What is 'civil' about 'civil society' in Africa?
A Review Essay

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Abstract

Careful consideration of Hann and Dunn's edited volume of anthropological essays on civil society shows that Mahmood Mamdani, in his recent book Citizen and Subject is unaware of extensive anthropological studies on rural conflict, urban politics, migration, and power, and thus is condemned to re-invent these particular wheels from a position of naiveté. This shows the limits of a strictly model-driven Western-derived, political science approach in African studies, since cultural factors [concepts of power, the person, witchcraft, polity, chiefship] are largely ignored. Mamdani's book has value primarily as a comparison of recent political transition in Uganda and South African, but appears to misunderstand South African cultural and social factors. In particular, the limits of the civil society idea in its application to African political communities and countries is not considered. This review argues for an approach that takes different African cultural forms more seriously.

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Civil society the concept and the phrase has emerged recently as a major topic of concern among social scientists. But the notion 'civil society' engages a number of debates, concerns and problems already deeply rooted in anthropology and the social sciences. Contemporary discussions of 'civil society' draw more than the root word 'civil-' from the early-20th century and even 19th century's ideas about civilisation and civility. The European and South African 'revolutions' of 1989-92 [for which we still have no name] have underlined the importance of the concept. Donors and foreign governments now tell Africa that what it needs most is some/more 'civil society'. While seeking new syntheses, it is as if we are condemned to repeat history, especially when our own moment seems to fall apart.

Early political economists like Adam Ferguson in his Essay on the History of Civil Society [1767] argued that 'civil society' [that is, the non-political organisations] gave the political [that is, the state] its form and impetus. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the revolutions in Czechoslovakia and Poland and emergence of new countries like Chechnia and Belorus from the remnants of the Soviet empire, however, civil society has been newly invoked the form of political order in the aftermath of the collapse of the state. In Africa, the promotion of 'civil society' is looked to as a way out of the upward spiral of violence and its economic and
political decline. Civil society is avidly discussed and initiatives for its promotion are funded! while ideas like 'development', 'nation building' and 'modernisation' fall more out of fashion every day.

Two books, Civil Society: Challenging Western Models, edited by Chris Hann and Elizabeth Dunn, and Mahmood Mamdani's Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism usefully address these concerns. The first is a collection of studies on what the phrase might [or might not] mean among American Mormons in Utah, in London, the former East Germany, Poland, Russia's arctic frontier, Albania, Turkey, Jordan and Syria, Indonesia, the Sichuan countryside, and Japan. Almost everywhere but Africa. Mamdani's book partially fills this gap.

Civil society is, however, a very slippery category. Various, it can be held to precede the state [Adam Ferguson in 1767, LH Morgan in 1872], or to appear after the collapse of the state [Skalnik]; to stand between the state and the community [Hann in Hann and Dunn], to promote state hegemony while not being part of the state [Gramsci], to oppress the working classes [Marx], or to liberate the working classes [Vaclav Havel]; or, it can be imported, into Albania or China, for instance; or exported from Britain and America. Mamdani even argues that it can be one branch of a 'bifurcated state'. While the Hann and Dunn book offer new and exploratory studies, however, Mamdani's book tries to re-invent de novo a well established anthropological discussion of tribe and ethnicity, townsmen and tribesmen, rural and urban, colonial and native, that has been going on for some six decades at least.

Although Mamdani’s book claims all of Africa as its analytical terrain, it is largely a comparison between Uganda and South Africa. The thrust of Mamdani's comparison is to show that Indirect Rule in Uganda and Apartheid in South Africa were in some sense 'the same thing', or 'different forms' of the colonial state. In other words they both were colonial-sponsored strategies of power that 'fused' the powers of government in the despotic 'native authorities' while excluding them from 'citizenship' in the colonial 'nation'. Moreover, he claims that these forms lie everywhere at the heart of Africa's crisis of government. The day may be over for such sweeping analyses. For one thing they make the continent seem empty of political diversity or creative response to its predicaments. Peter Pels, for instance, has recently argued that 'the study of "colonialism" faces a paradox: while its object is increasingly recognised as crucial to any understanding of the practice of anthropology, it has at the same time lost the meaningful unity of a systematic and intentional project of rule' [Pels 1996:738]. For Mamdani, however, it is all of a piece with one motivating and organising logic.

At first, Mamdani's project attracted me greatly since he and I have some background in common. After completing a Ph.D. in Government [Political Science] at Harvard University, he went to Uganda to direct a research centre, and subsequently came to South Africa as head of the African Studies Centre at University of Cape Town. I also had lived in Uganda from 1969 until after Idi Amin's coup, working as a science teacher in Rubaga [the capital of the old kingdom of Buganda] and studying at Makerere University. A few years later I wrote an MA thesis at the University of Chicago on the Kingdom of Buganda and a PhD on Tanzania, before coming to the University of Cape Town where I inevitably began to specialise in South Africa. So, apart from the clear importance of Mamdani's work itself, our differently-weighted but parallel experience in Uganda and South Africa drew me to the book. It has also led me to conclude that the fundamental assumptions in Mamdani's book are wrong.
In particular, I think he may have been as beguiled by apparent similarities between South Africa and East Africa as I was. Words are particularly treacherous, especially when one relies mainly on the academic literature. Words like 'tribal', 'rural', township, and 'traditional', and even 'colonial' and 'European', all have considerably different meanings in South Africa compared with the rest of Africa. In South Africa both black and white peoples were conquered and colonised by Britain. The homogeneity of 'whites' or 'blacks' was never so obvious to Black South Africans as it has seemed to the academics or others in Africa. The rural in South Africa is nowhere as rural as it is in Uganda or Tanzania or Zambia, and the town is never fully urban in South Africa. Indeed, 'urbanism' or 'the township' mean quite different things to Ugandans, Zambians and South Africans. So does 'politics' and 'society'. Thus the specific vocabulary that Mamdani employs often leads him unwittingly to compare chalk with cheese. This is especially true of his comparison between apartheid and 'indirect rule'.

It was a different experience that led me to Hann and Dunn's collection. My current work in Mpumalanga and Northern Provinces in South Africa suggests to me that there is nothing there quite like the 'civil society' I read about. The state recently thought all powerful has crumbled with the collapse of the old Homelands of Lebowa and Gazankulu. The new Provincial administrations appear confused. There is no funding at all for the new local government authorities that are thus paralysed. Order what there is of it is maintained by family and kin groups, 'traditional authorities' [chiefs and indunas who have effectively no mandate under the new constitution], church organisations such as the Zionist Christian Church, traditional healers, groups of youth and young men who call themselves 'civics', some parastatals such the electrical supplier ESCOM, and other informal organisations such as dance societies and initiation schools with their cohorts. Few of these would count as 'civil society' under current theories which allow us to conceive of civil society only in relation to state institutions where civil society is said either to 'resist' the state or to 'mediate' between the state and the people. Indeed they might be described as 'tribal', except for the absence of any form of tribalism. Most organisations do not promote an idea of the public good or even of 'a society' [civil or not]. They are closed to all but insiders [converts, the healed, the initiated, kin, neighbours, etc.] but are inclusive of local linguistic diversity and differences of 'custom'. The state's failure to collect taxes is a direct result of people's refusal to pay taxes [together with wholly ineffective enforcement]; but, is this 'resistance'? a lack of interest? or merely a refusal to get involved? The dearth of effective state institutions and the very low level of involvement with political parties, interest groups or other ostensibly political organisation must force us to ask what civil society could possibly mean here with neither an effective state nor effective political organisations.

As one theorist of civil society, J A Hall has pointed out, the development of civil society in 18th century Europe appears to be linked to the 'enormous jump in fiscal extraction' on the part of European state [cited by Knight in Hann and Dunn, p. 238]. In Mpumalanga Province, few people pay tax to the state, and virtually no services are provided by the state [though schools and roads still function minimally]. On the other hand, relatively large sums are voluntarily paid to chiefs, churches, and healers by local residents, none of which have any statutory authority. Although data is scarce by which the decline in taxation could be quantified, programmes of ungovernability as resistance in the black residential areas of South Africa have led to the almost total suspension of taxation. Poor administration has led to a further decline, with many potential taxpayers not even known to the government.
In the absence of fiscal extraction and of provision of state services, and in the absence of enforceable market or formal law in large areas, can that which remains, then, be called 'civil society'? If not, is it 'tribal', as Mamdani claims? Mamdani's analysis implies this is a degeneration or atavistic regression to the past. But what does 'tribal' mean when allegiance to the chief is voluntary and contingent? Are they citizens of alternative sub-states? With respect to Mamdani's dichotomy, the supposed non-citizens are not 'subjects' either. Even in areas of South Africa where chiefship or "native authorities" still function, I doubt whether anything approaching a majority of the population within their rough jurisdiction would declare themselves to be followers. In large areas of contemporary South Africa Western Cape, Northern Cape, Northwest, Gauteng there were no chiefs in any case, and no native authorities. Perhaps, as I suspect, 'civil society' and 'tribe' are concepts that just do not fit here at all?

Fortunately, the anthropological essays in Hann and Dunn's volume shed much light on situations like those in north-eastern South Africa. These essays explore how something like civil society might exist in the absence of state institutions. They argue, correctly I think, that the notion is deeply embedded in European history and consciousness, and it may not be possible to generalise to all political forms. Stephen Sampson, for instance, says that people call NGOs in Albania 'civil society', but foreign donor states and individuals, not Albanians, fund them and control them. He argues that the wealth of NGOs appears to native Albanians to be a kind of magic. This distinguishes the 'organic' civil society of Euro-American countries from the derivative and sponsored 'civil' institutions of basket cases like Albania or Tanzania. John Knight's article on a small mountain village in Japan also raises similar questions. Even in an economic power-house like Japan, rural villages like the one he studied are subsidised by the national government. While there is a lively village life, and strong local identity, it seems to him that it is not a 'civil society' in the way the term has been used in Europe. It does not in any way mediate between the state and the people, nor does it either oppose or support state power. The national and village identities are both strongly felt, and more or less parallel. The Hegelian 'dialectic' of People vs. The State, so essential to European ideas of civil society, is apparently absent.

Civil society became a battle cry of Vaclav Havel's 'velvet revolution'. As Eastern Europeans sought different, more democratic and 'human' ways of changing political life in the context of the state and within the parameters of state control, the concept of civil society shone forth [Hann and Dunn]. Soviet communism suppressed both the practice and discussion of civil society. Havel saw civil society as the thin end of wedge between the oppressive Russian state and the central European peoples. Michael Buchowski [in Hann and Dunn], a Polish anthropologist, argues for instance, that 'Western intellectuals' had taken the totalitarian model to be absolute, and thus could not 'possibly have been aware' that 'civil society itself continued to thrive at the grass-roots level.' Like Havel, Buchowski argues that civil society had been an invisible but effective mediator, and that it became an agent for resistance and change.

For Mamdani, however, it is the achievement of this kind of civil society that is still the goal in Africa. Most of the anthropologists in Hann and Dunn's volume find these concepts to be so deeply rooted in the specificity of European history as to be virtually useless as analytical categories in other societies and cultures. Others generalise these terms in their analysis of other cultures and other countries in an effort to maintain the comparative project by comparing comparables. Still others attack the very notion of 'society' and the 'civil' at
their roots, arguing that they are interesting cultural products of European cultural history. Hann and Dunn's edited collection and Mamdani's book thus pass each other unawares. Perhaps its is consistent with what Mamdani calls 'Afro-pessimism' the idea that civil society has failed in Africa, or does not exist that none of the authors in Civil Society discuss Africa.

This seems to be the case in the rural areas where I am working, for instance. There, belief in witches would say the existence of witches strongly limits development of civil institutions based on ideas of fundamental human right and duties of individuals as citizens. These limits are not the consequence of a 'tribal' ideology, or of a 'primitive mentality'. Rather, they indicate a quite fundamentally different model of human behaviour and motivation, one that is largely inconsistent with the individualism of Western European cultures. Indeed, this is one of the conundrums that confronted the authors of South Africa's new constitution, just as it was for colonial and apartheid administrators. These problems are far from solved, or even adequately described and comprehended. Mamdani's book shows off the current state of African theories, but it also shows up their weaknesses. We need new approaches.

Mamdani, for instance, characterises 'migrants' as 'free peasants in an urban industrial setting' [219]. In other words, he chooses to see them in approximately European terms the old South African orthodoxy rather than as people with fundamentally different ideas of who they are, but who are nevertheless fully incorporated into South Africa's diverse polity and economy. The collapse long ago of South African 'peasant' agriculture, and the vast and sustained flow of people between the cities and rural areas negates this naïve view. Moreover, since most households are dependant on income earned in urban areas, and because many have lived there and adopted its styles, it is scarcely credible to call them 'peasants'. The rigorous divide between rural and urban, the 'peasant' and the 'working class', the 'citizen' and 'subject', then, misses the point by ignoring the nuances of real complexity. Mamdani sees colonialism as a 'totalising strategy' that excluded those it ruled from the embrace of civil society while continuing to exercise power over them. He believes that the 'mainstream nationalists' during the period of de-colonialisation in Africa 'understood colonial oppression as primarily an exclusion from civil society'[289]; moreover, 'an exclusion that was based primarily on race'. Of course, we can say much the same thing about central Europe if we replace 'colonial' with 'soviet' and 'race' with 'nationality.' [South African uses of the term 'race' are more like the European 'nationality' than they are like Euro-American use of the word race.] Similarity between Buchowski and Mamdani that is, between Poland and Africa-- is, perhaps, not surprising. Indeed, Mamdani draws attention to this [5]. What is problematic, however, is the perplexing role of 'politics' in each case. We usually understand 'politics' as both the power of the state, and the resistance to that power, as for instance, in the idea that civil society stands against the state and for The People. Mamdani sees both these contradictory potentials in Hegel, and understands Gramsci and Marx as having elaborated on different aspects of the Hegelian confusion. This does not clarify Hegel nor does does justice to the complex intellectual history.

Fortunately, Hann is clearer and more explicit in identifying "two senses of "political society"." One sense, the narrower one, revolves around the dualism that opposes the power of the state to the power of the people. Political society, in this view, is "the activities of the population as it engages actively with matters of government and power" [Hann, pg. 5], a view which Hann associates with Tocqueville and the 'liberal-individualist' approach. Here, both the state and the people are distinct from 'civil society' that is constituted by the 'non-
political' associations that citizens engage in because of a 'habit of association'. This understanding of civil society should be familiar to all scholars concerned with South Africa since it is implicit in the name given to these associations in most of Africa: 'Non-governmental organisations,' or NGOs. These organisations are often responsible for administration of much of Africa's public economy, culture and society. Politicians and scholars imagine that these are 'non-political' and constitute a mediating third term in the State v. The People dualism that both Marxist-Gramscian and liberal theories rely upon. Civil society is, under this conception, 'non-political', a view that Hann deplores as defective in an anthropological project that seriously attempts to go beyond standard European assumptions. The second sense, and the broader one according to Hann, is the one that locates civil society within the ambit of the political. Any contest over 'values and ideals', according to Hann, is 'inherently political'. According to this view, then, the contest over meanings and values is no less political than the contest over officers of the state, or over land and other forms of capital. Thus, inasmuch as an organisation deemed to be part of 'civil society' promotes or attacks social values and ideals [and virtually all do], it is political. He condemns 'leaders of modern western states' who promote the view that the transfer of responsibilities and functions away from elected bodies to expert groups is 'anti-statist' or non-political. The negative definition given to these organisations that they are NOT-government, NOT of the state, and thus non governmental Organisations [NGOs] only confuses matters. The fact that there is considerable conflict between the state and NGOs over precisely who should control the major part of donor funding, and over attempts by the State in South Africa and Zimbabwe to control NGOs through legislation, are indications of what Hann would call their inherently political nature. In South Africa, it is NGOs that most people identify as 'civil society'. NGOs in Africa, however, frequently compete with government, or fulfil its proper functions where these can no longer be fulfilled by the state itself. Thus, it is not clear that they necessarily qualify as 'civil society', especially in comparison with Euro-America. Mamdani's analysis of contemporary Africa, however, relies primarily on the Hann's first sense of political society.

The contrast pointed to in his title between citizen and subject is emblematic of his approach. For him, the state in Africa is 'bifurcated' by a split between the citizen and the subject. The citizen is a member of civil society and is fully incorporated into the politics of the rational-individualist state. The subject, by contrast, is ruled by 'tradition' and 'custom' under the institutions of the chiefs and kings, and is not included in citizenship in the state. For Mamdani, subjects are people who believe that the authority of chiefs and kings under colonialism and under apartheid in South Africa rests on indigenous pre-colonial African institutions. Citizens live under the authority of the state and act politically, while subjects live under the authority of 'native authorities' and act in a 'traditional', that is, non-political way. Mamdani argues that the colonial regimes in Africa did not seek to marginalise the 'natives' but rather to incorporate them into the 'arena of colonial power' [15] that is, within the ambit of political power, but outside of 'politics'. The genius of colonialism, then, was that it did include African 'natives', but under a different 'form of the state'. 'Indirect rule' in colonial British Africa, and apartheid in South Africa, best exemplify Mamdani's perceptions. The idea that the 'subject' is somehow both included in the state but simultaneously excluded from it leads Mamdani to put forward the notion of the 'bifurcated state'.

Both apartheid and colonialism, according to Mamdani, sought to 'capture the peasantry' [in Goran Hyden's memorable phrase] by incorporating them into a form of state that
resembled African traditional forms, but which fundamentally undermined them. This sets up a distinction between 'civil society' and 'tribal society'. The promotion of ethnic differentiation fostered what amounts to a constant state of civil war between tribes [=ethnic groups] in Africa. Both chiefship and ethnicity, thus, are portrayed as products of colonialism, not of the African past, nor as a 'pidginised' version of both [Pels 1996]. Moreover, Mamdani argues that the form of the state in contemporary Africa owes its genesis to colonialism [and to apartheid that is, for Mamdani, 'actually the generic form of the colonial state in Africa.' [Mamdani 8].

Mamdani's analysis then stands firmly in the tradition of Weber, Talcott Parsons, and what Hann calls the 'narrower' view of political society. It also re-invents an earlier South African discourse, now discredited in South Africa, about the 'native' coming to the city. His views seem to contradict those of South African anthropologists such as Monica Wilson and Max Gluckman. His focus does not allow him to glimpse the 'broader' view of political society that Hann has outlined, one that is amenable to anthropological work that shows the falseness of this claim. Parts of this literature clearly anticipate Mamdani's arguments by up to 50 years, especially in the work of Max Gluckman, the members of the Rhodes-Livingston Institute, and the Manchester school of anthropology that Gluckman established. This gaping lacuna is the principle failure of the book.

In making this distinction, Mamdani adheres closely to Max Weber's notion that the 'traditional' was not political but rather pre-political. Here he seems to come very close to Smuts's idea that the 'natives' Mamdani's 'subjects' of chiefs] are 'not ready for politics'. This, in turn, is fully consistent with nineteenth century theories of Sir Henry Maine, Lewis Henry Morgan and Karl Marx. The theories attempted to explain the emergence of political society [Morgan's civitas, Marx's bourgeois society] from a previous era of 'primitive society' [Morgan's societas, Witfogel's oriental despotism, Marx's feudalism, and today's traditional or tribal society]. All linked this emergence with the development of city-states wherein civilised politics [= 'citified citiness' if we translate the Latin and Greek root words] emerged. Mamdani's fundamental claim is that the rural [he uses Ugandan and South African examples] is the domain of the non/pre-political subject while the urban is the domain of the citizen. One long chapter, 'The Rural in the Urban: Migrant Workers in South Africa', explains this.

He fails to recognise that this is certainly nothing new. Anthropologists have argued against precisely such dichotomies since 1936 when Monica Hunter wrote Reaction to Conquest: Effects of Contact with Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa [with a laudatory introduction by Jan Smuts]. It seemed to her then that it would be 'evident to the most casual observer that in the meeting of Bantu and European cultures both are modified. European culture is influenced by the fact that Europeans in Africa are in daily contact with Bantu, and Bantu culture is influenced by the presence of Europeans'. In the introduction to the second edition of 1960, she wrote somewhat it retrospect,

The expressed policy of the Government since 1948 has been to increase the power of traditional chiefs and establish 'Bantu Authorities' which, at some unspecified future date, might become 'independent'. Great stress has been lain by the Government on the distinction between so-called 'ethnic groups and attempts made to foster the solidarity of each group in opposition to others, by such methods as compelling people in urban areas to live in their own 'ethnic' quarter. There has been considerable publicity about the
participation of the Pondo chiefs in 'Bantu Authorities' . . . but the chief of Western Pondoland has made it very clear that he is no isolationist. It is plain that the creation of "Bantu Authorities does not mean the return of a tribal society. 'Tribalism' in any precise sense, depended upon an isolation and independence which have long since disappeared in Pondoland. Economically and politically it is inextricably linked with the rest of South Africa.

Indeed, Mamdani's account of tribalism and the Native Authority offers little that Monica and Godfrey Wilson or Max Gluckman did not already say. Mamdani sees tribalism as a deliberate creation of the 'bifurcated state', equally represented in indirect rule and apartheid. He holds that the violence of the tribal condition that amounts to a constant state of 'civil war' is the consequence of administrative decision, not historical and social process. Mamdani claims that 'tribes' or 'ethnic groups' are simultaneously coherent and at war. Though he does not appear to be aware of it, this is precisely Gluckman's idea summed up in the phrase 'the peace in the feud'. Gluckman, for instance, said in a popular talk that

"In continental Africa and elsewhere groups were everywhere cut internally into a number of divisions... Social ties were thus established to link together people who in other contexts were enemies. Indeed, social cohesion appears to depend on this division of society into a series of opposed groups with cross-cutting memberships [1954: 67]"

His research on the Zulu kingdom convinced him that this was an essential part of the social process.

Law and order in the [pre-colonial] Zulu kingdom a kingdom which was powerful enough to destroy a British army at Isandlwana was manifestly maintained by armed power of the king . . . At this stage of political development, where an integrating economic framework was lacking in the kingdom, civil wars did not break the natural unity but preserved that unity as a system. [1954:78].

Unfortunately, Mamdani's ignorance of Gluckman's more richly supported views leads to a conclusion that parallels that of the architects of the 'native policy' in the apartheid state. Specifically, they argued that the problem was the contamination of the urban by the rural. As if nothing has changed, this is precisely Mamdani's diagnosis of violence arising between Zulu urban hostel dwellers and the people of the surrounding townships. The restrictions on movement and residence under apartheid were designed to prevent just such a contamination. Mamdani's call to 'find new ways to link the urban and the rural' is hardly new, since 'solutions' to this 'problem' have been at the core of South African politics since the beginning of South African politics.

Civil society, and civilisation, thus, has long been inextricable from the ideas, institutions and even the architecture of the urban. In contrast, the rural was primitive, un-civilised [that is, un-citified] and barbaric ['of the beard'] rather than of the clean-shaven and washed face of the urban dweller. From its origins in Classical political philosophy and culture, then, the idea of the civil and of civilisation have been associated with complex social and cultural forms, including aspects of the body and its presentation. Mamdani seems largely unaware of the larger historical discursive context.

According to Hann, the contemporary discussion of 'civil society' arises historically primarily from its roots in the work of Alexis de Tocqueville, a French observer of the new American Republic and Georg Hegel, a philosopher and interested participant in the Prussian
State. He neglects Adam Ferguson, the great Scottish Enlightenment philosopher and Lewis Henry Morgan, an American lawyer and amateur anthropologist. Intimations of a theory of civil society are also present in the work of Niccoli Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes. Aristotle's Politics lays some of the groundwork on which the Enlightenment discussion depended. He identified the specifically political forms of social organisation with the polis, the ancient Greek city-state in which men who were 'fit to rule . . . rule and are ruled in turn'. In translation to Latin, the Greek word polis became the urbs, a population-dense political centre, or the civitas, the political centre, or town, of the client and conquered tribes. The social forms of the Greek polis or the 'political'-- thus became the models of political action as the basis of a civilised, urban-based society in European political thought. The Romans brought this to Britain, where the civitas was the geographical capital of the native tribes that is, a centre for 'indirect rule' while the colonia, towns inhabited and ruled by Romans that is, by citizens were more civilised [Wacher, Blagg 1997]. The fact that British colonial officials made the same distinctions wherever they ruled is scarcely surprising. It was their historical heritage, first of all, and one possibly the only one that every school boy knew. Since only school-boys were given authority, what they knew counted. What they knew was drawn largely from the Classics. Mamdani reinvents Hadrian. Karl Marx appropriated and translated these distinctions. Using the German term burger, or the French bourgeois to refer to the political centre much as Aristotle and the Roman jurists did [Crick 1970:24]. This opposition [and its source] is found in Marx's ethnological notebooks, in which his notes on Aristotle and Roman jurisprudence mingle with his notes on Lewis Henry Morgan's model of civil society [Krader 1974:21]. Aristotle, however, saw these differences as differences of kind, present in the nature [physei] of political or primitive man for which no transition was possible. By contrast, Morgan, the American Republican, like Marx, the German revolutionary, was concerned primarily with the transition from earlier, 'gentile society' [= kinship-based society] to civil [political] society. All assume without question that politics is urban [burgerlik/bourgeois/ civil/ civilised/ of the polis] while the rural or hinterland is not 'political'. This is the idea behind Mamdani's title: 'citizen' or 'subject': the citizen is 'urban' while the subject is 'rural'.

The language we use and its history out to be a central concern, then. In the 1860s, Morgan developed the thesis that the transition to civitas was caused by the differential material accumulation of land and capital in Ancient society. Marx readily incorporated much of Morgan's argument into his work. Gramsci, the leader of the Italian Communist Party in the 1920s takes over Marx's concepts of the transition, but adds from his own Italian tradition some of the ideas from Machiavelli's reading of the Roman political historian Lucrecius [to whom Marx also referred]. Like Machiavelli, Gramsci saw the development and importance of civil society as being primarily cultural what Machiavelli called virtó, a quality possessed by the ruling elites of the Italian city state of the sixteenth century but not by the powerless and the rural. Partly based on this, Gramsci usefully distinguished between civil society, the state and economic society [or Capitalism which had, for him, its own world-historical and inevitable logic]. For Gramsci, unlike other more orthodox Marxists, civil society could mediate between the State and the market, and could become the tool of the revolutionary something held to be impossible by Marx since he identified civil society with the market and capitalist oppression, that is, with the elites of the city, the famously so-called 'bourgeoisie'.

Within the anthropological discourse, the term has different connotations, and research has a somewhat different thrust than it does in political science and in history. Historians and
political scientist and philosophers have almost universally concentrated on European forms of the state, of 'civility', the civil order, and of society. Anthropologists have attempted to look at other, non-western forms of these concepts. Among the most penetrating and original is Clifford Geertz Negara [1980]. His account of the 'civil' in the pre-colonial Balinese village [banjar] is exemplary.

the hamlet was the fundamental civil community in Bali. But it must then be made clear that by 'civility' is meant neither 'secularity' [for the hamlet was, as wea virtually every institution in this ritualistic society, deeply involved in religious matters] nor, of course, 'urbanity'. What is meant is 'public virtue', what the Balinese call rukun: the creation and maintenance of order, good relations and mutual support among a group of neighbours. The purpose of the hamlet as a political body was civic in the broadest sense the provision of the legal, material, and moral requisites of a healthy community life. [Geertz 1980:48]

The hamlet was situated in a complex social organisation which Geertz describes variously as like a 'chain mail' or like a set of chinese boxes. But his notion of the civil 'in the broadest sense', that is, 'the legal, material and moral requisites of a healthy community life,' is apposite. For, although Mamdani, like virutally all Marxists, modernisers and nationalists in Africa, excoriates the chiefship and the rural. Nevertheless, the Kabaka [King] and other chiefs have proved to have an almost indestructible appeal in Uganda. [It is hard to imagine more brutal efforts to destroy something!] Yes, the new Kabaka was recently enthroned, and the institution shows extraordinary resilience. In South Africa, too, popular support in some areas is very high after a century of meddling, suppression, appropriation, co-optation and outright murder [notably by the recent 'liberation forces'] have tried to destroy its popular appeal. It seems, on the face of things, that there must be more to this that 'the legacy of late colonialism' as Mamdani suggests in his book's subtitle.

Mamdani best effort, in my view is to seek to understand Africa in the light of South Africa, and vice versa. He seeks to unify the field of African studies in a way that will include South Africa as part of Africa. Accordingly, he presents apartheid as a version or variant of political systems in the rest of Africa, especially under British 'colonial' policy. Mamdani is partly aware of these differences, of course, and utilises the difference between colonial direct rule and the policies of indirect rule in the territories and protectorates to formulate a theory of how a reformed discipline of African Studies might look that includes both Africa and South Africa in its purview.

In brief, Mamdani claims that apartheid was a form of indirect rule that Lord Lugard applied first in West Africa, and later in East Africa. Mamdani does not suppose that indirect rule or apartheid is wholly unique, wholly home-grown in Africa [or in South Africa]. He is aware, for example, of the significant contribution made by Sir Henry Maine's' policies in India that created the system of separate Native or Customary Law in India that ran parallel to that of British Civil law, but in different spheres, or Vollenhoeven's policies in the Dutch East Indian colonies. Both these leading practitioners of colonial rule, instituted two-tier or parallel systems of Native and European Law. But he does claim, too, that the African development of indirect rule under Lugard, and the development of Native Authorities were distinctly African, and constitute a distinctive historical experience in and of Africa. These are the roots, he claims, of all contemporary political order, especially in Anglophone Africa, including South Africa.
One must salute his courage though not everyone would call it that for challenging the unspoken rule of South African exceptionalism. This was position adopted by virtually every historian and political analyst of South Africa in the twentieth century. They all saw South Africa as unique, caught up in the struggle for or against apartheid. The latter comprised a sometimes vague collection of parties, classes, races, cultural organisations, secret organisations, multiple and nefarious security organs of the state, individuals, writers, crackpots, spies, collaborators and traitors, not to mention the mysterious 'Third Force' so often invoked in the late 80s and early 90s. This often amounted, in practice, to an inchoate battle.

...on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.
[M. Arnold, Dover Beach, 1867]

In the confusion of positions and postures, anyone who sought to compare South Africa with the rest of Africa was condemned as naïve, misinformed, malicious or worse. 'Comparison is odious' it was often intoned. Mamdani notes that he became 'painfully aware' of this South African attitude that 'often amounted to a prejudice.' Exactly what can be profitably compared however, and how, is still a problem. Mamdani's work is a first attempt that needs refinement and revision, and which can point to new direction outside his discipline of political science. The effort is laudable, however, if only because it is essential if to re-integrate South Africa and that north of South if Africa is to develop economic and cultural synergy within the continent that can lead it into the new century with more hope that we all seem currently to feel.

Mamdani presents apartheid South Africa as 'colonial', and sees in South African policies a key to understanding Africa under colonialism. This is problematic. First, it commits the error of 'history by analogy' [Mamdani's phrase] which he condemns in this book. Although South Africa apartheid is explained in an appropriate historical framework, apartheid [1949-1992] is used as an analogy for understanding indirect rule in Africa from the first half of the century. Part of the force of Mamdani's plea of South Africa historical 'inclusionism' is that [mainly] political scientists and sociologist have sought analogies to explain Africa rather than seeking to understand it as an historical unity. Mamdani believes that the development of these two systems had enough in common, and enough historical and personnel overlap so that they might fit plausibly in a single history of African ethnic and racial separatism. It seems to me, however, that 'Africa' and 'South Africa' [to explicitly oppose them] do in fact exhibit enough significant historical, cultural and social dissimilarities to make these claims tenuous. Mamdani's implicit 'argument from Origins' is also flawed. To explain any social institution by pointing to its origins, does not explain why it exists in its present form in its current context.

Mamdani seeks to explain apartheid as the 'survival' of indirect rule in the rest of Africa. This did not convince me. All African political systems in the area of former British rule do share some aspects derived from a common history, but each has developed in widely different ways. To try to comprehend Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa within a single framework of similar Native Affairs administrations, must necessarily miss most of what is interesting about these countries today. Such an approach must also miss the history of the intervening 35-40 years since the end of colonial rule in Africa, and the 87 years since its end in South Africa. It does not explain why apartheid in South Africa managed to survive for 44 years under the government of a single party the most stable such arrangement anywhere in
the world during the second half of the twentieth century or why such stability failed to develop elsewhere in Africa.

The most fundamental fault in this argument derives from the fact that indirect rule was formulated in West, Central and East Africa in order to incorporate already existing, fully functioning, politically autonomous African kingdoms and states under the colonial umbrella. This was especially the case in Uganda where the Baganda under the Kabakas had already conquered much of the territory that became the Uganda Protectorate. Moreover, Uganda was never a colony. Lord Lugard's published his own full statement of his policy in The Dual Mandate in Africa. Though Mamdani does not cite or refer to it, it makes clear the specificity of the policy to those colonies where African political systems continued to command authority. By contrast, there were no autonomous African polities with the current territory of South Africa. Those that existed The Swazis, the Sothos under Moshoeshoe, and the Tswana under Khama -- had already been excised, in the middle of the nineteenth century, from what was to become South Africa. They continue to exist as ethnically [relatively] homogeneous states. In South Africa, the Pedis had been incorporated into Transvaal farms, the Zulus had been defeated on the battlefield, and the Xhosa had collapsed through attrition. Indirect rule was simply not an option. When homelands were established in South Africa it was already well beyond the time when indirect rule had any credibility. Moreover, they were created as an extension of the apartheid bureaucracy. This was never an attempt to co-opt indigenous structures as indirect rule was, but a straightforward attempt to control the hinterlands from the centre. Like other such attempts, it met with varying success. To compare it with indirect rule, however, is historically erroneous and analytically useless. It seems to me that Mamdani simply does not go far enough. South African exceptionalism, was never just a 'prejudice' as he calls it: It was a political position that played an important role in a global and local politics. To see South Africa as wholly different from the rest of Africa made it possible for political supporters of apartheid in South Africa to make an appeal to 'occidentalism' the hyper-valuation of Europe and things and ideas 'European' in support of their continued claim to legitimacy [see Thornton 1996a]. Verwoerd's claim that some native South Africans were 'European', and thus the last, great defenders of that civilisation [and civility/civil society] in Africa, was one of bases on which his party's power rested. Its political success does not guarantee its truth as sociological insight, but as long as people in continental European and America could be made to believe this, the regime was effectively safe from external attack. This had worked tremendously well in the hands of Smuts who had worked hard to build this alliance between England and South Africans, especially Afrikaners. He did so against severe criticism by others Afrikaners that he was a volksveraier, a traitor to the people's cause. Only an appeal to this external 'source' of power and legitimacy could have made his position tenable. It worked well enough to allow Smuts to commit South Africans to the European wars of Nationalism the so-called World Wars and committed many South African soldiers to death in German East Africa and South West Africa. This claim to a cultural identity far from the real locations of daily life when South Africans identified themselves as European might be seen more profitably as an aspect of a Diaspora ideology that shares much with ideologies of Indians in Fiji and Houston, Texas, or Jews in New York. To portray Smuts, then, as merely the agent of colonialism seems misconceived. Indeed, it might even be possible to see him as more like Apollo Kagwa, the extraordinary Prime Minister of the Uganda Protectorate through the turn of the century.

Verwoerd's claim to a European identity for white South Africa, successfully portrayed
them as the endangered edge of the European 'Diaspora'. This had powerful resonance for large numbers of people around the world. Simultaneously, the resistance to this claim was also often based on a black or Pan-African racial exclusionism that similarly rendered South Africa 'exceptional' in Africa. Both 'required' a South Africa that was a moral theatre with a global audience rather than just another local politics. Consequently, the South African struggle is, Israel excepted, probably the world's most globalised local politics. In this it is certainly exceptional. But why stop with Africa as the background against which it stands out as unique. From the earliest stirrings of British consciousness of 'the native question', South Africa stands at the centre of the stage, and has continued to do so. This in itself requires explanation based on a global comparison and in the global context.

As I have argued elsewhere [Thornton 1996b], apartheid is certainly post-colonial, or even 'post modern'. It is post-colonial because it withdrew from its status as colony in 1910, and from its subsequent status as a Dominion in 1962. This is about the same time as the other African countries became republics as well. South Africa eventually went as far as withdrawing fully from the Commonwealth, something other African nation did not do. In this case, South Africa is not exceptional; rather it follows the rule rather precisely. The often absurd excesses of power, the one-party rule, the extreme fetishisation of the state at the very time the state was becoming weaker and weaker, the growth of ethnic-based patronage networks and state corruption, the exacerbation of ethnic or regional or tribal tensions, the rapidly decreasing tax revenues collected by the state, the failure to control or to usefully employ 'youth', the anxiety about male control over women, all run parallel to similar developments in the rest of Africa. If we hold colour out of the picture, things can be made to look remarkably similar is post-colonial Africa, South Africa included.

Mamdani refers to Smuts' Rhodes Memorial Lectures in 1929 in which he called the African a 'child'. This was certainly an exclusionary act, but not, I think, for the reason Mamdani supposes. Mamdani sees this as an example of a rather simple racism. Although Smuts was certainly deeply involved with the British and British institutions, it was a paradoxical involvement. Smuts had begun his life a 'freedom-fighter' against the British assault on the Afrikaner republics. Defeated, he chose to join the erstwhile enemy rather than to be oppressed by them, and he attempted to persuade the Afrikaans people that this course was in the best interest of all White South Africans. In the first world war, he had led some 17000 troops from the Union of South Africa into German East Africa to drive out the German colonial government, while another Boer general, Louis Botha, led 33 000 into South West Africa. The territory was eventually mandated to the 'trust' of the Union by the League of Nations. His participation in the foundation of the League of Nations, together with Woodrow Wilson of the United States showed him to be a citizen of the world, although he remained a South African patriot. Indeed, it seems to me that his policy towards the black South Africans was much more consistent with the League of Nations than with Lugard's policy of indirect rule. It was the League of Nations that, with the precedent of the Treaty of Versailles, sought to distinguish between nations that were fully developed as nations, those who were deemed worthy of ruling themselves, and those who might be ready for political institutions in the future, but who required mandatory rule of others in the meantime. As Mamdani points out, Smuts stated view was that Africans must neither be oppressed nor 'Europeanised'. The policy of putting nations 'not ready for politics' into the trust of others was in fact the one adopted towards what were seen as the black 'nations' in South Africa by Smuts's Union government. [The same policy was applied by Wilson toward the Philippines, and that was enshrined in the Charter of the League.] It was very similar to the policy that
motivated the policy of Grand Apartheid in the 1970s, after a period of severely repressive Apartheid legislation had begun to be attacked on both an international and a local level. There had been a break of some twenty years from the time Smuts lost control of the South African government until the policies of Grand Apartheid in the middle period of its sway attempted to actually set up the African nations Smuts had envisioned. Moreover, apartheid theorists in the 1960s had begun to elaborate a justification for the construction of the Bantustans that was far more consistent with Smuts' views than it was with Verwoerd's or Kruger's much more extreme views. It might be more appropriate then, to see the apartheid of the 1970s as a continuation of an policy toward ethnic groups that was most fully elaborated by the League of Nations. In this light, Smuts' remarks about African childhood can be better contextualised as the norm in international law at the time. Smuts excluded African participation of the civil society to be sure, but it was because, as he said, the Africans were 'not ready for politics.' This view is really about the definition of the boundaries of the polity, that is, the boundaries of political society in which a civil order would remain. Smuts believed that he had triumphed in a struggle to achieve a unity between the British colonialists and the Afrikaner republicans who had been defeated after an extraordinarily protracted and destructive struggle. He was not ready to expand the limits of the political any further. Thus his attitude towards black South Africans could be construed as a commitment to the kind of polity he had created, and to its fragile limits. In this sense, he was more of an African seeking accommodation and consensus even in defeat than a European, and more of an internationalist than a simple collaborator in colonialism.

The important point, however, is that apartheid can not be understood as a survival of colonialism, surviving in spite of the lack of any metropolitan power that controlled it. To do so merely accepts at face value what Smuts, Verwoerd and their followers wanted to believe [and made the world believe]. To be sure, there are reasons such a racist logic might be preferable, but these are political rather than analytic. I would side here with the South African 'exceptionalists' in saying that there are many very real differences between South Africa and the rest of Africa. The histories of the colonialism and of the state are differences, not similarities. There is no doubt that there are clear historical links between South Africa and the Rest, and valuable analogies can be drawn between different African experiences, but insofar as Mamdani's claims are based on his equation of apartheid and colonialism his argument goes astray.

Talal Asad, for instance, points to the Rhodes Livingstone Institute in what was then Northern Rhodesia of the 1930s. Its first director, Godfrey Wilson, began to formulate the problematic of 'citizen' and subject' while he was director of the Rhodes Livingstone Institute in the 1930s. As a both a Marxist and a Christian, Wilson saw the change from the rural, 'primitive' life to 'civilisation' as an inevitable progress towards the urban and the industrial. Max Gluckman, with previous experience in Johannesburg and Zululand, together with his associates C Mitchell and AL Epstein, however, described tribalism in much the same terms as Mamdani has done. Tribalism was not to be understood as a pure transfer of divisions from the countryside to town, but as the complex product of African cultures, the new urban conditions and the colonial structures in which the African labourers and urban-dwellers found themselves [Asad 1991:319]. Gluckman was writing, however, about Central African towns, and not about South Africa. South Africa itself he described in quite different terms, even then. It was, it seemed to him, all part of a single social system in which whites and blacks, acting in different roles relative to each other and in many different 'social situations' were nevertheless part of a single economy and society. In fact, Monica Hunter, later Godfrey
Wilson's wife, declared in her classic ethnographic monograph on the Mpondo, published in 1929, that they, too, were part of the south Africa social system unified by a common economy and common territory.

Mamdani writes as if the Zulu of contemporary South Africa were like the Bemba or the Chewa of northern Rhodesia in the 1930s. His chapter entitled 'The Rural in the Urban' describes contemporary Zulu migrants in hostels in terms that are strongly reminiscent of the 1930s. They are described as 'tribals' in the 'urban area', not a participants in a common political economy. This is simply naïve. Mamdani's more general claims, then, that there exists a 'bifurcated state', rest on this very weak premise. South African politics throughout the twentieth century has had little truck with a tribal politics. This is a fundamental difference between South Africa and the rest of Africa where national politics is tribal politics, and where specifically tribal cultural and political organisations continue to exist as political actors. In South Africa, none of the major political parties have been premised on this. [This is even true of the Zulu-led IFP, although it has come closer to the African 'tribal politics' model than any others, despite vociferous denial on its part.]

What is at issue, I believe, is not tribalism or 'native authorities' in a bifurcated state as Mamdani claims. Rather it is the very significant difference between the cultural bases on which the practices of power rest. Talal Asad articulates more succinctly the proposition that is more diffuse in Mamdani's book:

When Europeans acquired imperial control over subject societies, they set up law courts to administer justice in a radically new way. The mere presence of a government-instituted law court [including so-called customary courts] meant that resort to it required the treatment of vague claims and dissatisfactions according to precise rules that, as 'rights'. The concept of 'customs' which previously had the status of persuasive instances, now became grounds for judicial decisions which possessed and entirely different authority, linked to the coercive character of the modern coercive state. [Asad 1991:321]

Asad claims that 'British anthropologists dealing with African law and custom', Gluckman in particular, did not note this shift from the African pre-colonial justice to the coercive and despotic powers forced on chiefs, now acting as 'native authorities', under colonialism. According to Mamdani, African nationalists also continued to make this mistake. Both treated the law of chiefs' courts, or 'customary law' as if it were merely 'a more evolved form of "custom".' Both Mamdani and Asad give credit to Martin Chanock 1985 book, Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia for developing this insight. According to Asad, Chanock says that 'they did not recognise that the representation of conventional practice as a form of 'customary law' was itself part of the process that constituted it as legal instrument.' As such, it could be, and was, incorporated into the absolute legal powers that colonial administrators preferred [Asad 1991:321].

What all of them seem to miss, however, is the very important difference forms of social order based on small-scale consensus politics [the pre-colonial African model] and a system of formal written law based on the concept of the command. These are distinctly different cultural logics that depend on different implicit understandings of what 'power' is and how it works. What Immanuel Kant called the 'moral imperative', or the Roman senators called juris is ultimately the idea of the imperative command. As a basis for legal practice, it has its roots in Hamurabi's code of the law or Moses' commandments. It is a complex cultural
package whose implementation in Africa can scarcely been fully ascribed to the handful of colonial agents and governors. Where native European theories of power [which tend also to become the canonical theories in the academic disciplines] power, domination [Herrschaft, dominion], authority, and hegemony are all based on language and behaviour [the command and the act it is held to cause]. In Africa, theories of power more frequently rely on ideas of substance, circulation, and situation.

The theory of civil society on which Mamdani relies, assumes that all political actors are rational-individualists who either intentionally command others or who obey [or 'resist'] commands. This is the core of both Marx's or Weber's theories of domination since it is the command that is regularised in bureaucracy and codified as law. The command, especially in its written form as law is not always the underlying force in Africa. Witchcraft, practices of spiritual healing, belief in occult powers belonging to the chief, all depend on an alternative model of the person and of power. In this model, individuals may heal, harm or otherwise influence others without intention or words, through jealousy, anger or happenstance. A person's mind is not necessarily his own. Witches or ancestors may control him. He may imagine that wealth is acquired largely through magic or influence, not hard work and investment. There are no categorical differences between Africans and Europeans, but there are different balances of assumptions about the nature of the individual, power and wealth. Thus, western ideas of civil society may be of limited use.

Much of this, however, is a restatement of what the anthropologist Max Gluckman was saying in the 1940s and 1950s. For him, the issue was solving local problems arising from conflict in what he called 'social situations'. Accordingly, Gluckman said that if conflict could be represented in terms of previously existing cultural forms, both the conflict and the forms for dealing with it would tend to seem stable. Representation of earlier local procedures as law gave them and new and different kind of force that was, indeed, coercive and exploitative, but because they were still called 'chiefs' the basis of their authority seemed stable. This was less the result of colonial policy than it was the consequence of cultural processes we see active around the world. Gluckman, for example remarked in the early 1950s that

where Government appointed their own chiefs, these were not restrained by indigenous sanctions, and often became rank exploiters of their fellows. Moreover, they were not part of the indigenous cross-cutting alliances. They were regarded as tools of the Government, and became first object of attack, as among the Ibo in 1929 and possibly now among the Kikuyu [Gluckman 1954: 80]

Indeed, the 'Kikuyu struggle' what we now call the MauMau came to be interpreted in the way he expected. Had anyone applied the same logic to South Africa in the 1970s or 1980s, they would have been correct as well. But it is simply romantic to claim that pre-colonial authority was everywhere 'restrained' by indigenous practices. The remarkably bloody excesses of Shaka in South Africa, or of Muteesa of Buganda, offer ample illustration of this. One can no more explain these episodes as consequences of colonial policy than one can explain them as evolutionary stages of savagery and barbarity. They fit within their own historical trajectories. The old theories fall apart; their centres do not hold.

Gluckman, like Mamdani, assigns all credit [or blame] for this development to the 'colonialists'. Yet, however compromised the institutions of traditional authority have
become, it is abundantly clear that now in the late 1990s people look to it as a sort of bed-rock of African identity, and as an icon of African cultural autonomy. The African institutions of chiefship and kingship play centre stage in a broader cultural drama that is concerned with the 'African' versus the 'European' or the local struggling to hold its own against the global. It is incorrect to see it as an orphaned survivor of colonialism. Nelson Mandela himself, despite his early renunciation of any role in 'traditional' politics, nevertheless continues to offer considerable moral support to traditional authority in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. His appointment of the Home Affairs minister Mangosutu Buthelezi [also President of Inkatha Freedom Party, a Zulu prince, and Chief Minister of the Zulu monarch] as acting president for one day on Sunday, 2 February amply confirms this.

For all the attempts to say in formal, comparative terms what civil society is, few today mention what seems to me to be the underlying cultural commitments on which the possibility of having a civil society must rest. These would include the imagination of a public arena, domain, or space in which politics as such may exist. This space has been, since the beginnings of urbanism in the Eastern Mediterranean world, the city, especially its public spaces. It would seem that geography, at least, of the African cities of today militates against this sense of public. Public space is often abused. Indeed, it is difficult to argue for the existence of civil society when there is no place in which it can function, that is, in which communication in the public interest can flourish. When a state can not guarantee fundamental rights to life and property or chooses not to offer such guarantees then the fundamental ground for a civil society is lacking.

Mamdani's efforts to see the civil society of citizens and the tribal society of subjects as part of one state seems to misapprehend these fundamentals. If tribalism is 'civil war' and also a 'form of the state' then there can be no sense in applying the term 'civil society' in a state that does not claim the monopoly on legitimate use of violence [as Weber tells us it must]. Unless Gluckman is right about the 'peace in the feud' and I suspect he is not at the level of the state then any state which promotes civil war as mode of rule is not a state, at least not in the sense that Morgan, Marx, Weber and Gramsci had in mind. What they had in mind, of course, was the European state that did in fact exercise coercive control over its peasantry, no matter how 'tribal' the politics of resistance -- like the Irish, the Gypsies, Basques might be. On the other hand, if parts of the colonial [or apartheid] state can be usefully said to have civil society, then they can not include the non-political, non-civil rule of Native Authorities. As Max Gluckman remarked,

the major political difficulties with primitive societies to-day are created by a different kind of ignorance: the European failure to realise that Africans . . . are to-day so deeply involved in our own social system that they are moved by the political forces which are at work around us at home. [Gluckman 1954:80]

Gluckman's 'home', and his 'our social system' refer, of course, to Britain and the British political system. Today, this system still stands as the universal model of political maturity, not as 'home' or 'our own social system', but as a global model.

In other words, the notion of the bifurcated state appears to be a contradiction in terms. To the extent that the state is 'bifurcated' it is then not a state in those parts where the rule of custom pertains [since the state manifestly does not command where 'custom' does]. In other words, Mamdani's 'bifurcated state' is simply a weak state that cannot exercise its control as a
state over its territory. Now, if this is the case, then Mamdani's argument reduces simply to
the thesis of the weak state in Africa, a thesis that has been extensively elaborated in other
recent literature. Either way, 'Africa's impasse' rests on the fact that the majority of Africa's
people are still not integrated into the civil [civilised?] politics of its states. Whether we are to
understand this as two different forms of 'the state', or whether we think of it as the
'weakness' in certain quarters of only one form of the state, the problem what is to be
done? remains.

Since Mamdani has given us a bifurcated analysis of the problem, it remains to for him to
seek solutions to 'Africa's Impasse'. This rift turns out also to be the rift between the urban
and the rural. In the conclusion, Mamdani claims that reform must seek to 'link the rural and
the urban in ways that have not yet been done' [296]. He claims that Uganda and South
Africa are paradigm cases.

Uganda, though home of the most serious attempt yet to democratise Native Authority, has
been unable to address the democratic demands of civil society movements. In South
Africa, though the home of the strongest and the most imaginative civil society-based
resistance on the continent remains, reform has foundered on the walls of customary
power.

The phrase 'the walls of customary power' seem to refer in Mamdani's treatment to
Inkatha and to Buthelezi, the ANC's former bugbear, who has now served as interim president
of South Africa. In this role, was he a Native Authority or a citizen-President . . . or just a
rural Zulu in town? Mamdani believes that the one party state and nationalism are ways to
link the urban and the rural. Both, however, crush civil society. According to him,
Museveni's reform of Uganda which 'dismantled Native Authorities' and reorganised village
communities [300] did not do this, and was step in the right direction. South Africa's
struggles in the 1980s resulted in attacks on local/native/municipal authorities that rendered
much of South Africa ungovernable, and left it ungoverned. This was also correct, he argues.
What remains is 'to reform the centre and thereby to join the rural and the urban through a
single overarching but differentiated reform process' [300].

Ironically, this is precisely what apartheid attempted, and failed, to achieve: namely an
overarching reform process [reforming the English colonial regime] that . Again ironically,
this is scarcely surprising. Mamdani tackled a problem that has been vexing Africans and
Europeans ever since they came together in southern Africa and formed a coherent society.
That they did so at all is in itself very surprising, but their failure up to now to solve all of the
problems in this relationship is not particularly surprising. Mamdani's efforts to reinvent the
anthropological discourse about this fall short, however, and this sets him on a path that
converges with the theorists of apartheid. Both believe that 'the problem' was a binary
conflict between rural and urban, white and black, labourer and capitalist. In fact, the
situation is much more complex. If we are left with only these categories, moreover, the
'transition', the release of Mandela, and the establishment of a reasonably effective
government today remain unexplainable and very surprising. And since there are, legally
and practically-speaking, no 'subjects' in contemporary South Africa, we are left wondering
what, if anything, the initial analytic dichotomy of 'citizens' and 'subjects' is good for.

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Notes
Include ref to Ralushai'w witchcraft commission in which they accuse Africans of superstition and uncivilised.

Note German struggle to unite the tribal laws of the principalities and region under a common German law.