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Book Review

Suketu Mehta, **This Land Is Our Land: An Immigrant's Manifesto**,
Vintage, London, 2021, pp. 304, \$27.14 (Hardcover), ISBN 9781529112955

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This Land is Our Land: An Immigrant's Manifesto is a timely and topical book that makes the case that migrants from the Global South, for several reasons, will continue to arrive in the Global North in numbers and provide much needed, affordable, and quality labor. At the same time, populists, right-wingers, and nationalists will continue with their fear-mongering and scapegoating of immigrants and refugees in the receiving countries. To analyze this and investigate the critical political, economic, social, and environmental factors that motivate the migrants to uproot and move abroad requires a balanced researcher to understand and explain the historical and colonial influence on human migration and a researcher who is sympathetic to the immigrants and the receiving societies.

Suketu Mehta's heritage is (Kenyan) Indian. His family migrated to England and New York, United States; therefore, he comes to the debate with the lived experience of someone who knows about the rural to urban drift. His academic career makes his analytical writing informed, while his observations about the lived reality of immigrants, and the contrast between the 'rich North' and the Global South are thought-provoking. Mehta's preface says: "This is a book about people leaving their homes and moving across the planet: why they move, why they're feared, and why they should be welcomed" (p. 1).

The book's structure contains four parts and eighteen chapters. "Part I: The Migrants Are Coming" begins by saying that "These days, a great many people in the rich countries complain loudly about migration from the poor ones" (p. 3)—and barriers and policies in Hungary, Israel, India, and the United States aim to stop migrants and refugees (p. 9). However, migrants continue to journey and are motivated by external factors out of their control—for instance, colonial legacy, corrupt post-colonial political elites, unemployment, crime, gangs, and climate change. In light of this, the key to understanding the migrant's mentality is employment and family security (p. 8). Today, almost a "quarter of a billion people" live "in a country other than the one they were born in" (p. 4).

Mehta discusses the contemporary movement of immigrants across borders and traces events in a global context. Also, the author narrows down the study to local cases and personal stories recorded during his research. The local sites explored include the

Mexican-United States border crossing for South Americans looking for employment ‘up North’; and the North African- Mediterranean Europe crossing point between Morocco and Spain. A sea-crossing mainly for Africans seeking to enter Europe and begin new lives. Their struggles and challenges, sacrifices and dreams – considering the family security they have left behind – make them in Mehta’s reporting “ordinary, everyday heroes” (p. 29). He emphasizes a humane approach to migration: “I am not calling for open borders. I am calling for open hearts” (p. 29).

“Part II: Why They’re Coming” addresses four motivating factors for migrants. Firstly, the author outlines the history of Western colonialism and its political, economic, cultural, and psychological impact on Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and First Nation American societies. Then, neo-colonialism is reviewed in the guise of multinational corporations, government officials, and bribe-taking. Arguably, foreign control of national resources and their extraction continued after independence, masked as international business and trade. Thirdly, the effect of war on society and, consequently, refugee crises (in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Central America) to describe why people uproot and relocate abroad. Fourthly, climate change (water shortage, desertification, the effect on livelihoods, and the spread of disease) is another reason for migration in the present and future.

In “Part III: Why They’re Feared”, the author highlights negative and racist stereotyping by European and North American right-wingers towards immigrants and refugees. The evidence that immigrants work hard, pay taxes, and commit no more crimes proportionally than the host community are deliberately ignored by right-wing- politicians, journalists, and disaffected citizens seeking to blame their societal problems on the Other/ Them. The more authentic picture of a generally industrious and entrepreneurial immigrant community is ignored; instead, they are falsely portrayed as a threat to the receiving society.

In “Part IV: Why They Should Be Welcomed”, the author makes the case, supported by evidence, for the economic, social, and cultural benefits of immigration. Mehta contends that benefits are overwhelmingly positive. Moreover, the declining birth rate and aging populations in North America, Europe, and Russia will inevitably mean that young migrants from the Global South will provide the much-needed paid labor in the service, building, and care sectors and technically-skilled jobs. Today, their remittances ‘home’ are nearly \$600 billion yearly (p. 195). Furthermore, the migrants’ taxes and welfare insurance payments will help finance the pensions of the receiving society. The immigrant workers, from all social and class backgrounds, will increase the productivity of the receiving country and make them competitive in terms of Gross National Product and quality of life. Examples of multicultural success stories are the United States and Canada and cities like London.

The significant difference between British and United States citizenship is that the former requests immigrants to integrate into its multicultural society, while the latter advocates their assimilation into a nation of immigrants. However, in reality, immigrants establish and participate in community networks, traveling between their new homeland and their ancestral homeland. To explain this, Mehta says migrants are in “continuous transit between two or places, not nation-states. Let’s look at migration as not an arrow but a circle” (p. 211).

Given the above, Mehta should not underestimate the challenges faced by the receiving societies when their working and middle classes are experiencing unemployment and underemployment, the high expense of buying or renting a home, and an increasing cost of living. Some younger adults sense that their career and material futures will be less advantageous than the previous post-1960s generations. How will these influence attitudes about immigration, national identity, and cosmopolitan identity?

The social and demographic changes discussed by Mehta are far-reaching but are not explored thoroughly in this book. For instance, his vision of social change requires a revised citizenship model to support positive inclusiveness, equality, and increasing cultural diversity. It includes eradicating the problem of institutional racism in employment, health, and housing that immigrants encounter.

Lastly, while Mehta effectively questions the double standards of Western colonialism and immigration policies, he might also have been more critical of the far right-wing governments of Myanmar and India and their colonial-like attitude towards the Rohingya and Kashmiris, respectively. Likewise, he rightly points out the negative impact of nineteenth-century Western colonialism on Imperial China, but he fails to investigate Communist China as a rising superpower with possible colonial-like tendencies. The treatment of minorities in these three countries – some of whom become political refugees and immigrants – is not analyzed.

Nevertheless, Mehta makes a strong case and clarifies why humans migrate, why the politics of fear is wrong, and how immigrants offer an economical and cultural renaissance to their receiving societies and new shared homelands. The book is recommended for students and researchers of immigration, government policy, racism, and early twenty-first-century world history.

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