

## REVIEW

Review of Mahmood Mamdani (1996) *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton Series in Culture/Power/History, Cape Town: David Philip.

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It is not easy to review a book dealing with all of Black Africa, including South Africa, for a mostly South African readership whilst my personal reactions are basically French Africanist orientated. M Mamdani offers a new interpretation of colonial (and to some extent precolonial and postcolonial) Africa including the democratic demands of recent history. It compares favourably at a global theoretical level with the professional works of historians (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1992; Iliffe, 1995; Moffa, 1995). However, this type of historical approach is debatable because the historical unity of Black Africa is a colonial chimera. Social history in the last 15 years has tried to draw another picture, more detailed, more empirical but also better documented, of local and global interactions. To view Africa as a significant social arena of comparison is an ideological choice and a methodological blunder. This debate has as well a South African component; I concur in this regard with R Greenstein (Greenstein, 1994, 1996).

Mamdani's method is based on a global hypothesis selecting a limited number of examples coming more or less at random from the author's research or readings. There is no specific theoretical approach of a comparative kind that would justify the choice of one or the other case study. Quite naturally, most of these examples are drawn from British colonial Africa but Senegal, Guinea and Rwanda also receive some detailed attention. The best case study is of South Africa and this approach is in itself very positive; it renders South Africa in an Africanist perspective.

The book is divided into two parts: the structure of power and the anatomy of resistance. The first part is the longest and the best argued: it elaborates the hypothesis of a bifurcated state based on indirect rule in the countryside and on direct rule in the city: on the one hand, tribal authorities, customary law and subjects; on the other, civil society, civil rights and citizens. In other words, decentralised despotism versus centralised despotism. Anti-colonial struggle was waged to abolish the first and to promote the second. But in fact the system of native authority took over and deracialisation of civil society took on a more and more tribalist form. The radical traditions of nationalism were submitted to

this dynamic because the powers of the state did not care to, or were not able to, rearticulate socially and politically the rural and the urban. Such a hypothesis is not entirely new and original but Mamdani refers to it all through this book in a very systematic way. It is applied equally to South Africa and the simplicity of the message makes it quite appealing. We will debate its theoretical input later.

Decentralised despotism is indirect rule: land stays outside the market economy and so-called customary law becomes an official instrument of control. The anthropologist is surprised by the extremely schematic description of precolonial societies from which emanates Mamdani's logic. In the third chapter, the author describes at length the genesis of South Africa. Hence the definition of apartheid (p101) as a combination of decentralised despotism in the rural reserves (indirect rule) and of centralised despotism in the urban areas (direct rule). Therefore racial discrimination is conserved together with the tribal authorities. The Ivory Coast and Kenya come to mind here also. Mamdani additionally mentions Senegal but his explanation seems quite sketchy to me. The theory of such a system is based on the judicial institution of customary law. This fourth chapter is fundamental even if this topic is quite forgotten today, especially in French Africanist studies. Later the author reviews the peasantry, the status of land, the role of forced labour. He refers to extra-economic coercion which continues after independence. The examples of Swaziland, Tanzania and Mozambique are given.

To separate the enforcement of power from the resistance which it provokes and builds on is too rigid a dichotomy. It seems as if Mamdani's 'structural marxist unconsciousness' is still present though we know that he has abandoned such a view for many years already (Mamdani and Wamba, 1995). Africanist historians such as Beinart, Lonsdale and Ranger have for some time rather promoted a more dialectical view of social action and initiative.

The second part of the book is more important politically but the demonstration is both one-sided (only Uganda and South Africa are explored) and too general. Mamdani deals on the one hand with Ugandan peasant movements (Ruwenzururu), the National Resistance Army of Museveni and, on the other, with the urban movements in the townships, the hostels and the factories in South Africa. The sixth chapter is devoted to the other face of tribalism, to tribalism as a social movement and not as an outcome of the manipulation of the state and its apparatuses. Mamdani is not 'pro-ethnic' but he analyses the content of these movements in the light of democratic demands, of social stratification and shows that they could be the bases of movements straddling the rural and the urban (but which they are not). He discusses John Lonsdale's view of ethnicity but I think he is mistaken when he considers the latter's position as 'primordial'. As for his

understanding of the NRA, it is one thing to highlight its successes before its accession to power and another to review this success in the light of the remaking of the Ugandan state after 1986.

The last and most lengthy chapter is devoted to South Africa. Mamdani describes the migrant political economy and its evolution during the last 25 years. The basic question is still about the nature of the links between the rural origins and the 'urban' settings. Both for the workerist and populist activists of the 1980s, the political community was that of the township and not that of the rural Bantustan setting. The author analyses in some detail the cases of Durban and Alexandra where he has conducted research interviews. He explains the changing position of the hostels and the 'rural', semi-indirect rule function the *indunas* come to play. This conservative view of Inkatha puts into question the 'urban' nature of the ANC but it is true that there has been no real reform of ANC perspectives on urban-rural relations since 1994. I think that the violence of the 1987-94 period has a very complex make-up and that any too general or simple theory may be dangerous *especially for future South African political reflection*.

The conclusion is devoted to analyses of the social forces that can promote a positive link between the rural and urban. The ordinary clientelist relationships have to be discarded: even the radical forms of nationalism haven't been able to transcend them after independence. Decentralised despotism exacerbates ethnic divisions and centralised despotism exacerbates the rural/urban ones. Such a perspective enables Mamdani to criticise both a mere political economy conception of the social world (mode of production theory) and a political democratisation/governance one. Mamdani's insights are usually to the point but *Citizen and Subject* is a book of one and only one idea: African history is best explained by the gap between rural and urban and the best example of this colonial outcome is South Africa, typical rather than exceptional. This is a very schematic interpretation of the past and present of the continent: all the works of anthropology, history, political science that I have read in the last 15 years try to overcome this Western (and colonial) prejudice! Rural/urban links in Africa constitute a very complex social reality. Unravelling them transcends the stereotypical colonial and postcolonial structures. We cannot separate civil and tribal society neatly and ignore the gendered linkages which define African societies and cultures. A Pan-African (in the social science, not the nationalist or ideological sense) vision should be worked out very carefully through detailed comparison and an understanding of the dialectics of the level of analyses (local, regional, national) and of types of social groupings (kin relationships, rural and urban settings, professional, ethnic, public and private spheres). My limited understanding of South African society and its social fabric does not allow,

scientifically and politically, for such a generalised model. This book does not do justice to the specific complexities of Black Africa. Yet this knowledge is critical in order to deconstruct the dogmatic dual interpretation of apartheid and the struggle waged against it. Mamdani's views are helpful and propose a unified vision of African history. But its analytical and methodological efficacy is questionable, even more so if the political future of the continent (and of course South Africa) is to be built from its conclusions.

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