

Mahmood Mamdani. *Neither Settler Nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2020. 416 pages. Hardcover, \$29.95.

Mahmood Mamdani, Columbia University distinguished professor of government, raises fundamental existential questions as to why many postcolonial nations seek to exclude some groups within their borders from genuine membership of their communities. Why, Mamdani asks, is there increasing violence and bloodletting in new independent nation-states? His thought-provoking analyses contribute to our understanding of various dimensions of colonial legacy, including postcolonial politics, population transfers and genocide against targeted ethnic groups and increasing violence through civil wars. *Neither Settler Nor Native* focuses on the implications for the shaping of political community in postcolonial societies.

In retracing the lineage of political modernity, Mamdani persuasively illustrates that the nation-state was a product of European colonialism. Using relevant case studies from North America, Germany, Israel/Palestine, South Africa to Sudan/South Sudan, Mamdani argues that the colonial state and the nation-state have been reciprocally set up through the politicization of ethnic/religious national majorities at the cost of contrived ‘permanent minorities.’ Mamdani’s illustrations go back to the establishment of the Spanish state through ethnic cleansing and the 1492 deportations of Jews and Moors by the Castilian monarchy. The objective was nation-building, designed purposefully to change the people within the territory and to create a cultural homogeneity, in terms of a homogenous population, religion and country. Mamdani notes that the Castilian model did not spread in Europe quickly, but was suppressed by the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia in which European nation-states offered, insofar as minorities did not revolt, to end the persecution of internal minorities.

The book has six chapters, titled thus: “The Indian Question in the United States;” “Nuremberg: The Failure of Denazification;” “Settlers and Natives in *Apartheid* South Africa;”

“Sudan: Colonialism, Independence, and Secession;” “The Israel/Palestine Question;” and “Decolonizing the Political Community.” Mamdani’s analyses begin with the European settler colonization of the Americas, especially the dispossession and displacement of native populations and their near genocidal extermination. He contends that the United States served as a template for settler-colonialism, which was adopted not only by the Nazi regime, but also by *Apartheid* South Africa and the state of Israel. He provides detailed descriptions of ethnic cleansing, even genocide, of Native Americans, including their quarantine into reservations. Mamdani sees the American example as a poster child of the violent exclusion built into the nation-state project in a colonial context. In his description, the segregation of the autochthonous populations into internment camps in the United States—and Canada as well—produced both a permanent native underclass and a settler nation. Furthermore, the model was used both by the Nazis to ‘settle’ the Jewish Question and by the Allies after Nuremberg to alter the boundaries of nation-states in Eastern Europe through ethnic minority cleansing. Adolf Hitler reportedly praised the US Jim Crow laws in *Mein Kampf* and boasted about following the American example. In effect, the creation of the Israeli state as a Jewish homeland rid Germany of a religious/ethnic minority and crystallized it as a homogenous majority nation-state; alas, in contradiction of the spirit of Westphalia.

What is more, Mamdani criticized the Nuremberg trials as a deliberate choice of option by the Allies to criminalize individual perpetrators of Nazi atrocities instead of examining Nazism as a political project and, hence, the violence carried out by, and in the name, of the nation-state. Understandably, to question Nazism as a political question would have implicated the Allies, who had similar skeletons in their closet. Mamdani clearly shows how the Allies’ treatment of Nazism as simply the criminal wrongdoings of individual actors, most of whom

were tried, convicted, and sometimes executed by World War II victors guaranteed that the Nazi political project was never exposed and spurned. Implicitly, the refusal to acknowledge the political foundations of Nazism was that the structural and philosophical foundation for the nation-state was never questioned. Hence, the much-needed reimagining of modern political organization did not happen. In addition, the political projects that engender violent conflicts stem from efforts by states to rally national majorities to eliminate national minorities. Conflict and violence, Mamdani asserts, are designed to cement whose group identity will define the nation-state's identity. Unequivocally, he argues that political violence demands political solutions, not criminal justice for perpetrators and "victim justice" for survivors.

Prior to the creation of the state of Israel, the British Mandate segregated Arabs into separate homelands. Mamdani drew similarities to the expulsion of Palestinians after the creation of Israel in 1948 as a Jewish state. In their nation-state project, Zionist settlers in Palestine forced out non-Jews from their land and homes to make space for Diasporan Jews returning to the Jewish homeland. Thus, in Israel, Palestinians became 'permanent minorities' not only within Israel proper, but also in the Occupied West Bank. Today, with intermittent violent flare ups, the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict seem to have defied resolution. In South Africa, European settlers, in their nation-state project, forced Blacks into tribal homelands called *Bantustans* in a bid to implement its *Apartheid* (a.k.a. Separate Development) policy. Although Mamdani was not impressed with the South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, he, nonetheless, expressed optimism about the struggles to achieve a new political settlement, *sans* permanent minorities. The South African case serves as a typical example of political modernity in which a multiracial democratic arrangement could be conceived and put in place.

Sudan/South Sudan is Mamdani's fifth case study of the legacy of European colonialism. Sudan, colonized by Britain, was structured with the predominantly Arab north as the national majority and African ethnic groups in the south as the national minority. Political conflicts between Sudanese Arabs and Africans have raged since independence in 1956, culminating in the eventual secession of South Sudan in 2011. Barely two years later in 2013, internal ethnic disagreements about ethnic group primacy and spoils of office boiled over into armed, bloody conflict. In calling for the decolonization of politics, Mamdani draws attention especially to the need for a rethink of political community past majorities and minorities. *Neither Settler Nor Native* is an outstanding addition to the body of literature on Political Thought.

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