

**Book Review**

**Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.**

**Reviewed by Prashant Narang**

In present day India, where we debate rights and access to resources and opportunities through a vocabulary of social justice and also sometimes through citizenship and son-of-soil claims; in “Define and Rule,” Mamdani interrogates the construction of the concept of “native”. He argues that the concept of “nativism” is a political construction of colonial intellectuals during crisis in mid-nineteenth century. Mamdani distinguishes between direct and indirect rule. Initially, the colonial supremacy was direct but post-mutiny in Colonial India, British institutionalized politics of difference which Mamdani calls as “Define and Rule”. This was more indirect by way of managing differences and monopolizing the power to define identities.

Mamdani attributes construction of “the native” to the colonial intellectuals at the time of crisis. He identifies Sir Henry Maine as the key intellectual who guides the colonial administrators post-1857 crisis of the British Empire in India. Similar project was undertaken by Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje in Dutch East Indies. These colonial historiographers demarcated and carved out the native identity differentiating it from the settler and amongst native based on tribes.

“Divide and rule” is a common phrase used in the school text books in India to describe British policy in early twentieth century, through which colonial administrators sowed seeds of divisions based on religion to weaken resistance among the subjects. But little we knew about “Define and rule”. This according to Mamdani was a deliberate strategy of defining subjects to fragment them. This was a strategic shift from Whiteman’s burden or civilize-and-control colonial project to a Management-through-definition-and-differentiation project. The book presents the theory of nativism with details of its origins, motives in India and a replica of its application in Sudan. Additionally, it also presents a historical account by the Nigerian historian Yusuf Balla Usman and Tanzanian Leader Julius Nyerere who provide counter-nar-

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ratives to colonial historiographies.

The first chapter describes the indirect rule as a reflection on the crisis created by the mutiny as well as the reform project undertaken to alleviate the crisis in India. Sir Henry Maine was one of the most prominent anthropologists among those who reflected on the the reasons of the mid-nineteenth-century crisis of the British Empire. The outcome of his debate and reflections was the construction of the “native” as a political identity. He believed that a sustainable colonial project would require attention to the historicity and agency of colonized. He substantiates his argument with a conceptual binary of West and East: West as progressive, East as static; West as civilized, East as traditional; West ruled by civil law; East by customs and religion. According to him, a settler is defined by the history and a native is defined by geography. Therefore, the goal of British colonial rule was to conserve or protect and not civilize. Maine focused not only on the history but also on the legal theory. His main objective was to provide a theory aiding sustainability of the colonial project. His historiography racialized the colonial subjects and laws shaped their future. Mapping the population provides key inputs on categories for organizing the society. Categories were based on origin – “race” for non-natives and tribes for natives. This categorization ignored other parameters such as residence. According to Mamdani, this should be viewed as a new form of Governmentality that creates differences and shapes and manages them. Here, the colonial administrators imposed group identities thereby institutionalizing state’s monopoly on defining identities.

The second chapter extrapolates and elaborates the indirect rule phenomenon in the African colonies particularly Sudan. Mamdani discusses the writings of the Nigerian historian Yusuf Bala Usman, a postcolonial intellectuals who cautions us against the subjectivity of the colonial historians and seeks “distance, detachment and objectivity” from readers. One needs to be cynical of colonial historiographies, according to him. Similar antidote in context of state craft one can see in Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, Tanzanian state-builder who attempted to reform and decolonize the indirect rule state in a non-violent way. He created a unified law-enforcing administration governing all citizens with same set of rules and same court system.

Mamdani has based his study exclusively on colonial discourse and left non-state actors entirely. May be the colonial administration recognized and legitimized those fault lines that already existed amongst the subjects. His argument on post-mutiny India rests entirely on an individual. This seems to be an implication that there was no emphasis on customs by the colonial state for the purpose of justice administration before 1857. This may not be correct. His argument that definition of management of difference evolved under the indirect rule colonialism. This is akin to saying there was no legal pluralism in India. Or the state never recognized legal pluralism. Mamdani here comes out as a conspiracy theorist who attributes motive to Maine’s work. Primacy to customs over legislation may not be undesirable per se. Particularly in the domain of personal law, state interfering in rules governing marriage, divorce and succession did not happen before British. One can now see the debate on Uniform Civil Code in India through this prism but the counter-arguments offered by opponents of Uniform Civil Code apply to Mamdani as well.

Interestingly, the Post-Colonial State particularly India continues to hold monopoly on construction of identities for social justice. There is census or mapping based on caste, gender and religion. These identities and backwardness tag may not strictly be a product of objective processes and procedures. Further, there are privileges and protections granted based on caste identities. The point that Mamdani may be missing here is that whether Colonial administration created zero sum games among their subjects and complicating it further with special privileges for certain identities as “defined” by the state. This is precisely the scenario in post-colonial India though there is no empirical study that has measured the depth of the fault lines created.