein with a more explicit enunciation. In her critique of colonization, she assembles the ideas of Césaire, Memmi, and Fanon, giving them shape and articulation while exposing the emptiness of neo-colonial discourses.

My only substantial critique is Sharma's misuse of the Tower of Babel story as her starting point. The story is misrepresented and badly interpreted as depicting the Judeo-Christian God not allowing people into heaven by confounding their languages so they would have to scatter. This is a minor issue, however, since most people do not understand the Old Testament. All in all, Nandita Sharma has delivered a masterpiece that further fuels the cries for global justice.

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