

Mahmood Mamdani

***Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism***

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018, ISBN: 9781400889716, 384 pp., £22.00 paperback.)

Prof Mahmood Mamdani's (2018) book *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa the Legacy of Late Colonialism* is the second edition of a book published by Princeton University Press in 1996. *Citizen and Subject* reveals the challenges between Native Authority and Imperial Authority in the history of the colonial and post-colonial African nations. The book deals with the struggles of colonialist societies against settlers particularly in Uganda and South Africa.

If one looks at this work from within the South African context, the first edition came just two years after the general elections which brought an end to the Apartheid regime. The statements in both the first and second editions of *Citizen and Subject* resonate with the social reality at present.

In the preface of the new edition, Mamdani also responds to some of the criticisms to the previous publication. The first critique was that the work did not cover the whole continent. Mamdani responds that *Citizen and Subject* is not a historical work, stating that, 'it was a mistake to read the work as competing with the historians; rather, it needed to be read as using the work of historians to illuminate the present' (2018: xv). The second criticism was about the theoretical focus on 'indirect rule'. Mamdani responds by arguing that indirect rule is worthy of consideration since the state used customs instrumentally to wield power over colonial subjects, in his own words, to institute 'state violence'. He adds that indirect rule is still prevalent as a 'politicisation of cultural difference' and a form of statecraft to divide and rule.

Mamdani's perspective on the 'citizen' and 'subject' is theorised in the historical context of South Africa and Uganda in the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward. Mamdani states that, 'Citizenship would be a privilege of the civilised; the uncivilised would be subject to an all-round tutelage' (2018: 18). The so-called 'uncivilised' may have few civil rights, but no political rights. Mamdani quotes Cecil Rhodes, 'Equal rights for all civilised men', precisely to demonstrate that there were two classes of men in the colony, the civilised and uncivilised men. Statements made at that time clearly exemplify the British perspective towards citizens and subjects in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, when a Muslim candidate, Ahmed Ataulah Effendi stood for Cape Parliamentary elections, he was criticised as being uncivilised because of his 'non-white' status and Muslim religious identity. A local newspaper in Durban, *Invo Zabanstundu*, reported that, 'The British Empire is what it is because it is the nicest civilising power in the world. Cape Town has to be civilised up to English standards. What attitude does the Effendi assume toward civilisation?' (1894: 10).

Mamdani explains how colonial subjects were governed either through direct or indirect rule. With direct rule, the colonial state controlled the subjects centrally using European laws, whereas with indirect rule, the state controlled them through tribal leadership using customary laws as well. Mamdani refers to direct rule as 'centralised despotism' and indirect rule as a mediated, 'decentralised despotism'. Direct rule was racially discriminatory towards the natives who were regarded as uncivilised. Indirect rule, on the other hand, was also discriminatory at the tribal level, because tribalism was instrumentally used if not created to facilitate indirect rule (2018: xiii).

*Citizen and Subject* explains how the ghastly territorial segregation in colonial South Africa was shaped under the British rule with the cooperation of Afrikaners from the 1800s to the Apartheid period. This also featured in the works of non-African scholars in the 1960s (Mansur, 1962). Mamdani reminds the readers of colonialists like General Smuts, who attempted to 'de-Africanize the African'. In his talk at Oxford in 1929, Smuts stated, 'de-Africanize the African and turn him either into a beast of the field or into a pseudo European. African was good as a potential European; his social and political culture was bad, barbaric and only deserving to be stamped out root and branch'. This clearly shows that Smuts's aim was not just territorial segregation but also a racial one (2018: 5-6). Mamdani uses Smuts's statement as evidence for the fact that white supremacists tried to erase African ways of life in the process of colonising African states.

According to Mamdani, the brotherhood of Boer supremacists reinforced the system of racial domination, which Smuts termed as 'institutional segregation'. This became a question of life and death for people of colour. To Mamdani, 'The context in which Apartheid came to be implemented made for its particularly harsh features, for to rule natives through their institutions, one first had to push natives back into the confines of native institutions' (2018: 7). According to Fatimah Mansoor, 'Indeed the harsh segregationist system of Apartheid regime was so cruel for natives of South Africa and Congo' (Mansur, 19). Archival documents illustrate Mamdani's argument regarding territorial and racial discrimination in colonial South Africa. For instance, in order to protest against territorial segregation, the chairman of the Cape Muslim Community, Hesham Neamatollah Effendi delivered a talk in Cape Town as follows:

The Town Council of Cape Town asking Parliament for powers to establish locations for the Asiatic and other coloured people. Now we, as a Muslim community are included in one or the other although there are many European Muslims here, but for the sake of being Muslims, they are classified as Coloured or Asiatic. Now what we are going to do? Are we going to sit still and allow them to march us the station with our wives and

children like sheep, as was done to do natives? No, certainly not...! We shall have to protest against such Legislation (1903: 3).

As understood from the speech of Hesham Neamatollah Effendi, Muslims experienced racial discrimination at the Cape, which even included white skinned Ottoman Scholars, who were classified as Asiatic or Coloured because of their religious identity as Muslims. Therefore, they decided to fight against racism with local Muslims in solidarity, as “subjects” of the colonial state.

From this perspective, it can be said that territorial segregation and racial discrimination were regarded as a critical problem for non-whites in South Africa, and primary sources demonstrate the dangers of this policy implementation, as also pointed out in Hesham Effendi’s speech. Still, Mamdani notes that neither institutional segregation nor apartheid was a South African invention. To him, apartheid was a form of despotism in the colonial state, both ethnic and racial (2018: 26).

Mamdani pursued his argument with an analysis of the occupation of the Cape Peninsula by the British Empire, a subject also covered by the Black intellectual Sol Plaatje (2007: 34). In order to show the background of the British segregation system in South Africa, Mamdani pointed out that the first phase of segregation took place with indigenous Khoikhoi and Malay Slaves, who constituted a minority within the Cape population. The second phase began with the conquest of Xhosa people from 1779 to 1878 as a campaign against “Kaffir” people, called *Kaffir Wars*. To Mamdani, almost a century of colonial encounter resulted in the killing of cattle ‘breaking the back of the Xhosa and Thembu peoples who lived in British Kaffaria’ (2018: 66). According to Mamdani, the main aim of these cruel implementations was to keep natives under their control. Indeed, as Mamdani mentioned, ‘the tenor of Cape liberalism was largely shaped by the experiences of protracted African resistance: the century-long Kaffir wars’ (2018: 7).

On the whole, Mamdani’s general view in *Citizen and Subject* is that of the public as citizens and subjects from a historical perspective. The difference between his analysis and that of western scholars is that Mamdani theorises the colonial encounter from the bottom-up, even emphasising the ways in which customary law was used as a tool of oppression. From this perspective, Mamdani’s book can be considered as a sociological treatise on African studies, illuminating the underlining political structures that endure in the post-colonial era. In his concluding chapter, he calls for the rural and the urban political spaces to ‘be transformed simultaneously’ through social processes rather than through state directed top-down measures (2018: 301).

The only criticism I would like to highlight is that Mamdani’s analyses on the white supremacy in South Africa would be more accurate if Mamdani could have used more local sources from South Africa. Therefore, the

excerpts of old newspapers used in this review corroborate the historical episodes mentioned by Mamdani in his book. Had he used more local sources, he would be able to offer another dimension to the narrative about citizens and subjects from the perspective of the oppressed.

Still, the limited use of local archival documents in Mamdani's work does not discredit his hypothesis about rulers such as Smuts and Rhodes, and their racist attitude and actions towards subjects in South Africa. One must remember *Citizen and Subject* is written from a sociological perspective, rather than a historical one. *This* methodology will help scholars from sociology, politics and anthropology to name a few, to revisit existing approaches in the decolonising African societies and their political dispensations.

Halim Gencoglu

University of Cape Town

Gnchal001@myuct.ac.za

**Reference list:**

*Cape Argus*, 19 March 1903, "South African Moslems Association", p. 3, Cape Town

*Cape Argus*, 19 March 1903, "South African Moslems Association", p. 3, Cape Town

*Invo Zabantsundu* (Native Opinion), 10 January 1894.

Mamdani, M. 2018. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mansur, F. 1962. *Process of independence*. London, Routledge & Paul.

Plaatje, S. T. 2007. *Native life in South Africa*. p. 34, Northlands [South Africa], Picador Africa.