Onni Gust's *Unhomely Empire: Whiteness And Belonging, C.1760 -1830* (2022)

Review

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After the Brexit vote in 2016 – and indeed after 9/11 and the 6/6 terrorist attacks, though I was young at the time – the concept of home had drastically changed. Being born in Britain to immigrant parents did not mean anything to me until I was made to feel uncomfortable about it by those who perceived me to be less than British, simply because I was not white. But what was home then? Could India be home, even though I had only visited a few times and my grasp on Punjabi is only passable? Is Britain home, being a physical place that I belong to but culturally and psychologically cannot fully access? Home is a deeply unstable concept, and some of us have difficulties navigating it as descendants of subjugated people.

Onni Gust's *Unhomely Empire* considers home in the same manner, but in reverse. Whereas I question home as a brown man in the twenty-first century, Gust's protagonists (or should colonists be antagonists?) question home as white people living in the colonies. In their quest to colonise the world, Britons had to come terms with their various identities in order to maintain power but also maintain a sense of self. What *Unhomely Empire* offers is a new way of under-

standing the anxieties of empire and why the concept of whiteness needs to be front and centre in future discussions of British identity.

The introduction and chapter 1 offer several definitions of home that mean different things to different people, but was essentially and "important site for the configuration and performance of middle-class English identity" (11). More striking, however, is the idea of sympathy, or the act of "calling home to oneself", which Adam Smith uses to critique chattel slavery (19). Reading philosophical debates on sympathy and whiteness immediately brings to mind contemporary problems with 'neoliberal niceness', the fact that white people can erase racism through the sheer power of amiability. As Morrison states, "[t]he habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture. To notice is to recognize an already discredited difference" (Morrison 9-10). Chapter 6 deals with gender more explicitly, but it is instantly clear that Gust—and by extension, eighteenth century Britons—emphasise the gendered aspect of whiteness. Civilization is a concept that is applicable to the white man. In offering this nuanced approach, Gust highlights the intricacies and complexities of racism. Racism is present in Hume's infamous footnote in *On National Characters*, but it is also present in patriarchal and capitalist structures that oppress women and working-class people.

Chapter 2 deals with the physical act of transplanting oneself into a foreign place and its effects on both the physical and mental characteristics of white settlers. It does so primarily through comparisons between home and wandering, the former being a sign of civility and the latter a sign of the savage. Interestingly, the wanderer could be either a settler or a society considered 'pre-civil' according to Smith's stadial theory. Gust's book covers the period from the 1760 to 1830 but these connections to land had been growing steadily since the Glorious Revolution in 1689. Liberty is dramatically contextualised in the work of Fortesque, who insisted that "this law of England [liberty]" was "not common to all the world" because the quality of English soil and crops had nurtured social independence (Greene 211). What should be also be noted is that the concept of land ownership as a defining prerequisite of 'home' automatically excludes women from this conversation. The highlight of the chapter is the power of networks of whiteness, particularly through the examples of Dugald Stewart, Adam Smith, and John Millar. All of the subjects of Gust's book are connected in one way or another, all of them playing a role in the cognitive empire and furthering the imperial project through projections of whiteness.

Slavery and abolition is covered in great detail in chapter 3, though Gust presses the uncomfortable truth that being an abolitionist did not necessarily mean one did not hold racist views, or that the wellbeing of the enslaved was a factor. Maria Graham is an example of this. Although she rejected philosophical claims regarding African intellect, she also "reinforced the image of Africans as abject characters who lacked understanding of their own situation" (61). Home is here considered from the African perspective, both through the forced exile from Africa and the inability to form a home in the colonies. As discussed, the ability to maintain a home was a marker of (white) civility, and Gust discusses the trope of the 'grateful negro' and a benevolent form of white supremacy. In Maria Edgeworth's *The Grateful Negro*, a slave named Caesar becomes loyal to his owner Mr Edwards after begging to be purchased so he could remain with his lover, the result being that Edwards is able to thwart a slave rebellion. Forming domestic habits, then, became a way for African slaves to overcome their passionate nature and feed into white duty and servitude. The second case study in this chapter is *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil* by Graham, where indigenous Brazilians are seen, from the Portuguese perspective, to be cannibals who wander rather than settle. As Gust rightly points out, "both subtly acquitted British enslavers from the worst brutalities of slavery" (73).

Chapter 4 sees a return to Britain and the perception of Highland Scots after the Union of 1707 and the Jacobite Uprising of 1745, primarily through the writings of the Earl of Selkirk. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Highland population not included in English whiteness due to their Catholic beliefs and agrarian ways, particularly those who were anti-Union. One writer in 1733 described Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, as a "low, thin Man, [with a] brown Complexion, full of Fire, with a stern … Look," similar to the Earl of Perth, with his "quick Look; [and] of a brown Complexion." Alternatively, Lord Belhaven was "a rough, fat, black, noisy Man, more like a Butcher than a Lord" (Macky 236). Selkirk devised a way to incorporate these men into the machine of empire by emigrating them to the colonies, both to address the overpopulation of ill-mannered people but also to increase the military capacity of the empire. He also justified the system of settler colonies by repeating the common belief that growth was a marker of economic progress, and removing the Highland population would mean they could retain their 'hardness' abroad in way that did not threaten the rest of Britain. What Gust does masterfully is expose the inherently unstable nature of whiteness that places it within a set of cultural norms as opposed to purely physical. It was not enough to be visibly white, "the Highlanders

became "white" through their emigration and physical exclusion from British society" (99).

Until this point, the geography of this book has concerned the Americas and Europe, but the final two chapters discuss identity in India. Chapter 5 outlines the deeply contradictory views that epitomised British rule in the subcontinent. According to Burke, Indian natives were "for ages cultivated and civilised", meaning that they were not wanderers, and linguistic analysis into Sanskrit revealed its connections to Greek and Latin (105). Yet Europeans were still superior. The primary concern of those in the metropole was the alarming descent of moral values once Britons had settled in India. Sir James Mackintosh, for example, "had ambitions to bring "civilization" to a far corner of the British Empire" for the betterment of the European settlers, "in the hopes that they would set a better example to the "natives" over whom they wielded political power" (116). Gust then outlines some of the ways Britain tried to improve this corruption: a new and improved policing system, a pro-Christian governmental structure, and the establishment of the Literary Society. This example is a reflection of the wider anxieties that afflicted Britons both at home and abroad, that "misrule, corruption, greed, vice, and arbitrary government would not remain confined to India but might serve to act as corrosive agents and weaken traditional liberties, values, and virtues within metropolitan society" (Bowen 531).

Chapter 6 considers whiteness and womanhood in India, and why it was an 'unhomely' place unsuitable for polite women. Gust emphasises that this chapter relies almost exclusively on evidence from private letters, the aim being to show that these racially-charged views were not simply performative colonialism, but a strongly held belief system. Building on the definitions of home and sympathy from chapter 1, the family unit in India was not the "heterosexual, racially homogenous, and patriarchal, nuclear family" as was found in Britain and was a marker of humanity (133). The chapter focusses on two factors that caused this. First, the lack of white women in India meant that there were few models of morality and virtue for younger girls. Second, the average Anglo-Indian was seen to be severely lacking in sympathy. James Mackintosh was referred to as worse than an enslaved African, since the African at least has his "brethren"and Catherine Mackintosh – the subject of the chapter – was horrified that white girls were married before "habits were built" (144-5).

Unhomely Empire spans over four continents but the same anxieties about whiteness and identity lurk under the surface. What Gust offers is a powerful account where whiteness intersects with other identities to create a distinctly 'Brit-

ish' identity. Class, gender, geographical location, and occupation all interweaved within whiteness to both promote a homogenous imperial machine and a truly 'British' empire, one that exhibited both "moral virtue and material stage" (153).

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