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Mahmood Mamdani. *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. xvi + 364 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-05821-4; \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-691-10280-1.

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Thinkable Genocide

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During three short months in 1994, in the small central African country of Rwanda, between 500,000 and one million Tutsi were killed by their Hutu neighbors. The killings were not carried out using the refined technologies of death that would best facilitate a mass murder of such proportion and speed; instead, regular farm implements, especially the machete, were somehow made capable of such large-scale killing. The often stunningly matter-of-fact perpetrator and survivor testimony that has emerged from the genocide has described for us the gruesome mechanics of the crimes—the details of how people were killed—but it has not brought us closer to understanding how ordinary people, such as peasants and professionals, could commit such intimate murders.

A breathtaking example of the seeming routinization and normalization with which the professional classes approached genocidal violence in 1994 is the comment of a Hutu teacher to a French journalist in Butare: “A lot of people got killed here. I myself killed some of the children.... We had eighty kids in the first year. There are twenty-five left. All the others, we killed them or they have run away” (p. 228).

Mahmood Mamdani sets out to explain the actions during the genocide of ordinary Rwandans like this teacher in Butare in his brilliant study of political identity and violence. His book is inspired by the terrible question raised so acutely by the Rwandan genocide: how could so many ordinary people participate immediately

and directly in the killings of their neighbors? He sets for himself the formidable task of answering this question. “My *main* objective in writing this book,” he writes, “is to make the popular agency in the Rwandan genocide thinkable” (emphasis in original, p. 8).

Mamdani frames the problem in the following way:

“The violence of the genocide was the result of both planning and participation. The agenda imposed from above became a gruesome reality to the extent it resonated with perspectives from below. Rather than accent one or the other side of this relationship and thereby arrive at either a state-centered or a society-centered explanation, a complete picture of the genocide needs to take both sides into account. For this was neither just a conspiracy from above that only needed enough time and suitable circumstance to mature, nor was it a popular jacquerie gone beserk. If the violence from below could not have spread without cultivation and direction from above, it is equally true that the conspiracy of the tiny fragment of *genocidaire* could not have succeeded had it not found resonance from below. The design from above involved a tiny minority and is easier to understand. The response and initiative from below involved multitudes and present the true moral dilemma of the Rwandan genocide” (p. 7).

Mamdani turns to history to render genocide thinkable, and investigates the detailed institutional histories of Rwandan political identities. His interest is principally in the political processes through which identities

were formed and how these identities then informed the progress of Rwandan history. Like other scholars of the genocide, Mamdani identifies the categories “Hutu” and “Tutsi” as one of the main long-term facilitators, if not causes, of the genocide. It was the specifically racial definition these identities were given during Rwanda’s occupation by German and then Belgian authorities that set in motion a genocidal potential. And yet, despite this potential, Mamdani argues that the genocide was the consequence of short-term historical developments, especially the 1991 “war of repatriation” launched by Rwandan refugees in Uganda (most of whom were Tutsi). By focusing on long-term facilitators and short-term causes of the genocide, he strikes a very subtle and enlightening balance between structure and agency.

In analyzing Rwanda’s history, Mamdani draws from the work of noted Africanists Catherine Newbury, David Newbury and Rene Lamarchand, among others. His historical analysis is thus also a detailed and comprehensive overview of Rwandan historiography. Original research and interviews conducted in Rwanda, Congo and Uganda serve to draw out the meaning of Rwandan history for the genocide and the post-genocide state. In this way, *When Victims Become Killers* ties together a massive literature with theoretical vigor that is at times quite breathtaking. Because the book covers the long-term and the regional history of the genocide with such analytical depth and richness, it will be an excellent text for courses in genocide studies as well as for readers interested in an authoritative work on the subject. Because of its broad focus, however, non-specialists in African history and politics will want to refer to a basic historical overview of East and Central Africa alongside it, or at least to Gerard Prunier’s *The Rwandan Crisis*, which offers a brief and linear overview of events.

While many studies have pointed out that the identity markers “Hutu” and “Tutsi” have shown much malleability across time and space, Mamdani delves deeper into their histories to chart with great analytical sophistication the particular ways in which they have been caught up in the drama of power in Rwanda. One of his most important insights is the central role played by law and the state in “breath[ing] political life into” these identity categories (p. 20). Through this attentiveness to the structural background of identity and agency, Mamdani demonstrates, for the first time in the scholarship on the Rwandan genocide, the internal mechanics of the fundamental difference colonialism made to the dynamics of power in the region. And in so doing he introduces the long-term effects of colonial political identities on the

macro- and micropolitics of postcolonial Africa.

Mamdani casts “Hutu” and “Tutsi” as political identities, ones tied to the formation of the Rwandan state and embedded in political and social institutions. He juxtaposes these to cultural and market-based identities, for which they have often been confused. Thus, “Hutu” and “Tutsi” were never simple ethnicities or indicative of particular class strata. This shift in definition is very helpful, since much work on the genocide has done a poor job in explaining exactly what “Hutu” and “Tutsi” mean if we are to understand them not as races, or classes, or ethnicities. Furthermore, it challenges interpretations of the genocide that focus either on eternal hatreds or on class antagonism (or land scarcity) to explain mass participation in the killing.

Because the scholarship on Rwandan identity has been so intimately mired in the very same power that has given meaning to the terms “Hutu” and “Tutsi,” Mamdani outlines scholarly approaches to the categories in great detail, focusing especially on the colonial “Hamitic Hypothesis,” which cast the Tutsi as an alien race of quasi-Caucasian pastoralist conquerors from the north. He uses his discussion of the “Hamitic Hypothesis” to criticize the colonial obsession with origins and physical types as well as the tendency in older historical scholarship to essentialize the opposition between Hutu and Tutsi as primordial and unchanging—a tendency that was resuscitated by the Western media and political analysts interested in avoiding intervention in the region.

Mamdani reinterprets the precolonial meaning of Hutu and Tutsi as intimately tied to the process of state centralization beneath a Tutsi dynasty, a process that began in the fifteenth century but accelerated at the end of the nineteenth. In this precolonial era, the meanings of Hutu and Tutsi were used to extend and legitimize power inequalities while becoming embedded in institutions that had more flexibility than their racist incarnations under European rule. The colonial preoccupation with the “origins” of each group, a preoccupation that colors scholarship and political discourse to the present day, emerges in Mamdani’s study as what it always was—intellectually specious and politically dangerous. Of much greater importance are the meanings these terms have been given under the rule of various power holders.

Mamdani offers many examples of the impossibility of charting a stable line of descent from today’s Hutu and Tutsi to the supposedly originary “Hutu” and “Tutsi” of the fifteenth century. Although it is often assumed

that the Tutsi were pastoralists and the Hutu agriculturalists, Catherine Newbury's research suggests that many Hutu owned cattle and many Tutsi farmed land. In fact, "agricultural and pastoral activities were hardly exclusive; they tended to be carried out jointly in most regions" (p. 51). Cross-cutting institutions, too, guaranteed not only social mixing but also avenues of assimilation into either group. One important institution—intermarriage—was socially interpreted according to patrilineal descent, so a Tutsi woman who married a Hutu man became a Hutu. So too did their children. Thus in Rwanda there is no mixed category of person. To use Mamdani's coinage, there is no "Hutsi" (p. 53).

Persons with the political identities of Hutu and Tutsi can be understood as belonging to the same overarching cultural group. To demonstrate this, Mamdani points especially to regions outside of the stretch of the precolonial and colonial Rwandan states. Both Hutu and Tutsi speak Kinyarwanda, and the boundaries of this cultural community extend far beyond present-day Rwanda into the neighboring countries of Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania and Congo. Significantly, Kinyarwanda speakers in the northwest—the "Bakiga," or "people of the mountains"—had social and political institutions in the nineteenth-century that were very different from the centralizing pre-colonial Rwandan state further south. The Bakiga did not recognize the categories of "Hutu" and "Tutsi" before the German and Belgian colonial regimes incorporated them into the colonial state and imposed these identities there. Thus, Hutu and Tutsi identities are the creations of the specific political process of state centralization and its institutions.

Mamdani focuses on three ideological and social institutions of the central state—court rituals, patron-client relations and military and administrative systems—to chart how Hutu and Tutsi identities became polarized. The changes in these institutions that brought about Hutu and Tutsi polarization are too complex to summarize here, but they ended up organizing Rwandan society along hierarchically exploitative lines. Within this hierarchy, the people constituting the "Hutu" were a transethnic group who came to be subjected to state power. Thus "the Hutu" were never a single ethnicity. The Tutsi were an ethnic group, but one that became "recast as an identity of power" with the centralization of the state under a Tutsi dynastic lineage (pp. 101-102). This polarization between dynastic power and its subjects was not non-negotiable. The precolonial institution of *kwi-hutura*, for example, insured that the Hutu/Tutsi opposition did not ossify. It gave Hutu the opportunity to "rise

through the socioeconomic hierarchy ... and achieve the political status of a Tutsi" (p. 70). Mamdani concludes that "to be a Tutsi was thus to be in power, near power, or simply to be identified with power—just as to be a Hutu was more and more to be a subject" (p. 75).

Colonial rule supplanted these mediating and assimilative institutions and crystallized the identities as different races, making it thus impossible for a Hutu to become a Tutsi or the other way around. This is when the question of origins began to take on a central political importance. Europeans, enamored by the elongated features of the Rwandan power holders, and convinced they showed some innate talent for higher forms of political and cultural production in contrast to the "Hutu" peasantry, decided that they must have come from somewhere else. So the "Hamitic Hypothesis" was born. The Tutsi were racially defined as the descendants of Ham, banished to Africa for seeing their father's nakedness, but still retaining a civilized bloodline that made them racially alien and superior to what was then often called "the Bantu." Not only did the German and Belgian states recast political identities as racial ones, but also, like elsewhere in Africa, they used the existing hierarchy to impose their rule. This worked in favor of Tutsi power holders by broadening and securing their coercive powers, and by undercutting the mediating influence of reciprocal institutions. Disturbingly, Mamdani shows how the Catholic Church was one of the principal responsible parties for the colonial racialization of Rwandan identities, inasmuch as missionaries created the body of knowledge, based in the "Hamitic Hypothesis," that the Belgian state used to institutionalize race as the primary marker of social differentiation. After World War I, the Church itself, along with educational institutions, the state administration, and forms of taxation, was organized along racial lines. This process of institutional racialization culminated in the 1934 census on the basis of which each person was issued an identity card classifying them as Hutu, Tutsi or Twa (who comprise about 1 percent of the population).[1]

To place this study of the development of Hutu and Tutsi as race identities in an analytical context, Mamdani builds on his argument in his 1996 book, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. There he analyzes the various political spaces opened up and shut down by the colonization of Africa. Focusing on indirect-rule colonialism, he differentiates between the civic sphere reserved for Europeans and citizens, and the customary sphere (or "Native Authority") reserved for Africans and divided into distinct "ethnici-

ties.” The civic sphere was the sphere of democratic political participation and due process. The customary sphere was one of despotic rule by (usually) colonial-appointed chiefs. The despotic customary sphere has proved to be a seemingly intractable problem for postcolonial African states. Whereas independence movements decolonized the civic spheres, they generally left the autocratic institutions of the “Native Authority” intact.

In his present work, Mamdani places Rwanda within the larger political schema worked out in *Citizen and Subject*. He argues that Rwanda was a “halfway house between a direct and indirect-rule colony” (p. 103). Rwanda shared much of the legal framework of indirect rule with other African colonies, and thus also suffered from the resulting divide between civic and customary political spheres. But unlike other indirect-rule colonies, the colonial Rwandan state recognized only races. Thus, those persons subject to the “customary” sphere were defined as a distinct race, the Hutu, and this race was thought to be indigenous. The Tutsi, defined as an alien and settler race, ended up existing somewhere in-between. They became a “subject race,” belonging neither to the dominant European civic sphere as citizens nor to the majority ethnic sphere as indigenous subjects. The way this in-between status worked itself out institutionally was that the Tutsi were dispossessed in the civic sphere while being granted the power of “chiefs” in the customary sphere—that is, without being accorded the privileges of whites, they nonetheless ruled over the Hutu locally. This had serious consequences for Rwanda’s subsequent history. Mamdani writes, “[p]recisely because Hutu and Tutsi had, under colonialism become synonymous with an indigenous majority and an alien minority, decolonization was a direct outgrowth of an internal social movement that empowered the majority constructed as indigenous against the minority constructed as alien” (p. 103).

Out of the shared oppression beneath the Belgians and the Tutsi evolved a “Hutu consciousness” (p. 117) that defined the tensions between Hutu and Tutsi as a matter of natives versus settlers, what Mamdani calls the politicization of “indigeneity” (p. 33). The 1959 revolution, which brought about decolonization in Rwanda, was a revolt against what was widely understood to be two groups of settlers: Europeans and Tutsis. The revolution had been prefaced by almost a decade of political reforms helped along by several UN decolonization missions. These reforms, existing more on paper than in fact, convinced the Hutu intelligentsia “that nothing less than radical change was likely to bring an end to the so-

cial plight of the Hutu” (p. 115). Radical change came in fits and starts between 1959 and 1962. In November 1959, a few months after a coup installed a conservative monarch in the Tutsi court, Hutu revolutionaries rose up against Tutsi chiefs—the symbols of Tutsi privilege and colonial autocracy. The UN mission estimated the dead at two hundred. To avoid a bloody crackdown by the Tutsi monarchy following this event, the Belgians placed Rwanda under the governance of a Belgian colonel, who replaced more than 300 Tutsi chiefs and sub-chiefs with Hutus. The final death knell of Tutsi privilege occurred on 28 January 1961, when these new Hutu chiefs reorganized the central state and declared the abolition of the monarchy.[2] The November revolution in 1959 and subsequent reorganizations sent the Tutsi monarchists into exile. It was this exile population, which grew with each wave of anti-Tutsi violence, that became a powerfully destabilizing force not only for Rwanda but also for neighboring Uganda.

Unfortunately for Rwanda’s subsequent history, the language from the revolution that gained dominance at the end of the First Republic continued to cast Tutsi as alien settlers. As Mamdani states in his introduction, “the single most important failure of the revolution was its inability to transform Hutu and Tutsi as political identities generated by the colonial power” (p. 16). Not only did many parties of the Hutu “counter-elite,” who led the revolution, maintain the logic of the Hamitic Hypothesis, but also conservatives within the Tutsi royal court sought to hold onto their privilege by invoking their status as racial aliens. The exclusivist worldview of the dominant Hutu nationalist party, PARMEHUTU (Parti du Mouvement et de l’Emancipation Hutu), which Mamdani sees as the precursor to the Hutu Power movement of the 1990s, was strengthened by a series of military attacks on Hutu officials by Tutsi exiles on the Rwanda-Uganda border. The democratically-elected Rwandan government, dominated by PARMEHUTU, responded to each of these raids with massacres against Rwandan Tutsis as potential collaborators. Estimates of the number of Tutsi killed between 1959 and 1964 range from ten to twenty thousand.

Tragically, there were alternatives to this racial polarization and political violence. One of the political parties that spearheaded the revolution, APROSOMA (L’Association pour la Promotion Sociale de la Masse), sought to unite the Hutu poor with what were known as “petits Tutsi” against the privilege of Tutsi wealth. However, this party remained of little electoral consequence and its non-racialist message was worn away by the radicalization of Rwandan politics after indepen-

dence. Furthermore, the massacres of Tutsi civilians after border raids by Tutsis in exile effectively wiped out the moderate and accommodationist Tutsi political contingency, since it was the accommodationists who stayed inside Rwanda during the years directly following the revolution. “Two political tendencies,” Mamdani writes, “one accommodationist, the other exclusionist—vied for supremacy between 1959 and 1964. These tendencies did not correspond to the political divide between the Tutsi and the Hutu political elite, or between the revolution and the counterrevolution. Rather, both tendencies could be found on either side” (p. 126). Unfortunately for Rwanda, the accommodationist spirit of the immediate post-independence years succumbed to the politics of exclusion in 1964. As a result, Tutsis were forcibly removed from politics and the First Republic of Rwanda was defined as a Hutu state.

The specter of the Hutu state was to haunt Rwandan politics into the Second Republic, which emerged from the 1973 bloodless coup that brought to power General Juvenal Habyarimana, the Rwandan president whose death is often identified as heralding the beginning of the genocide. His rule was marked by an easing of tensions between Tutsi and Hutu. He redefined Tutsis as an ethnic group, and hence as indigenous Rwandans. Although the Tutsi faced discrimination in the civic and political spheres, the Habyarimana regime sought to implement redistributive policies aimed at lessening, at least in the long run, the roots of Hutu disenchantment and anti-Tutsi sentiment. The Second Republic was, however, incapable of coming to terms with two vestiges of the colonial past. On the one hand, it did not solve the growing problem of the Tutsi political diaspora in Uganda. Mamdani casts this failure as “testimony to a past [the Rwandan state] could not come to terms with, because to do so required nothing less than to shed the presumption of its being a state of the Hutu nation” (p. 155). On the other hand, the Habyarimana regime built upon the despotic local administrative structure inherited from the colonial period, unwittingly contributing to the entrenchment of the “administrative machinery” that would lead the genocide (p. 144).

Few scholars have put the history of the Rwandan genocide in a regional context (as opposed to one confined to the political boundaries of “Rwanda”). And none have used this regional context to help explain the behavior of the perpetrators. Key to Mamdani’s argument that there was method—or reason—to the genocidal madness is his focus on the problems posed for the Rwandan state by the presence of a large Tutsi refugee population

in Uganda. Mamdani convincingly argues that without looking at the regional context—and the Rwandan war it created—it is very difficult to understand the parameters within which people were making decisions. One of the great contributions of his book is his effort to balance the scholarship on the initiatives of the Hutu Power extremists in the Rwandan state on the one hand with a detailed consideration of the roots of popular participation on the other. His interest is in casting Hutu participants as something other than puppets controlled by the state or as irrational savages exploding in primordial rage.

The First Republic saw the Tutsi exiles as a permanent threat to the integrity of the Hutu nation, and Tutsis living within this nation were in constant jeopardy of being associated with the militants across the border. The Second Republic did nothing to solve the diaspora problem. Although it redefined internal Tutsi as an indigenous ethnic group, this indigeneity was not extended to Banyarwanda Tutsis in exile. By allowing this problem to grow, the Habyarimana regime “created, for the first time, a group that was from the region but not of the region.... The distinctive feature of the Rwandan Tutsi diaspora was that its members were ethnic strangers everywhere; they had no ethnic home. The 1959 revolution has made of the Rwandan Tutsi diaspora a group akin to the Jews of prewar Europe” (p. 156). As such, the refugee crisis was the result of the politics of indigeneity created by the colonial state.

Rwandan refugees in Uganda, from whose ranks the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) was created, did seek inclusion within the Ugandan state. The pluralist state of Yoweri Museveni’s National Resistance Army (NRA), which owed much of its success to Banyarwanda soldiers, attempted to revolutionize the strict descent provisions of existing citizenship law and grant Ugandan citizenship to all persons residing in Uganda for more than ten years. This move heralded as well an easing of the restrictions on return in Rwanda itself, as the leaders there realized that most Rwandan exiles preferred naturalization in Uganda to repatriation. However, in Uganda too the politics of indigeneity won out, leading to social violence that was framed as a matter of Ugandan “natives” against Rwandan “settlers.” Museveni was forced to make concessions, and his proposed citizenship reforms were one of them. This convinced the Banyarwanda there that armed repatriation was the only solution to their crisis of belonging. Mamdani argues that the “refugee soldiers who formed the core of the RPF—who had been nearly 4,000 of the roughly 14,000 NRA who took Kampala in 1986 and were probably another thousand-plus in 1990—

found themselves between the Rwandan devil and the Ugandan deep blue sea. True, the raw material for the refugee crisis that led to the 1990 invasion was the outcome of post-1959 developments in Rwanda, but the crisis itself was very much Ugandan in the making” (p. 184).

The civil war that began with the “armed repatriation” of October 1990 turned the RPF from an army of liberation to one of occupation, and made Hutu Power a “central tendency in Hutu politics” (p. 185). As the RPF advanced on Rwandan territory, the population fled. In late 1990 there were as many as 80,000 internal refugees in Rwanda, in 1992 the figure had grown to 350,000 and after the February 1993 offensive the number swelled to 950,000. Thus, there were almost a million internal refugees on the eve of the genocide. The RPF encouraged much of this flight, for it did not want to be burdened by administrative responsibilities, and hence it lost its chance to win over local populations. The civil war caused widespread hunger and starvation. In the context of dislocation and deprivation, Hutu peasants began invoking memories of the Tutsi monarchy and the 1959 revolution. Hutu Power took advantage of this widespread sense of fear to rekindle hostility towards Tutsis as an alien race. Using the now notorious radio RTLM and the newspaper *Kangura*, Hutu Power projected its own nefarious lusts on the RPF, claiming that what the RPF wanted was Tutsi Power and a restoration of the pre-1959 oppression.

Mass participation in the massacres of 1990-1993 and the genocide of 1994 were thus the result of fear—fear not only of the Hutu Power genocidaires, who did indeed kill many Hutu who refused to participate, but also of the RPF. Mamdani comments,

“[t]his is why one needs to recognize that it was not greed—not even hatred—but *fear* which was the reason why the multitude responded to the call of Hutu Power the closer the war came to home. Hutu Power extremists prevailed not because they promised farmers more land if they killed their Tutsi neighbors—which they did—but because they told farmers that the alternative would be to let RPF take their land and return it to the Tutsi who had been expropriated after 1959” (p. 191).

It was fear, too, which radicalized the Rwandan public during the years of the civil war:

“The great paradox of Rwanda of the 1990s is that democratic reforms blossomed at the same time as the civil war raged. The former fed aspirations for individual and group freedom, the latter gave rise to demands for

loyalty to the nation. The two processes could not continue side by side, except through generating great tension. As war intensified and defeat loomed on the horizon, more and more of those in power, and even those in the population, came to see dissent not only as a luxury but, at a time of national crisis, as betrayal. Defeat in civil war spelled an end to both the democratic opening and to the democratic movement and its torchbearers. After the fires of war had consumed democracy, its burning ashes extinguished life itself” (p. 208).

A tragic example described by Mamdani of the way in which the civil war reshaped peoples’ political identities is the case of Stanislas Mbonampeka, in 1992 a member of the multiethnic Parti Liberal (PL) and an outspoken critic of the Hutu Power. As Minister of Justice, Mbonampeka issued an arrest warrant for Leon Mugesera, a prominent Hutu Power ideologue, after Mugesera called publicly for the physical elimination of the Tutsi. Mbonampeka resigned from his post because he was frustrated with what he thought was Habyarimana’s vacillation on this point. And yet, Mbonampeka moved from this position to an anti-RPF stance and eventually to the position of a genocide denier and Minister of Justice of the Hutu government in exile. In 1995 he told Philip Gourevitch, “In a war, you can’t be neutral. If you are not for your country, are you not for its attackers?” Rationalizing the genocide in this way, he commented, “This was not a conventional war. The enemies were everywhere. It wasn’t genocide. Personally, I don’t believe in the genocide. There were massacres within which there were crimes against humanity or crimes of war. But the Tutsis were not killed as Tutsis, only as sympathizers of the RPF. 90 percent of the Tutsis were pro-RPF” (p. 196).

In his words to Philip Gourevitch, Mbonampeka seeks to cast Tutsi citizens of Rwanda as the “enemy within” and thereby to offer a legal defense for his actions. As he seems well aware, one of the criteria of the legal definition of genocide is that a person be killed for his or her membership in a religious, national, racial or ethnic group. If a person is killed as a combatant, and this killing is deemed a crime, this crime would most likely fall under crimes of war, as Mbonampeka points out. His use of the term “civil war” to describe the context in which he was operating is in line with his defense, for it suggests that Tutsi citizens constituted a “nation in arms” with the goal of overthrowing the Rwandan state and instituting Tutsi domination. There is no evidence of this, however, and even if there were, it would do nothing to explain the intentional slaughter of the elderly, of children and of infants, who could hardly be deemed combat-

ants. Furthermore, all the evidence points to Hutu Power as the aggressor party. Hutu Power cast the resident Tutsi as racial aliens, called for their annihilation, and set about organizing the infrastructure—including the importing of weapons months before the genocide began—that was to carry out the killing, with the help of ordinary people. So, Mbonampekâ’s efforts to describe the genocide as anything less than that fail.

At first glance, therefore, Mbonampeka’s rationalizations look like nothing but the stock apologetics of all accused perpetrators of genocide. We could interpret them as the *ex post facto* explanations of a man whose conscience was not strong enough to keep him from being engulfed by the murderous months in 1994. Mamdani asks us instead to view Mbonampeka’s words as evidence of a horrendous shift that occurred in the political opinion of Rwandans outside the genocidal Hutu Power faction during the war. And considering Mbonampeka’s background as a liberal minister who treated genocidal speech as criminal, there is reason to do this. For, in Mamdani’s opinion, Mbonampeka’s remarkable shift, which took place within only three years, is an example of the wider and more generalized shift that explains the mass participation in the genocide.

Mamdani sees the war as a necessary precondition for the genocide. War was necessary not because it provided secrecy, as was the case with the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust, for example. On the contrary, the Rwandan genocide took place in broad daylight, in public places like churches, schools and hospitals, and it was often perpetrated by people the victims knew well. War was necessary because it produced the fear in the population that led them to kill. Although many killed because militias threatened them with their own death, far too many others killed willingly. It is this group—“the ‘foot soldiers of the genocide’” (p. 233)—that Mamdani seeks to understand:

“If it is the struggle for power that explains the motivation of those who crafted the genocide, then it is the combined fear of a return to servitude and of reprisals thereafter that energized the foot soldiers of the genocide. The irony is that—whether in the Church, in hospitals, or in human rights groups, as in fields and homes—the perpetrators of the genocide saw themselves as the true victims of an ongoing political drama, victims of yesterday who may yet be victims again. That moral certainty explains the easy transition from yesterday’s victims to killers the morning after” (p. 233).

This point—that the Hutu historical consciousness as

victims granted many a necessary moral certainty that enabled participation in mass murder—is remarkably important. Without the element of moral certainty it is hard to imagine how fear might incite both the scale and the kind of murder we witnessed in Rwanda. The point about the crucial role played by moral certainty also has important comparative potential, helping us think about genocide as part of longer-term historical cycles of violence. It points to the danger inherent within “internal enemy” arguments during times of conflict and war. It underscores the terrible compromises of democratic institutions that people are willing to make when they feel they are threatened, particularly when the threat is used by self-serving political factions to buttress their own power. And it acts as a powerful warning for the post-genocide Rwandan state, where the cycle of violence could easily renew itself as the victimized Tutsis respond to their fears of the return of Hutu refugees from the surrounding states. Because of the importance of moral certainty in explaining people’s actions, it is strange that Mamdani does not spend more time discussing it. He raises it, in the quote above, at the very end of his chapter on the genocide, and then tantalizingly moves on to a discussion of the new citizenship crisis in Eastern Congo that was provoked by the genocide.

Understanding mass participation is, for Mamdani, key to explaining why the genocide happened. Without popular participation, he argues, there would have been no genocide at all, since in most regions popular participation was required to murder Tutsi with such terrible speed and effectiveness. “Had the killings been the work of state functionaries and those bribed by them,” he writes, “it would have translated into no more than a string of massacres perpetrated by death squads” (p. 225). While his argument about the role played by historical anxieties and war-induced fears is convincing, and heightens our awareness of the process through which victims can and do become killers, it is less clear that there would not have been a genocide at all without mass participation. There would not have been *the* genocide we witnessed, but a “string of massacres perpetrated by death squads” can quickly take on genocidal proportions, especially when there is a clear intent on the part of the perpetrators to destroy “in whole or in part” a group due to its “national, ethnical, racial or religious” affiliation.[3] Apart from the somewhat dead-end question about numbers, there remains the danger of defining genocide on the basis of the effectiveness of the perpetrators in carrying out annihilation.

One wishes Mamdani had engaged in a more exten-

sive consideration of the questions surrounding comparative genocide studies, and that he had occasionally taken more care in making comparisons, especially with the Holocaust. Some readers will undoubtedly cringe at the bold and at times baffling (and historically inaccurate) strokes of his comparative arguments, such as the following, which he makes as part of a critique of “victor’s justice” in post-genocide Rwanda: “It is worth remembering that it is not simply German defeat in the Second World War that made Nuremberg possible, but also the effective divorce between Gentiles and Jews in Germany, since most surviving German Jews departed for either America or Israel. In the absence of this effective divorce, anything resembling Zionist power in Germany would have been a recipe for triggering a civil war” (p. 272). In a book of such breadth and density, requiring impressive erudition in a variety of fields, it is impossible to devote sustained attention to all the various questions raised by the book and its subject matter. This being the case, misleading and insupportable comparisons like the one above should have been edited out. While certainly it would be instructive to read Mamdani’s thoughts on the comparative issues raised by the Rwandan genocide in respect to the Holocaust, such a project may have taken the book too far afield, requiring a grasp of too many literatures and historical periods.

Mamdani does devote a chapter to the comparative study of specifically colonial genocides. His introduction, “Thinking About Genocide,” is a very insightful discussion of “settlers’ genocide” and “natives’ genocide,” in which he compares the settlers’ genocide of the Herero in German South West Africa in 1904 with the natives’ genocide of Rwanda in 1994. Elaborating on Frantz Fanon’s famous quote, “[t]he colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence,” he notes that the Rwandan genocide, a natives’ genocide inasmuch as the Hutu saw themselves as indigenous and the Tutsi as alien, was a derivative form of violence, “a result of prior logic, the genocidal logic of colonial pacification and occupation infecting anticolonial resistance” (p. 13). This is an extremely significant point, with unsettling ramifications. The issue of innocence and guilt becomes much more complicated and nuanced than in the case of the Holocaust, for example, where the targets of persecution and genocidal violence—Jews, Roma-Sinti and others—can in no fashion be interpreted either as constituting a military threat to Christian Germans or the German state, or as representing some previous despotic form of rule.

Mamdani’s book is about far more than the genocide as such. The development and execution of the geno-

cide have been detailed elsewhere, and his chapter on it is very comprehensive.[4] *When Victims Become Killers* is also an argument about history. Mamdani is arguing for the historical basis of identity formation and the role this history can play in providing the fodder for genocidal thought, when triggered by short-term events. The racialism of Hutu Power was the product of colonial categories and their institutionalization. But this alone was not enough to create a genocide. The masses had to be radicalized and mobilized, and this could occur only in the context of the RPF invasions. Peasants’ abject fear of the RPF, a product of the way the colonial state ruled, was the necessary ingredient sealing the fate of Rwanda’s Tutsi minority.

We have seen in the case of Stanislas Mbonampeka how crucial the period of “civil war” was to his political development as a genocide denier.[5] He understands his endorsement of Hutu Power’s response to the RPF invasion as a matter of patriotism, of protecting the country. And he believes that “massacres” and other crimes were the tragic but unavoidable result of simple Tutsi presence in Rwanda. For him, each Tutsi was a potential RPF abettor. While he may truly believe this to have been the case, his testimony raises very important questions about the role of propaganda in this genocide, questions that Mamdani does not fully answer. How terrifying was RPF occupation, apart from Hutu Power invectives? We know that Hutu peasants fled from RPF-occupied zones, out of fear, as a consequence of forced relocations, and because the RPF requested they leave. We also know that the RPF did commit human rights abuses in its occupied zones, but they were far smaller in scale and hardly comparable to the genocide. And yet, the Hutu Power extremists and their hodgepodge of political supporters continued to whip up fear and hatred of the RPF as if its goals were in fact genocidal as well. Mamdani does not spend much time analyzing the extent to which the extremist Hutu Power camp was even in the logical position of claiming, with any moral authority whatsoever, that it was being illegitimately attacked and threatened. Surely, it was being attacked, and was losing the war at the time when the genocide broke out, but it had taken steps—including four massacres between 1990 and 1994—to kill democracy, and derail negotiations and power-sharing arrangements with the RPF, such as the Arusha Accords. So the fact that it was being threatened still in 1994 is really a problem of its own making.

More convincing than Mbonampeka’s self-serving rationale is the argument that the development of his political ideas resembles in its radicalization the develop-

ment of the perspectives of Hutu civilians. The war had led to severe dislocation, starvation, economic stagnation, massacres and the resulting pervasive environment of fear. In basing much of his argument on this critical wartime experience, Mamdani is also making an argument about democracy and what kills it. As he mentions in a passage quoted previously, Rwanda was in the process of democratization, spurred on by economic decline in the 1980s among other things, when the war broke out. The war derailed democratic reform and with it openness to and possibilities for creative political solutions to entrenched and long-term tensions. It expanded people's toleration of state-sponsored violence as a legitimate response to external and internal threats, whether perceived or real. In this climate, propaganda about the "return" of Tutsi Power oppression found fertile ground. Legitimate historical concerns thus entered into the calculations of ordinary Hutus when taking action during the genocide. This insight is a welcome corrective to studies that have emphasized Hutus' blind obedience to authority, enhanced by greed.

In focusing so strongly on the reason—or thinkableness—of the political agency leading up to the genocide, Mamdani is up against one of the central questions of genocide scholarship: how much *can* we explain when we look at atrocities like Rwanda and the Holocaust? Analyses of the Rwandan genocide take place in a specifically difficult context in as much as Europe has long perceived the continent on which it occurred as a space of madness and death. This explains why the Western press could get away with the shoddy journalism so scathingly criticized by Philipp Gourevitch in his best-selling book, *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families*. So Mamdani is in the situation where he must perhaps overstate at times the reasonableness of participants and perpetrators in an effort to counter glib explanations that rely on racist stereotypes originating with the Atlantic slave trade.[6]

Mamdani relies heavily on history, and on categories, in explaining why so many Hutu peasants and professionals felt that their very lives were threatened by the Tutsis in their midst. He does not conduct an extended analysis of perpetrator accounts, along the lines of Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men*, to bring to light the short-term experiential effects of the war and the way perpetrators were perceiving reality and acting upon these perceptions. The moral and religious question at the heart of much scholarship on the pressures that bring people to kill—how can human beings commit such evil?—was not the purpose of Mamdani's

book. Instead, he rather courageously seeks an historical framework that will allow us dispassionately to enter the intellectual space of the killers. "My preoccupation," he writes, "is not with the universal character of evil, with describing acts of cruelty to underline the fact that people—or some people—are capable of unspeakable cruelty. It is, rather, with trying to understand the political nature of violence—that its targets are those defined as public enemy [sic] by perpetrators who see themselves as the people—and thus with the process that leads to it and the specific conditions that make this possible" (p. 229). In fact, he is suspicious of works that spend too much time on the details of the violence and the moral questions it raises. He comments, "[t]he point of such an exercise may be to show how base human nature can be, or it may be, I fear, more self-serving: to show how base is the nature of some humans, usually some others, not us" (p. 228). While I recognize the value of this caution against the self-congratulatory indulgence that moral outrage can at times kindle, a serious inquiry into, as opposed to a simple description of, the violence might give us a better sense of the immediate experiential reality that contributed to men, women and children walking next door with the purpose of massacring their neighbors.[7]

If the genocidal actions of ordinary Rwandans are thinkable, and Mamdani's work certainly helps us "think" them, there is still the possibility that this genocide—along with all other instances of mass murder—took place in a kind of reality that exceeds the language we use to describe political agency. In this case, in order to make genocide thinkable, we will also need to grasp the short-term mental pressures that brutalization and escalating violence exert upon those called upon to kill. While Mamdani has left little doubt that Hutu peasants were truly afraid, and many believed they were defending their liberty by murdering Tutsis, I wonder if there were not also other, much murkier, contributors—the effects of hatred inspired and encouraged by political extremists, the ever-present problem of social pressure, the experiential dislocation caused by the state's liberal use of lies, the cumulative physical vertigo caused by exposure to mutilated corpses and other signs of atrocity in one's own backyard. Fear may be the reason that is easiest to speak of after the fact.

In explaining the logic of the perpetrators, Mamdani is not shifting the blame to those the perpetrators targeted. Instead he is deeply preoccupied with and concerned about reconstruction in post-genocidal Rwanda, where the horrible dynamic that led to the 1994 genocide

and had fed so much of Rwanda's postcolonial history threatens to take over again, repeating the cycle. In this way, Mamdani's book is an exhortation for the future. His avoidance of the kind of study a moral inquiry might lead to is of enormous practical value. What his work suggests is that since people do kill, and kill genocidally, political societies must be vigilant about meting out political, social and economic justice as equitably as possible in the name of fostering peace over the long term. He asks us as readers to move beyond placing blame—inasmuch as such a thing is ethically thinkable—to considering the wider historical and geographical context so that political violence can be avoided in the future. In this scenario, the lessons of pre-genocide Rwanda have a chance of influencing the governance of the post-genocide state. They also have relevance to all societies struggling to come to terms with the violence of the twenty-first century world.

The lessons Mamdani draws are incisive. He argues that to reconcile justice with democracy, post-genocide Rwanda will have to pursue survivor's as opposed to victor's justice. This means that *all* survivors of the genocide—Hutu and Tutsi—will need to be considered the potential beneficiaries of political justice. He points out that most of the rank and file perpetrators gained nothing from the genocide and were, in a sense, victimized by history and the irresponsible, at times criminal, ways political leaders had engaged with it. This is not a popular insight, but it bears serious consideration. Although Mamdani recognizes the importance of trials, he fears that if ordinary Hutus are not included in the state's concept of justice, the final result of the genocide will be to institute a state under the ideology of Tutsi Power. Already today, as he remarks, "[i]n the real world of state politics ... the word *genocidaire* may be used to label any Hutu seen as an opponent, or even a critic, of Tutsi Power" (p. 271).

The pursuit of justice will have to extend from the focus on the reform of individuals (as in trials and tribunals) to the reform of institutions of rule, especially citizenship laws and local administrative structures. Citizenship, he argues, must be redefined on the basis of residence in order for future generations to exceed the violent racism of the native/settler dynamic. And in local politics, the executive, legislative, judicial, and administrative powers will have to be parsed out to different bodies. These are extremely important arguments, and ones well supported by the cautionary tale of the political choices that led, over many decades, to the genocide.

Notes

[1]. On Rwandan demographics, see: Gerard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 5. German rule in Rwanda was not intensive, and Germany lost the territory along with its other colonies after World War I, when Rwanda became a League of Nations Mandate under Belgian rule. However, Germany strengthened the Rwandan court and implemented a form of indirect rule that became the model for Belgian administration.

[2]. Rwanda gained formal independence from Belgium in 1962.

[3]. This language is taken from Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

[4]. See, for example: Alison Des Forges, *"Leave None to Tell the Story": Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999); Philip Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998; Prunier 1995; Rakiya Omaar, *Rwanda: Death, Despair, Defiance* (London: African Rights, 1994).

[5]. The extent to which the RPF invasion constitutes a civil war is debatable. A civil war is usually one between subjects or citizens within the boundaries of the same state. Although the Tutsi refugees in Uganda had a reasonable claim to (re)inclusion within the Rwandan state-society, they were not, at the time of the invasion, legal members of that state-society. So whereas it may have been a civil war in terms of a cultural community, it was not one in terms of a legal community. Mamdani does not say whether his use of the term civil war is intended to subvert the logic of the Hutu state, which created the refugee problem and refused to acknowledge refugees' citizenship for decades after the revolution. In this way, Mamdani's use of the term would challenge and defy the naturalized and racialized identities inherited from the colonial era, inasmuch as he would be declaring the cultural belonging and legal citizenship of refugee Tutsi within pre-genocide Rwandan society. In another interpretation, civil war can imply a moral equivalence between the opposing sides, or at least an equivalence of goals. The RPF was indeed an invading army; yet it was willing to engage in power-sharing agreements and signed the 1993 Arusha Accords that set the terms for peace. It was not interested in committing genocide. Nor were Rwandan Tutsis all in league with or members of the RPF, as Hutu Power extremists argued. Certainly, many Hutus saw all Tutsi as the enemy, but there is little to suggest that Tutsis resident in Rwanda were all some-

how in cahoots with the RPF, at least not until they began to see the RPF as their only liberators from certain death. An analytical separation must be made between the RPF-Rwandan war, on the one hand, and the Hutu Power-directed genocide of Tutsi citizens and civilians, on the other.

[6]. This difficulty in “getting close” to genocidal logic is intensely portrayed in the 1999 film “The Specialist” (available from Kino International in New York

City), which is based on archival videotape footage during Eichmann’s trial held between April and December 1961 in Jerusalem. The film, and of course much thinking on this problem, has been deeply influenced by Hannah Arendt’s classic, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963).

[7]. Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993).

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