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Partition & Entanglement

Review of Home Rule by Nandita Sharma

William Gillis

January 11th, 2022

“The entire, eons-long practice of human movement into new places was pushed out of our imagination — or, perhaps more accurately, was reimagined as a national security threat. In the process, stasis was glorified as the normative way of being human.”

“Only after the death of the national liberation project can we renew our commitment to decolonization.”

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Many years ago a latinx friend of mine designed stickers that simply read “*Migrants Welcome, Against Borders*” (versions in English and Spanish) under a circle-A and the two of us covered the Bay Area with hundreds of them. Amusingly, this provoked the ire of a prominent white anarchist who denounced the phrase as pro-gentrification. She emphatically preferred “*Refugees Welcome*” because it distinguished those who are coercively *displaced* from their proper homes by various forms of western imperialism in contrast to those who voluntarily *choose* to migrate, like (her example) those moving to the bay for tech jobs.

My friend found this preposterous; we *already* have lines of critique to deal with the privileges of the gentrifier class and the negative structural mechanisms of gentrification. Virtually no one in the American context calls white tech bros “migrants” – the term has almost exclusively valences of brown skin and manual labor. The average American who runs across a “*Migrants Welcome*” sticker knows immediately what it means (and gets mad about it), whereas the term “Refugees” is much more sparingly used and in many cities is far less contentious or even that meaningful. This isn’t an abstract sense, but something empirically visible: in San Francisco and Portland white yuppies would ignore “*refugees welcome*” stickers my friends ordered from European antifa distros, but frequently tear down “*migrants welcome*” – sometimes even leaving racial slurs scrawled in their place.

Further, my friend argued, *surely* as anarchists we support the freedom of individuals to move for *whatever* personal reason, not just when they are formally categorized as “victims.” The response was sharp, *no*, she emphasized, *neighborhood communes should have the power to democratically decide who is allowed in.*

Nandita Sharma writes from the context of a different intersection of struggles. Sharma is an anarchist, activist, and academic whose family was shaped by the traumatic partition of India and their immigration to so-called Canada. In the dedication to *Home Rule: National Sovereignty and the Separation of Natives and Migrants*, she relays her mother’s dismay at the suppression of a Mohawk revolt: “*Us and them, same, same.*”

This is the central focus of *Home Rule*: to ruthlessly criticize and deconstruct the migrant versus indigenous conceptual dichotomy rather than ignore it. Whether such categorical distinctions come “‘*from above*’ or ‘*from below*,” from the right or from the ostensible left.

It is not a rejection of specific claims or a sweeping leveling of complex differences in historical injustice. Struggles for land

what we're fighting for, and an ideology or a technology or a practice or a belief or even "community" is only valuable insofar as it furthers that. *Healing* is not the same thing as *preservation*. As some indigenous anarchists have taken to saying a "tradition" is something static and dead "*that sits on a shelf*," in contrast *a lifeway* is something that evolves and dances, intertwined and inseparable from the knot of humanity and nature around us.

As Sharma puts it powerfully for anarchists, "*an origin of "state" is "stasis," or immobility.*"

and liberation, for the defense of culture violently suppressed, in response to the traumas and particularities, are obviously vital and important. But Sharma is not tip-toeing around, timidly qualifying statements so much they say nothing, as so many writers in this space do. Her target is all nationalism, and ultimately all parochialism, all regionalism, *explicitly including the nationalism of the oppressed*, and her argument is that for all the leftist discursive trappings, such a framework reproduces the structures of an existing postcolonial order that has simply laundered power and domination, rather than abolishing it. To truly break the legacy of colonialism we must break entirely with the frame of nationalism and the idea of discrete peoples each inherently "of some place," cultivating instead, a more complex *global commons*.

Central to Sharma's argument is that notions of nativeness do violence to the complexities of the actual human tapestry — to fix some people as being "of a place" and others as aliens to it — is a simplification that benefits power and hierarchy. While the mistaken frame of sovereignty has spontaneously emerged in various places for thousands of years (to inevitable damage and horror), today's global interlocking nationalist order is *a direct continuation* of the imperial and colonial process of legibility construction.

Home Rule is a book that refreshingly *says something*, not just with hyper-particularity, but with general conclusions.

This has been a hard review to write because I unabashedly *love* this book and have spent over a year urging every academic anarchist I know to read it — to universal followup thanks and praise. There are plenty of merely *good* books that merely reread or repackage important positions and critiques, the activist press is filled with them. Perfectly enjoyable books that get consumed on a monthly subscription basis by thousands to little fanfare or impact. Rare is the book like *Debt: The First 5000 Years* or *Caliban And The Witch* that become lasting centers of gravity in the left. And rarer still is the book

that doesn't just meet the radical left where much of it already is, but pushes it further. I am not given to hyperbole in praise, so let this serve as a high water mark in a decade of lengthy reviews: Home Rule feels like a worthy sequel to *The Many Headed Hydra*.

This may seem a little non-sequitur given how directly Home Rule leans on a lot of established work in postcolonial studies, but thematically and ideologically, it's plain throughout the entire text that Sharma is tightly aligned with Linebaugh and Rediker. And while their famous collaboration developed over a series of engaging historical anecdotes or studies weaving together into a broader picture of universal struggle for the commons and against power, Sharma's is more of a meticulously broad weapon, rigorously covering a sweeping global history of empire and the rise of various nationalisms over the last two centuries. Entire eras in the development of individual nations are sometimes given merely an incisive paragraph. Sharma strings the reader along with as many engaging examples and detailed contrasts as she can, but her need to provide exacting scope leaves much of *Home Rule* a ratatat of globetrotting examples and citations as she presses her general point. Yet the passionate universalism, the sense that the struggle against domination is one timeless struggle at the heart of humanity, fills your chest in a way few other books even bother to attempt.

Sharma's approach in Home Rule is to demonstrate 1) How historically useful the divisions of nationality, of foreigner and native, were to the European imperialist project. 2) The complex ways that settler colonial ideology is parasitic on this framework and reproduces it. And 3) how the modern paradigm of a checkerboard of nations covering the planet was the continuation and — in many ways — intensification of the logic of prior imperialist horrors.

Today there's widespread interest in either painting nationalism as a timeless reality of human nature and innate com-

indigenous scholarship and attempting to fight some kind of battle on behalf of migrants against natives, when everything in Home Rule seeks to dispel that dichotomy.

"Us and them, same, same."

This is not a cloak or defense for settler fuckery or a sameness that erases differences, histories, lines of power, and important lessons. It's a call for solidarity with teeth and audacity. A swirling hurricane of possibility, rather than a fractal landscape of micro tailored prisons. Or at least enough audacity to see past lazy simplifications and the limited imaginary bequeathed us by feudal chains and genocidal empires.

If nothing else, many of the arguments in Home Rule at least provide a counter to those who declare that the desire for mobility and wide connection, thinking in abstract or universal terms rather than place-based, etc, are all imperialist constructions. Maybe! But the same can be said about the ideological elevation of local parochialism, particularity, and fixedness. So let's just clear out claims of historical false consciousness and just make direct arguments for a given value or approach.

The white anarchist who years ago denounced our oh-so contentious "Migrants Welcome" stickers because she couldn't imagine a world without closed territorial communes of democratic tyranny and who couldn't see modes of resistance to yuppie fuckery that weren't grounded in territorial claims is a perfectly fine human being, sincerely trying her best, her mistake was reflective of a widespread atrophy of our imagination. And this is one of the worst crimes inflicted by our rulers. We do not have to turn to fixed, simple models.

Imperialism and colonialism violently, unfairly, and inanely crushed immeasurable knowledge and culture; healing that damage and tearing down the power structures that perpetuate it is overwhelmingly in the interest of all humanity. But ultimately no abstraction or set of practices has value in and of itself, *people* matter, actual individual human beings in all their rich complexity, *their* agency, their freedom, is

tal political, as well as ontological and epistemological, challenge we must address to achieve something that can live up to our aspirations for liberty.”

It is always hard to critique an ideology that has not yet widely taken power or begun to implement its vision. When anarchists attacked Marx for the coming catastrophic failings of his framework we were absolutely right, but it still took decades for the mounting bloody evidence to become overwhelming. Sadly, anarchists have not always had such foresight, and those who participated in national liberation struggles or made common cause with nationalists have always come to regret it. Many Korean anarchists today *denounce* prior generations as fake anarchists and embarrassments for even temporarily *tolerating* Korean nationalism, nevermind how intense and pressing the boot of Japanese Imperialism was.

While compassion, humility, and attention are extremely warranted when navigating the complex and fraught complexities of situations of oppression, I have long since renounced the lefty Irish nationalism I grew up connected to and have no doubt that in the view of future generations nationalism-from-below will always prove a grave and harrowing mistake. I think a lot about Korean anarchists I've met who grimaced in reference to their predecessors. I wonder how long it will take us to truly learn our lessons.

I have already praised Home Rule as a thematic sequel to *The Many-Headed Hydra*, but I worry that it will also take the place of *Statism and Anarchy* as a text clarifying emerging fractures and perfectly predicting mistakes to come, but trapped in the Cassandra gutter anarchists must so frequently retreat to. Some warnings are as unpopular as they are — consequently — necessary.

Since publication Sharma has caught some unfair and plainly dishonest attacks that present her as unattentive to

community structures, or in overly distinguishing the particular norms of the westphalian nationstate system as some kind of totally unique phenomenon. Sharma is clear that nations in the broader sense have an unfortunately long legacy reaching back thousands of years, but at the same time European imperialism played a significant role in deepening the poison. Virtually all the modern associations we have with borders as well as the repulsion of non-natives, have their genesis in the administrative needs of empire.

In the US context we often forget or ignore historical developments beyond our borders, turning the slave trade into an entirely US-centric story, for example, and ignoring worldwide phenomena that we weren't central to. But Sharma draws out how, on the global level, the abolishment of slavery in the British Empire led to a calamitous decline in the productivity of centralized capital intensive projects like plantations, as former slaves focused on efficiently satisfying *their* interests as small farmers or paid laborers. Since these decentralized forms of economic activity are both less taxable and less legible and more facilitative of resistance and power erosion... as always, the misfortune of high-capital projects means the misfortune of the state. And of course, low-capital projects like small farmers have little capacity to capture political power for themselves to stop the state from recoiling.

The replacement of slave labor with “coolie” labor from India and China filled *the same boats*, and served *the same economic niches*, and was conditioned and controlled through indenture and immigration controls. It was an explicitly racialized system that in many cases amounted to contract slavery, but added token *paperwork* (a contract in an alien language stamped with your fingerprint and an early passport) and shifted around (de facto) slave flows to benefit British interests.

Essentially: first you conquer the world, then you slice it up into little prisons and refuse to allow people to seek eco-

conomic opportunities across your new prison walls unless they have certificates *that are only given to those with indenture contracts*. Since people have always moved to seek opportunities, you have a base population of workers, but since it's always nice to keep the labor market completely desperate, you also implement policies of vicious enclosure, dispossession, repression, and famine-making.

This is the essential thing to understand: even as Americans we live in the continuation of a global system created in large part by the British Empire. A system that became so globally encompassing it could do away with the traditional focus of states or nations on *limiting exit* and instead shift to now *limiting entry* between subdivisions of the empire. Through systematic dispossession almost every region produced displaced and desperate workers for the global benefit of the empire, but rather than have their origin region administrate their distribution to other regions, it was recipient imperial regions that oversaw admissions.

To be clear — the British themselves didn't need to cover literally *every* square inch of the planet, merely a sufficient fraction of it so as to crystalize a new world system, partially of imitators and partially of regimes around the periphery who — still focused on preventing the exit of their own populations — saw the benefit. So, for example, the nominally independent Chinese government actively collaborated with this new immigration control system since it offset the costs of preventing its population's escape.

Moreover, paternalistic liberal reformism *reinforced* this new system, taking the existing (racialized) internal barriers to movement and strengthening them. The liberal imperialist declared that Indian and Chinese migration must be stopped *for their own good*, so the systematic dispossession and immiseration of colonial occupation continued, but now even sharper constraints were put up against rational relocation. Liberals found the new immigration-regulatory state form

posed legal context where it has salience) are doomed to only *legitimize* such, with all its baggage.

But sadly many in indigenous spaces of resistance *don't* mean merely community by their usage of “nation” and aren't merely opportunistically exploiting loopholes in the ideological framework of the colonizer, rather struggles within the nationalist framework have in many cases taken to heart the logics of national sovereignty, discreteness, exclusion, and territory.

“Self-defined anarchist Taiaiake Alfred (2005, 266–267), for instance, argues that supposedly distinct and discrete “nations” can and should “move from colonial-imperialist relations to pluralist multinational associations of autonomous peoples and territories that respect the basic imperatives of indigenous cultures as well as preserve the stability and benefits of cooperative confederal relations between indigenous nations and other governments.” This vision is, of course, the core of the Postcolonial New World Order.”

Again, such ghastliness isn't to imply that there aren't far more enlightened, original, complex, and probing perspectives in the impossibly complex expanse of varied experiences and positions thrown haphazardly under the umbrella label of “indigeneity” (and Sharma cites a wide array of literature across the board) but it does sufficiently highlight that instances of mistakes exist. One need not point to unquestionable fascists leveraging both their tribal membership and frameworks of “indigeneity,” from the national-anarchist Vince Reinhart to the neonazi Serafin Perez, for the general point about conceptual and rhetorical dangers to be pressing.

“the differences posited between autochthons and allochthons—Natives and Migrants—is a fundamen-

ried non-citizens and evicting their partners from tribal land, and — of course — the infamous Cherokee exclusion of Freedmen. These are obviously horrifying and reflective of real dangers, but it's worth noting that many decolonial indigenous activists who fought against such did so *in the frame of "nationalism,"* however awkwardly. For example, Ellen Gabriel's aghast statement on the evictions of families in Kahnawà:ke over what amounts to miscegenation correctly emphasizes that such constrained or blood-based notions of identity were imposed by colonizers to whittle away tribal membership, but she, *at the same time,* frames inclusion as necessary to "*rebuiding our nations from colonial genocide.*" Of course we might wish that statements like "*For over a hundred years the Indian Act has coercively indoctrinated Indigenous peoples into believing that the colonizers definition of identity was true.*" would also be applied to the concept of nations too, but still language usage here can get muddled and contradictory.

Of course, even if we were to cede that certain activists mean *nothing* more than a sense of community with their usage of "nation" — there's little reason to think this personal or local redefinition will survive and flourish. As I pointed out against Sharma's attempt to change our language around imperialism, history and popular usage creates certain gravitational effects on words. The least complex, most intuitive, and already familiar definition in a language tends to win out. Someone could, for instance, try to reclaim or redefine the term "fascism" to only mean "solidarity," but the net effect of their particularized usage is almost certainly going to be the legitimization of actual fascists and actual fascism. And that's hardly an extreme comparison. "Nationalism" is pretty much politically interchangeable with "fascism" (modulo a myth of palingenesis), with an *even wider umbrella* of atrocities it has historically covered. There is no conceivable universe in which nationalism pivots in its associations. As such, attempts to gain standing within a wider dominant discourse of nationalism (and im-

quite amenable to these reforms because it served state and capitalist power.

Sharma emphasizes that these practices of imperialism weren't confined to contexts like India where partition makes them blindingly apparent, they were also critical to white settler states like the US, and liberal paternalistic reformism (intersecting with state needs) likewise played an important role, although with some limited inversions.

Since local populations (often with access to commons, ecological knowledge, wider community support, etc.) were at least perceived as distinctly resistant to work and thus obliging the importing of various forms of coerced and dispossessed labor, and because their existence threatened certain mobilizing narratives, a distinct approach was taken with them. "*Definition, segregation, protection, and immobilization*" were repeatedly shepherded by liberal paternalism, flattening the complexities and dynamism of pre-columbian societies into a fetishized place-bound ideal of stasis. Notions of 'innocence' and 'purity' were leveraged to patronizingly preserve 'tradition', in ways that systematically suppressed the native to extremely limited means or modes of engagement, while stripping anyone who wandered outside those borders of native status. So for example in Canada,

"Indians needed a permit from a government Indian agent to sell, trade, or barter (Opekokew 1980; Sluman and Goodwill 1982). Obtaining a university degree or voting in a Canadian election was declared to be "un-Indian" and, if practiced, would, until 1960, result in the loss of "Indian" status."

Meanwhile across settler states it was generally decided that a woman who married a white man lost her legal "native" protections. "Protection" meant segregation, and "tradition" meant deprivation of wider mobility, solidarity, and economic access.

This suppression of potential market activity no doubt helped monopolistic ambitions of white capitalists, but it's a stark comparison to the *forced entry* into labor markets going on elsewhere. Sharma roots the explanation in terms of legitimization processes distinct to white settler societies.

If the arc in the surrounding British imperial world started with forced assimilation and then transitioned to the construction of nativism, in general terms the US and other white settler states went from the construction of nativism to forced assimilation. These divergent paths were related to the need of white settler states to construct their own nationalist sovereignty and identity to bind disparate whites against the migrant labor being imported. As the pivot from empire to nationalism took place globally, with for example the US revising its self-perception into a nation rather than aspiring empire, the white dominated colonies focused on constructing whiteness as a *native identity* (erasing prior complexities and divergences in origins and motivations).

“what makes White Settler colonies distinctive is not that, from the start, imperial states wanted to extinguish Native life in order to gain territory to populate with Europeans. Instead, what is unique about them is that the Whitening of one portion of the working class sowed deep and long-lasting divisions between workers... Arguably, the success of strategies used to Whiten workers was an initial moment in the imperial turn to biopower and informed all subsequent “define and rule” strategies of indirect-rule colonialism across the empire.”

This inevitably meant championing not just the nationalistic and native paradigms, but also a framework of extermination, assimilation, and “preservation” that framed prior populations as static snapshots and objectified them in terms of iden-

ples of language like “*We must be the ones who determine who is and who is not a member of our community, based on criteria accepted by our people,*” but while the inside-outside hierarchies of any sovereignty are inherently abusive and unjust and it's trivial to point to examples of First Nations governments who have wielded access to tribal membership as a tool of power or exclusion, it warrants emphasis that one of the most pressing motivations for sovereign control over tribal membership is precisely to make them *more inclusive* than settler governments allow. There is little more universally reviled than the blood quanta system that essentializes indigeneity as a matter of genes rather than culture and heritage. I most commonly hear calls for sovereignty over tribal membership invoked to *resist* various limits and restrictions imposed by settler governments. The motivation of settler states is straightforward: not only do they wish to see tribal membership ultimately evaporate, they dare not risk a situation where tribal membership expands like a corrosive acid of more complex overlapping jurisdictions.

I want to be absolutely clear that competitive governance is no grand improvement, *especially* when territorial restrictions on scope remain in play. But it's easy enough to imagine an enlightened future where the US faces a crisis of legitimacy and jurisdiction with mass settler *defection* into the ranks of strong and expanding first nations. Where various clear territorial claims break down into more complex and *overlapping* communities. This would be far from anarchist ideals, but it is not quite the same thing as nationalisms of territory and blood. Of course virtually no one is proposing radical expansions of first nations ranks divorced from cultural heritage, and unfortunately what Actually Existing First Nation governments have focused on is *quite* different from the idealism of those radical indigenous activists focused on inclusion.

Sharma zooms in on examples like the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke stripping major rights from citizens who mar-

This is not merely two distinct uses and definitions of “indigenous” in various languages — for example the chauvinist “here first” usage by mainstream right-wing political parties in many countries versus a philosophical or spiritual notion of “ecological relationship to the land” usage increasingly pushed by younger activists across a subset of colonized peoples — but in fact a more complicated matter of bleed, appropriation, and opportunistic mutation. When many white scumfucks, like infamous political prisoners Sadie and Exile, leaned into fascist blood-and-soil mysticism they did so draped under the stolen language and signifiers built up by indigenous activists, not beer-soaked Trump chuds. And part of why so many US white radicals had trouble identifying and expelling them was an increasing treatment of “indigeneity” — *even the pagan playacting of white settlers doused in fascist iconography* — like a third rail. A first principle or apex value that automatically vanquishes all other considerations, removes all critical thinking and turns people’s knees to jelly.

This is to say that while “lanes” and epistemic humility can have value, we should not render ourselves completely useless in some performative surrender of our minds and thus responsibilities. If white radicals fail to recognize clearly dangerous invocations of “indigenous” we will be of no use to anything or anyone. Sharma covers examples of intensely reductive ideologies of indigeneity, from Patrick Wolfe declaring that, “*The fundamental social divide is not the color line. It is not ethnicity, minority status, or even class. The primary line is the one distinguishing Natives from settlers—that is, from everyone else. Only the Native is not a settler. Only the Native is truly local.*” to Métis scholar Bonita Lawrence (and self-identified “Asian settler Colonist” Enakshi Dua) arguing that because non-indigenous people of color are functionally settlers “*antiracism is premised on an ongoing colonial project.*”

It is, however, important for anarchists to challenge ourselves and read charitably. Sharma focuses in on various exam-

tification with place and history — to be treated as museum curios on the side of the road — rather than agents capable of an active conflicting claim to nativeness. White settlers could then be constructed as uniquely native *and* migrant by removing the agency and presence of existing native populations. And insofar as those populations were to achieve agency or capacity for self-alteration they were to be forced into whiteness.

Thus a major byproduct of constructing white settler national identity as “natives” was the *construction* and reinforcement of national and native frames in actually native populations. Some of these dynamics are well known. Policies like the Dawes Rolls incentivized deep alignment towards the state’s notion of “indianness” by tribal leaders and many individuals. Blood quantification and discreteness of “membership” were but part of a wider array of incentivized dynamics in the construction of identity.

And this followed imperial and colonial patterns worldwide:

“Colonialism was now portrayed as necessary, not to change Indigenous-Natives (e.g., to “civilize” them), but to preserve their (often invented) traditions and customs as they encountered the “modern” world”

Reservations confined survivors to remove them from attention and facilitate cultural extermination, but they also reinforced and even created identifications of peoples with place. *Imperialist and settler-colonial practice thus shaped and constructed indigenous subjectivities.* This is both a trivial and a sharp claim, and Sharma leans into the latter.

The forcible crushing of cultures and knowledge erased much, but it also imposed opportunity costs. What is lost to western imperialism is not just *what was*, but what *might’ve grown* on their own or in varying degrees of collaborative contact with distant cultures. The pathways of exploration

and creation — the consensual syntheses and wildly divergent children — that were made impossible. Such is *also* the legacy of colonization.

This is an image of colonialism not just as imposed contact, but actually as violent segregation. This picture of colonization is the *suppression* of meshing networks, instead violently affirming simplifications and removals. Anything to stop hybridization and complex cyborg flows or diversifications of agential currents. White settler society could only hold itself together if it removed all fluidity and activity from those it wanted to steal “nativeness” from. Ratcheting up the definition and immobilization inherent to any construct of nativeness, hoping to impose such to the point of rigor mortis.

The Third Reich would infamously later take up this ideological drive into an explicit institutional crusade for the ‘*preservation*’ of local cultures against the ‘imperialism’ of global culture. Such hyper-paternalistic reduction of diverse, mobile, and fluid populations into fixed eternal peoples with similarly eternally fixed traits and behaviors was, we must remember, cast as a noble struggle of resistance. Part of what made national socialism so potent was its self-narrative as standing up for the little guys worldwide. Germany sincerely saw itself as *defending* the indigenous nations of Europe against globalism, universalism, and foreign corruption. And, just as in the settler states it took partial inspiration from, this meant concentration camps and mass murder.

It’s important to highlight however, that such define-and-rule paternalism wasn’t just the invention of some happenstance global norms or conventions constraining the arrival of immigrants, it was also bound up with the wider imposition of capitalist dynamics that incentivized the perpetuation and reinforcement of these new norms *even once the regional prison administrators had autonomy*.

The imperialists put the system into place but could then, in the twentieth century, step back and let it perpetuate itself.

We exist in a global discourse and community. Backing a generalized muddle of autochthonous narratives and implicit first principles in Turtle Island, for instance, has spillover effects that can hurt migrants in Europe. For the first principle of nativeness applied generally has quite noxious implications. Let me be very clear: no European should *ever* have a nation, there is no amount of reparations for the atrocities of imperialism that might “reset the clock” nor excuse Fortress Europe’s exclusion of migrants. Fortress Europe is not bad because of a specific history of European colonialism that they owe reparations for and invalidates their nations, it’s wrong because *fuck nations, everyone has a right to migrate*. While reparations and liberation in the face of dispossession and oppression is essential, our goal is not to *restore* some prehistoric balance wherein an indigenous “Frenchness” can live alongside a checkerboard of other national identities but to abolish all such discrete categories. To grant wider and deeper options to everyone and escalate the dynamic swirling complexity of humanity.

In land projects across North America and Europe it’s common to hear ecofascists and green reactionaries speaking of seeking, reestablishing, and defending an “indigeneity.” This can come either in the packaging that “the first people colonized were whites by the Romans” (recasting whiteness as a gateway to oppressed class status) or it can emerge from a supposed imperative to land-based spirituality (implying that constructing abusive mysticisms is a valid path out of white guilt).

The most facile response is to merely critique the absurd bundling and recent lineage of “whiteness.” But rarely are the speakers already unaware of such, nor would grounding one’s identity in some resurrection of a more specific lineage and tradition (eg “viking-ness”) necessarily avoid anything important. Nor is the important fact that these “land projects” are often on stolen land and facilitating continued settler colonial dynamics a sufficient response. One shouldn’t wish ecofascist communes on the people of Denmark.

not require ceding to a fixation with collective priority and origin. We've repeatedly seen, from the horrors perpetuated in Côte d'Ivoire between groups with conflicting claims over who was *more* "native" to the genocide and ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya as supposedly "illegal Bengali immigrants," that such frames are a fountainhead of oppression.

And it must be emphasized that "*being of place*" as an ossified collective identity is quite distinct from active knowledge and love of the land you work or a bioregion and a painstakingly built web of ecological relationships. To *liberate* land, air, and water from those who would control, monopolize and/or despoil them is not the same thing as a struggle for territory and sovereignty, concepts inherently tied to fixed relations, social discreteness, and functions of authority (whether collective or not).

Sharma's rejection of the former is sharp and motivated by a deep concern that *firstness* and *of-placeness* are subsuming the radical imagination and erasing or placing themselves before all other ethical considerations. Worse, this replacement of other driving values is happening in ways that places itself beyond discourse or consideration.

"All mobilizations of national autochthonous [nativeness] discourses... view indigeneity as a first principle of political action... autochthony is usually represented as " 'authentic,' 'primordial,' 'natural' and 'self-evident.'"

While it's understandable that people leverage what claims are fecund within an international liberal Wilsonian legal context, we must undermine the supposed incontestability of this principle of nativeness and origin. As such legitimization criteria is increasingly accepted as the starting point of movements of resistance, to engage with critiques of it increasingly verges on *unthinkable*. Nevertheless we must think it. And say it.

To put it in more concretely theoretical terms: it took the genocidal engines of imperialism to push most of the world into a profoundly suboptimal equilibria state. A new configuration that resisted transformation and pulled anything nearby into its own destructive form.

Indeed, having brutally reshaped the world into this new norm of states policing entry, the ruling imperial powers increasingly found it advantageous to remove their own administrative overhead once a region had been integrated into the new global system.

That the project of imperialism became constructing these discrete "nations" was explicit in many ways. The League of Nations openly framed the role of Empire as *the development of nations*, the "tutelage" of populations into becoming distinct "Peoples" and then nations.

Of course FDR used British desperation in and after World War 2 to strong-arm the UK into effectively turning their empire over to the US, but this wasn't a change of the foundations. The US model was a decentralized *next step* in the British approach to administration: where discrete national prisons were administered through the UN and brought to heel via one-sided open trade with the US — the last standing industrial and financial powerhouse — but retained enough independence to resiliently keep the whole system afloat. It was the intensification of the British policy of getting Natives to continue the process of empire themselves. Struggles of resistance, having now aligned with US power and aspirations, were then able to create a checkerboard of postcolonial nations.

This *escalated* processes of enclosure and suppression because local rulers had local knowledge and were now embedded in more totalizing and resilient wider incentive structures.

When U Nu, the nationalist first prime minister of Burma, described the UN charter as "*one great mutual security pact*" he was not speaking of the security of nations against one another, but of the security of *power* in the face of that which would

dissolve it. In this sense the interlocking national structure was not a matter of securing peace (wars continued unabated), but of securing domination itself from the spectre of revolution, insurrection, and revolt.

Power embraced decentralized *fragmentation* (according to a fixed logic) to avoid *dissolution*.

Natural systems, left to their own devices, will generally entangle. When ink disperses into water the result is a dissolution of simplistic discrete categories and structures. This is the *opposite* of nationalistic fragmentation which continues the construction of legibility started by Empire. If the preservation of “order” requires a fractal subdivision of humanity — the forced relocations and dispossessions of countless souls in endless partitions — then all the worse for any actual living breathing individual human beings. Humanity must be fed into the meatgrinder of simplistic abstractions.

Sharma is quite clear that, in her mind, the term “imperialism” poorly characterizes the US-created postcolonial system. The US was a hegemonic locus of power that extracted absurd concessions and material wealth from the rest of the world, spread its bases everywhere and bombed civilians, *but* the global nationstate it built was significantly different from all prior empires. Sharma is without mercy in her description of the machinations of the US (and USSR), but it’s still deeply unsettling to read a leftist author put “US imperialism” in scare quotes, so deeply has the anti-imperialist frame of analysis become hegemonic. In Sharma’s insistent frame, neither the US nor the USSR were “empires,” they were rather *postcolonial powers*, a classification which she seeks to give equivalently negative valences.

Sharma is concerned that the “imperialism” frame centers foreigners invading and controlling natives, an analysis that both misses critical dynamics of the Postcolonial New World Order and reproduces the nationalism it is dependent upon. In

social context, and not universally as anarchists do. They align with those politics here, today, but make no promises about tomorrow.

Arguments that critique cops, prisons, and borders, solely because of their *present* genealogies, affinities, and structural role leave open the door to schemes to implement them in the future, “beyond capitalism,” “beyond settler colonialism,” etc. The anarchist project, however, is not to critique the symptomatic expressions of power in our time, but the lines of underlying rot that inexorably drive *new* expressions as contexts change.

Sharma on the other hand is repeatedly very clear that the logic of nationalism and borders is rotten not just today, but inherently, “*national liberation did not result in decolonization, nor could it have.*” (her emphasis)

If Walia’s case is that borders are today interwoven with the function of capitalism and that the *displacement* of migrants is coerced by war and economic exploitation, Sharma’s argument is more that borders arose as a symptom of an underlying viral way of thinking: of cutting the world up into discrete regions with distinct “natives,” castigating and often enslaving the exceptions to this schema as “migrants.” It is a nuanced historical picture that traces the complications of white settlers dancing back and forth between categories as need be to keep their domination. But Sharma is interested in pushing a point that is unfortunately novel and contentious in the wider left: “nationalism from below” cannot offer us a break with the horrors we struggle against, indeed it can ultimately only ratchet up those horrors.

Much structural violence is obviously involved in the *displacement* of many migrants today, but Sharma warns against implicitly taking for granted that people are or should be *of some place*.

Resistance to imperial domination and struggles embedded in specific histories of trauma, genocide, and dispossession do

and views, but the integration of them. And that includes those who want *independence*, or, perhaps better put, a different and more far-reaching type of interdependence than that provided by the commons of old.

These are of course very broad points, about very broad narratives and concerns, but the most refreshing thing about Home Rule is the degree to which it audaciously embraces radicalism, which, lest we forget, is not a synonym for extremism or coolness but is about *getting to the root*.

Sharma's book contrasts with for example Harsha Walia's recent *Border & Rule*, which, while powerful in its lists of horrors, avoids comparably "abstract" discussion of underlying roots to instead focus on relatively more *particular* associations and mechanisms. Where Home Rule traces how underlying ideas, identities, policy orientations, and narratives came into being, *Border & Rule* focuses more on the myriad examples of how specific border policies functionally interface with or reproduce patriarchy, white supremacy, ableism, etc. — the long menagerie of formal oppressions we already instantly recognize as bad — and generally function as part of a control apparatus to brutally manage the global workforce. This is certainly valuable, and Walia is a rightfully beloved figure in the movement, but her words at points reveal, I think, a difference in philosophy between the two books:

*"I align with a leftist politics of no borders, **since the borders of today** are completely bound up in the violences of dispossession, accumulation, exploitation, and their imbrications with race, caste, gender, sexuality, and ability." (emphasis mine)*

Walia is seemingly not foreclosing support for borders *in some other context*, merely our own. Similar arguments and lines have been used by Marxists to endorse "all cops are bastards" and "prison abolition" *solely in our present historical and*

her ideal world we would recognize the "postcolonial" system as a distinct and arguably worse evil.

I am, it must be said, not sanguine about this rhetorical strategy. Whatever our *ideal* language might be, activist usage largely does not follow academic invention, but is shaped by and responds to pragmatic needs and pressures, constantly collapsing to the most succinct frame that makes intuitive use of existing language. Complex formal definitions rarely win against general resemblances. And it is simply a fact that capital flows continue to be centralized in imperial metropolises. Why *shouldn't* we speak of the US, USSR, and PRC as empires and imperialist projects? Their economic as well as political centralization and direct military domination has clearly followed longstanding imperialist patterns. Comparisons to imperialism are inherent because the term has widespread negative cachet in general populations. There is no feasible pathway to establishing similarly potent valances for "postcolonial" on its own; we struggle mostly within the language we are given.

Sharma confidently claims that global inequality is *worse* today than in the age of empire.

"Between 1960 and the late 1990s, a significant widening of world income distribution took place. Indeed, the extent of the disparities surpassed those during the Age of Empires"

But I find such quantifications suspect. One can point to all manner of depredation and slaughter today, but can anyone really say with any certainty that today's world is more unequal than when the Belgians were chopping off hands and feet in Congo? This is not to entirely foreclose the possibility, but it seems like the sort of claim that's impossible to establish. In short it collapses tangles of complexities much the same way nations collapse the complexity of our social relations. Never mind the discontinuities of measuring wealth over a period

where the fine-grained legibility of title itself has changed, or the incommensurabilities papered over by “inflation adjusted” figures. Even pointing out the enclosure of the dark parts of the map sweepingly described as “commons” proves very little about relative degrees of access and power within said old commons. I simply can’t imagine a single unified measure of “inequality” or any bundling of an aggregate measure that could even remotely establish this claim. (Much less by way of citation to Samir fucking Armin, a Khmer Rouge and Putin defending wingnut.)

This is not necessarily to push back on the *idea* that the creation of postcolonial national regimes made things overall worse, when examined within a certain window, but as an *argument* it’s a quagmire. What sort of time window should we be using to evaluate this? From one side someone could make the argument that national liberation struggles led to a gradual weakening of imperial power long before flags formally changed on a map, from the other side the nationalist ideologues could just as easily say “*undoing imperialism is just really hard, we need another five centuries before things get net positive, but then things will get truly good.*” There’s no winning once we get bogged down into arguing over which timescale and period to measure over.

It’s certainly true that many things have gotten worse in the postcolonial era. For example, where colonial administration hadn’t managed to implement border controls, the newly “liberated” nationstates acted quickly to create them. This meant that the transition from colonial rule to postcolonial rule in for example much of Africa saw the sudden creation of constraints on movement that had been free throughout prior history. In this respect Sharma is correct in identifying the postcolonial system as even worse than the imperialist system, intensifying its logic of domination rather than breaking from it. And similar analysis can be made in terms of the formalization of new

My concern with Sharma’s framework is that while it correctly objects to the *forcible* creation of markets and the *forcible* creation of dispossession and enclosures, as well as the construction of titanic industrial infrastructure along a single innovation pathway, her narrative risks empowering reactive or clumsy rhetorical corrections. *Choice* is not quite the same thing as *commons*, although they can be allies. In some contexts it can be useful to disentangle local knots so as to enable more global connections. I have no sweeping answers or blueprints for property norms, but I know that orthogonalizability is not always evil. The broad strokes of the historic enclosures at the dawn of capitalism were surely quite evil in most means and consequences, similarly the followup processes of enclosures that were applied beyond Europe by imperialists and then postcolonial nationalists, but these broad strokes eclipse the people from below who sincerely and for good reasons pushed for changes in their existing property norms in ways that included dividing and individualizing some things. That they didn’t get the direction and types of reforms they wanted nor the results, trammled over by the powers who orchestrated and profited from enclosures, doesn’t mean they should be erased from our understanding. I don’t think we have to pose their struggle for liberation *against* the liberatory aspirations of the Diggers. The truth here is more complicated. To shift identity and context, to sincerely struggle to step into alien perspectives, is at the core of building a better world and resolving the wounds that have been sliced into us by empire and nation alike. But such individual mobility can require slicing us free of inherited community, *picking up our things* and departing, and in so doing can be quite at odds with many generations of “the commons.”

To connect globally, to *build the tower of Babel* that Sharma so resonantly speaks of and quotes Toni Morrison on, should not involve the flattening or smothering of diverse experiences

social relations has been an incredibly liberating experience for many and is deeply related to why migration isn't just an inextricable component of human existence, but a freedom to be encouraged. And part of having choice is knowing what the choices are. Legibility and even simplicity can thus be liberating, in the right contexts.

This is why I've emphasized a focus on *positive freedom* and a network lens. While I have no doubt Sharma would not embrace any of the nefarious takes above, she has certainly gotten fastidious about the dangers of myriad language choices like "global south" and so I must interject that talk of a global *commons* does carry its own dangers. There has never been a true global commons, because we have never been as strongly and directly connected to one another. Every historical instance of "commons" was inherently, and usually quite explicitly, partially closed and parochial. Historically access to the commons of a village is usually tied to membership within that village, or even one's property title within it. We have never had a global commons in anywhere near as direct a sense and so the concept is a cipher that people will take different assumptions and priorities into.

Sharma looks back to the radical aspirations of the Diggers and Ranters, enormously influential seventeenth century precursors to the modern anarchist tradition who conjoined a fight for *land* with grand aspirations for a world without *exclusion* or *territory*. For the Diggers, "*an essential aspect of this freedom/mobility was the ability to change or shift one's identity*" and for the Ranters "*the people in England, France, and Turkey [must become] one people and one body, for where the one lives there liveth the other also.*" I have long shared in a deep admiration and love for these proto-anarchists who emerged endogenously within the belly of European empire at the dawning of capitalism. For two decades have I teared up while belting "*this earth divided / we will make whole*" but the devil is in the details.

property regimes and the intensifying legibility of claims at the cost of the old support mechanisms of the commons.

But this doesn't necessarily prove an *overall* devolution.

Regardless of whether national liberation was a net advancement or a net escalation of horrors, I am frankly quite sick of common leftist rhetoric that dismisses things like the abolition of chattel slavery as an irrelevant trick of smoke and mirrors. Radicals often feel we have to pretend we live in the worst of all possible worlds because if people feel there's any advantages to our present order they might not want to risk toppling it. This is a path by which radicalism perversely ends up generating reactionary frames at least as noxious as nationalism. The sloppy leftist dismisses the immense suffering under for example monarchy and slavery and the awe-inspiring, hard-won social transformations away from them, declaring instead that all progress so far has been illusory, even that *things have gotten worse*. It is true of course that power has gotten more dextrous, more insidious, and its function more complex. But that retreat to complex mechanisms *is itself a sign of power on the back foot*.

When the mechanisms of power are forced to adopt greater internal complexity they *lose efficiency* and either become more brittle or open up more space for erosion. Power may survive in the face of resistance by mutating and trying to co-opt or misdirect that resistance, but that is not necessarily to say it ends up on a stronger footing. Merely that the strategic landscape changes.

The Left spent the last half of the twentieth century in a tizzy about insidiously complex systems of control like advertising and the construction of desire that end up being largely paper tigers. It convinced itself that progress was impossible, that Moloch had perfected titanic systems to generate false consciousness, even while progress was being made in myriad places, often without the help of leftist or radical theorists. This is not to suggest that nationalism of the oppressed is a

necessary step towards progress, nor that no one knew better — many anarchists at the time certainly did and far too many paid with our lives for the sin of correct prognostication — but I do think we can't afford to ignore or discard the positive currents and improvements that got mixed up in the noxious morass of national liberation struggles.

A significant aspect of Sharma's argument is that no nation *escaped* neoliberalism because in fact nationalism and neoliberalism each imply the other. In her account national liberation states didn't "sell out" to western imperialists, rather they continued the logic of nation building, that is to say building infrastructure and exclusionary power systems necessarily provoked positive sum (for capitalists and rulers) collaboration between nations. Sure the Washington neoliberal institutions profited immensely, but so too did the "national liberation" projects, once you realize what nation building *means*. And Sharma's right that in many contexts the most supreme and omnipresent power in people's lives was national.

Indeed one of the ways national liberation states *benefit* from the horrors of global apartheid is by externalizing costs: the rule of autocrats depends upon exporting the unemployed and dissidents they create. That those people are made desperate by immigration restrictions in other countries and at best become a deeply policed inferior class helps maintain order at home. Obey and stay or else get thrown into a meat-grinder. Submit to the prison at home, or else become a prisoner completely without rights or even voice in the global system. The project of national control is only stabilized by the ability to eject, to make alien or immigrant, those in the fuzzy areas (which are ultimately almost everyone). The nationalist and the capitalist *both* need the dispossessed underclass inherent to the construction of borders and national identities.

Sharma drills down in particular on how the specific term "neo-colonialism" was invented and theorized by Kwame Nkrumah who ruled Ghana and served as a major figure

by whom. Just as nationalism erases all other modes of resistance to imperialism, collapsing our options into just replicating a unified state or "people" with a military and economy that fight with (eg interface with) foreign ones *on their terms*, so too does it erase all pathways to material abundance that are not in the interest of power. The problem isn't that infrastructure and property relations *changed* after independence, it's *how* they were changed. Just as we must defend the right to move and freely associate globally we must defend the freedom to evolve, hybridize, and reconfigure ourselves.

Another danger in popular narratives that focus on the enclosures is to view complexity and illegibility as ends in themselves. In this frame the commodification eating the world is a matter of increasing precision and detail in our map of things, going from a lackadaisical commons where no accounts are kept, to a stressfully overly quantified world where every single individual grain of rice is indexed, tracked, and purchasable with a personal loan for a low annual rate. Yet, *there is value* to clarity, reconfigurability, and material capacity. Elinor Ostrom emphasized that not only is the tragedy of the commons a real danger that communities around the world have long been quite familiar with, but people solve such in bottom-up ways through a diverse variety of often overlapping means, including strategies that increase clarity and even parcel out the commons. Further, being able to extract oneself from social contexts, to sell one's stake in a clean manner has clear liberatory aspects. Sharma mentions urbanization in the list of effects of national "development" and neoliberal reforms, and there's a serious danger here of building a narrative against urbanity itself. We must not pretend that *every* dynamic driving urbanization was violent or created by imperial interests, the interconnection of a globalizing world was *in part* facilitated by voluntarily adopted technologies and individuals embracing exit from parochial communities closed as a result of their own power structures and material constraints. *Choice* in one's

in a similarly slapdash and unilateral form. Instead of distributed weighing of every individual's context and desires, these violently "optimized" market processes can only serve the hamfisted ends of power. That is to say: there are very different directions and branches of "development" possible, serving very different interests.

But this brings us to some frictions in the popular "lost commons" narrative. Firstly, many societies do not have commons in anywhere near the same sense as the feudal villages often treated as prototypical. Even the egalitarian !Kung San hunter-gatherers traded overlapping titles to regions of land and all their benefits within their gift/debt system. While their specific individual ownership system and market norms are quite foreign to our own, they said they found the concept of "collective ownership" particularly repugnant and hard to conceptualize, even finding much of the current global norms of property and market exchange *liberating*. This is in no remote sense to minimize the repression that the !Kung San have faced as a minority and the shittiness of the capitalist dynamics many have been forced into, but the point is that our world does not have a uniform history and cultural inheritance.

One huge lurking danger to the valorization of the commons is that to many the takeaway is always that everyone was at least better off in subsistence farming villages and should have more or less remained there in some kind of essentialistic and static natural relationship. Of course that so many people dig their feet in there is understandable if the only other pole is to uncritically embrace more or less the exact infrastructural norms of dominant modernity and say "look destroying thousands of villages for some dam is obviously a net positive." If these are our only two options then we are indeed in trouble. Hence why a crucial response to the claims of national liberation states that they promoted development is to contest what sort of development in what direction, at what cost. To specify which pathways were available and which were derailed,

in the Non-Aligned Movement. Nkrumah only wrote and publicized his theory *after* he had already destroyed the homes of tens of thousands for a dam to power a smelter for Kaiser Aluminum, a U.S.-based corporation and *then* created permanent economic catastrophe by nationalizing much of the economy into a command system. Every step of the way Nkrumah's ruling circle enriched itself while exacerbating inherent state dysfunction. The national liberation regime sweepingly tried to do big things with the blunt instrument of the state, externalizing the costs to the people, while profiting from the asymmetries. The analysis of "neocolonialism" thus emerged from the outset as an apologia and deflection by those in power.

In contrast to this theorizing-from-above, Sharma emphasizes how the rot of the entire postcolonial system was focused on and critiqued by theorists-from-below like Ghana's Ayi Kwei Armah as having always been lying in wait in the national liberation project.

In short, our postcolonial hellworld isn't perversion or *undermining* of national liberation, but its natural culmination.

Under the postcolonial order all legitimacy lies in being a discrete People "of place." Such Peoples can make political claims, declarations, demands, but the same is virtually *unthinkable* for migrants, those "out of place".

"while the "human rights" of many National Citizens were not recognized, respecting such rights for foreigners was always out of the question"

Further, the power structures, the lines of domination that persisted under or were necessary for the "nation" were framed as "peoples' power." The very possibility of abolishing power itself was thus made increasingly unthinkable. Rather, the fascist philosophy shared from Engels to Schmidt became hegemonic: 'there is nothing outside domination, only questions of *who* wields it.'

The paradigm of national liberation thus is the paradigm of postcolonial apartheid, not of *actual decolonization*.

In Sharma's account the postcolonial period of nationalization was necessarily a *ratcheting* of the violent hierarchies introduced or intensified by colonization. By splintering the world into competing nations every nation was forced into a "development" arms race that intensified processes of enclosure. If imperialism had partially dispossessed a subsistence farmer the nationalist project only furthered this suffering. Just as capitalism depends on simplistically slicing up collectively managed commons into fungible and alienable parcels, the entire paradigm of "the nation" works to slice apart different natives, and create a fungible underclass out of everyone too entangled to fit in these boxes.

Migrant labor is thus the gasoline that drives the world power system, while native labor helps structure, condition, direct, and control it. The global patchwork of discrete nations necessarily creates migrants by their existence, slicing up (violently simplifying) the inherently more complex network that is humanity as well as obviously stripping options and agency from individuals.

All this has deep implications and insights with regard to the turn to patchwork micronationalism intensifying among most currents of reactionaries and fascists since the 80s. Obviously a strategy of fractal secession would only further deepen the creation of oppressed migrant classes. The micronationalists frequently act like the problem with existing nationalisms is that they encompass *too much* complexity and so the logic of nationalism should be *pushed further* to the point of every town, every neighborhood a nation. The fractal checkerboard of Iraq and Syria emphasizes that this doesn't bring peace, it brings displacement and more directly attentive gang rule. And, of course, a mass refugee crisis.

Today's reactionaries often fetishize "exit" on the premise that folks can vote with their feet and thus minimize the harms

freedom, security, and community, only to be brutally sliced up at the onset of capitalism, dispossessing and creating the working class. As an account of the enclosures this is certainly quite accurate. And it's easy to see the congruities between this aspect of capitalism and what Sharma focuses on in the construction of nationalism. Similarly the core of her argument that the postcolonial nation system is *worse* than imperialism is that it has enabled more dextrous enclosures. Distant imperial bureaucrats couldn't dream of incentivizing and handling the construction of modern property norms to the same extent as local rulers shouting about national honor and growth.

Libertarians tend to treat Lockean property titles as unalloyed positives, arbitrarily selecting a thin slice of possible property norms as the most ideal, in no small part — even when they hide such consequentialist roots to this position — because it facilitates *fungibility* and *investment* and ideally thus rapid "development."

Part of what is glossed over is the *cost* of such imposed orthogonalization in property titles. Whereas while every society has a property system of some kind, claims are usually far more *entangled* than anything like the cleanly separable ones of Lockean norms. As claims of ownership originally emerged in bottom up processes of widely or mutually useful detentes, they kept all sorts of artifacts of their context. Someone's title to their house might not be *exclusive* or apply in every dimension. This impedes selling property, staking it as collateral, etc, if only because one person's title claim is not something entirely in one's own hands, and is also ultimately dependent upon the aggregate acceptance of countless individuals in one's community.

Further, sure, this *entanglement* in conventional property impedes rapid "development," but when the state violently slices through those entangled connections to impose one universal and fungible map it can only assure "development"

is not at all to say that nations are *natural* or *good*, any more than a common illusion or confusion is.

Common fantasies of a return to perfectly uniform and closed communities of fixed traditions are motivated by fear of complexity and a hunger for the abolition of thought and responsibility. This is not to suggest that complexity is innately good, or truth not often quite simple, but nations are the product of valuing simplicity as an end almost unto itself. They're not about accurately mapping what is true, they're about *imposing* a reduction of complexity. This is the common goal of would-be slaves and rulers, and so the historical equivalence and ever-more-deepening ties between nationalism and various forms of authoritarianism is unavoidable. The imperialist and post-colonial leader obviously share in a need to impose simplicity to build power structures, but so too does a certain type of revolutionary or insurgent have an investment in making the battlefield *simple*.

Today if it is said that we can no more envision the end of capitalism than the end of the world, we can even less envision the end of nationalism. The only alternative to European imperialism folks can imagine under its spell is often just European feudalism, re-baked as a kind of voluntary micronationalism. But the manors of feudal Europe — with their aspiration to operate villages as closed social universes in ways wildly different from how bands and sedentary communities have emerged in other societies — are not some natural configuration emergent from free association and personal preference. They were, themselves, the historical product of imperialism and maintained through immense violence, serving the ends of power.

And this is a critique that can be turned back, to some degree, on Sharma's appeal to and valorization of the commons.

There's a broad metanarrative in circulation, especially among Marxists looking for a way to ditch their historical materialist baggage by focusing on the end of the first volume of Capital, that once upon a time "the commons" provided

of governments, but the incentive structures of nationalism *at the margins*, as economists say, don't work that way. Rather, constructed minorities are targeted and pushed out of one region on the premise that they have less legitimate "claim" to belonging and then no other region has incentive to provide them *full* citizenship. Elevating a stranger to equivalent political power and rights as you is rarely worth that person's marginal economic contribution to your nation. Thus the global ratchet is towards intense hierarchies of Nth-class noncitizens. A patchwork of democracies or populist dictatorships thus rapidly converges on arbitrary class ladders with the enfranchised few shrinking and the base of exploited or just suppressed constantly expanding.

It's easy to *lose* legitimacy as a "native" but almost impossible to gain it.

Of course it should always have been trivially apparent that a patchwork of states would be inclined away from freedom. A market with 200 hundred competing buyers and seven billion competing sellers is always going to be skewed to the buyers. When what's being sold is labor and the system iterates constantly the emergence of essentially slavery conditions is a foregone conclusion. Even if there were *two million* buyers the asymmetry in bargaining power will remain pertinent.

This authoritarian ratchet of the inter-national system was what we opposed in the streets of Seattle fighting the WTO, a system of "globalization" that used national barriers to reinforce power globally. The only way to stop the race-to-the-bottom enabled by the interlocking system of "nations" is to abolish them entirely. Sharma is quite clear that reinforcing borders doesn't protect local workers, it is an essential component of the overall downward spiral.

If we start from the perspective that the world is an irreducibly complex network, then it's preposterous to think that such a network can be decomposed into a set of discrete villages or cliques. Rather, with every subdivision forcibly sliced

through the tangled knot of humanity, lives are cut short and single threads cast loose. Fractal secession or subdivision is thus the most damaging, most harmful, strategy possible. It looks at the harm caused by nationalism, by borders slicing up the world, displacement, genocide, and war, and thinks the solution is to double down.

Instead of framing things in terms of a “right to exit” we must realize that the modern nation paradigm is predicated on a claimed “right to eject” that is *to manage populations by violently subdividing them*, by the construction of “the inside and the outside.” The nationalist takes the nation as *given* but there is no such cohesive simplistic discrete set of people. Not even a “family” has an a priori inside and outside, lines of connection and association are always graduated and intermeshed in complex ways that defy simple accounts. The nationalist’s *given* is not a reflection of reality, it is an idol he is asserting, an idol whose “rights” inherently require human sacrifice.

It’s beyond critical that we emphasize this, because the fact that a structure emerged out of a specific historical context doesn’t mean it wouldn’t and hasn’t emerged in other contexts. An intellectual fascist, upon reading Sharma, would no doubt see her argument about the historical roots in imperial bureaucratic management as *beside the point*.

The specificity of “nationalism” as a word and ideological history has become blurred out in popular perception to virtually any and all projects of *usness versus themness*. The modern proponent of nationalism would look at two germanic tribes warring with one another thousands of years ago and see two “nations.” And it is not clear to me that such a wider definition is “objectively” wrong. For what it lacks in congruence with the historical emergence of the term, it can be argued the more generalized definition does a better job at cutting reality at the joints. Beyond the relevance of popular usage, to achieve the generality and universalism of a truly radical analysis, our words should arguably try to pick out perpetually *emergent*

dynamics, rather than exclusively tracing out particular usage within a specific historical context.

William C Anderson reminds us of all this in general terms in his critique of Ashanti Alston’s sympathies for black nationalism, writing in *The Nation Of No Map*, “*some of us are descended from the enslaved because of the betrayal of nations, one group of people pitting themselves against another for dominance... our past is a cautionary tale.*” [emphasis added] While many horrible particular norms of the present postcolonial nationstate system were created by Empire, that system itself had roots in the generalized logic of nations and division. The pull of simplicity driving clustering dynamics and closed communities aren’t a cure for Empire, *they’re what gave rise to it in the first place*.

Sharma doesn’t deny the widespread tendency to chauvinism, but she doesn’t directly address that in Home Rule, being instead at pains to undermine our current reception of Native and Migrant conceptual categorizations as timeless, putting their *present use* in historical context as products of specific power systems and interests. And, as a correction Home Rule can at least emphasize that the particular potency of nationalism and native identification today is overwhelmingly propped up by a *specific* history of power. But, while the problem posed by human inclinations towards clustered communities and simplistic cognitive abstractions of groups (in-group or out-group) is an eternal threat that can obviously reproduce territorial barriers and the like on its own, the history that Sharma highlights has clear *general implications*.

Even in those cases where a nationalistic tendency is not carrying a legacy of imperialist managerial needs, the fact that managers love the nation form and that such can only be cleaved out of humanity’s tangles via systemic violence is relevant. While there may be a cognitive laziness in humans that eternally pulls us towards the mistake of nationalism, this