COMPARATIVE REFLECTIONS ON THE AFRICAN DILEMMA:
THE INTERDEPENDENT DEMOCRATIZATION OF STATES AND CIVIL SOCIETIES

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Mamdani masterfully articulates historical legacies with contemporary challenges for political analysis and action. The broad patterns of civil society formation and ethnicity that he synthesizes for Africa resonate throughout the postcolonial world—even in regions where one might not expect it, such as Latin America. Mamdani's approach pares away empirical differences to reach an analytical core that facilitates trans-Atlantic comparison. This paper will explore three of Mamdani's themes that travel especially well: the impact of history on civil society formation, the distinction between racialized and ethnicized politics, and the tensions between authoritarian and popular politics in the arena called "traditional." The comment concludes by questioning Mamdani's dichotomy between representative and participatory politics.

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Proposition 1. Mamdani's argument shows how colonial state legacies shape the contemporary political construction of ethnic power relations in both states and civil societies in Africa.

When one begins to review colonial histories for analytical resonance between African and Latin American experiences, the differences between the regions at first appear overwhelming. One first notices that most Latin American nations had long been nominally independent before most of Africa was colonized by Europe. Most of Latin America's population was either descended from or ruled by settler-colonialism, in contrast to more widespread indirect rule in much of Africa. Subsequent neocolonial experiences also appear to lack close parallels, including clear differences between the patterns of the United States vs. European domination (though both metropoles shared a taste for gunboat diplomacy in the smaller or weaker postcolonial regimes in each region at least well into the 1980s).[1]

Following Latin America's independence, republican states declared "liberal" reforms, including nominal guarantees of individual equality and political freedom. This included the widespread commodification (and often expropriation) of communal lands—a process slowed or partially undone by mid-twentieth century "peasantizing" populist land reforms, most of which are now being reversed to some degree. One of the most important cross-regional differences between the role of states in shaping rural group formation is precisely the powerful role of the central state in defining land rights from the state in Latin America, in contrast to most of Africa. The long arm of the Latin American state has long promoted the "peasantization" of many land claims that would otherwise have been based on the (ethnicized) right to ancestral domain.[2]

Though the institutionalized forms of racial and ethnic discrimination were more famous in United States, similar constitutional democratic promises were also betrayed in Latin America. Afro-Latin Americans were subjected to more subtle regimes of pervasive social control, most notably in Brazil and Cuba (where slavery was only legally abolished in 1888 and 1886, respectively). Formal exclusions were also used, however. Non-Spanish speaking indigenous peoples were often considered less than full citizens (wards of the state, as though they were "minors"). Illiterates, which would include most of both African and indigenous peoples, were routinely officially denied the right to vote (even in Chile's long-standing democracy, where much of the rural population, including the Mapuche people, was disenfranchised until illiterates could vote in the early 1960s). Most often, however, the authoritarian practices of both elected and military Latin American regimes that regulated inter-ethnic power relations were not formalized; more often left to local state institutions and everyday social practices. The more general point here is that when one reviews the historically inherited social structures of both Africa and Latin America, one will quickly note the heavy overlap between ethnic identity and class position in many societies.[3]

Analytically, resonant themes begin to emerge more clearly once one begins to focus on the relationship between ethnicity and civil society formation, especially if one focuses on those Latin American societies with large populations of indigenous and African descent.[4] Parallels begin to emerge more clearly if one focuses more on patterns of internal colonialism.[5] The political and economic control of largely rural indigenous and partly rural Afro-Latin American peoples tended to be left in the hands of regional bosses, intermediate links in the chain of domination known as internal colonialism. Here Mamdani distinguishes crisply between interlocking forms of "centralized" and less formal "decentralized despotism."

In his discussion of recent processes of regime change in Africa, Mamdani paints a picture of emerging political citizenship limited to urban areas that had experienced direct colonial rule, while the rural hinterlands tend to remain dominated by despotic rule by local ethno-political elites whose power was consolidated by indirect colonial rule. The proposition that access to political institutions and basic freedoms is highly segmented within nation-states, both territorially and ethnically, would be quite familiar in Latin America. The main Latin American parallel with the pattern Mamdani describes is the de facto bargain struck between national and local political elites, where national elites cede territorial and ethnic power politico-economic monopolies to local bosses in exchange for political stability and loyalty to the national regime.

Many of the transitions to elected civilian rule in Latin America brought political freedoms to urban areas but left large swaths of the countryside under authoritarian or semi-authoritarian rule, at least until recent breakthroughs by rural social and civic movements managed to broaden and deepen. In short, in both Latin America and Africa, urban civilian rule is necessary but far from sufficient for rural democratization, and this deep cleavage is historically inherited in both regions.[6]

Proposition 2. Mamdani makes a powerful case for a more precise distinction between racialized and ethnicized power relations.

Mamdani underscores "the division between the racialized citizen and the ethnicized subject." This important distinction is relevant for Latin America but is only just beginning to be explored systematically. This is no accident, since the national intellectual establishments of several of the Latin American countries with the largest indigenous and African populations have long rejected the proposition that racial and ethnic discrimination are contemporary facts in their societies (e.g., Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Cuba). Today, however, a new generation of researchers is documenting contemporary racialized and ethnicized politics and social relations, and is also exploring their roots in colonial and post-colonial legacies. For example, one study in progress is documenting the historical and cultural roots of Brazilian urban police violence. This study finds "civil police" behavior to be

shaped by a historically-inherited sense of mission; the institution was founded to repress communities of escaped slaves known as *quilombos*.[7]

Most Afro-Latin Americans are excluded politically along the lines of the "racialization" of the citizenry described by Mamdani. The process of slavery was designed to destroy the ethnic legacies that could have supported "customary" authority structures, such as those used by indirect rule in Africa. The main exceptions are in Brazil and Colombia, where Afro-Latin Americans are claiming land rights based on ancestral domain provisions usually limited to indigenous peoples, based on their ethnic identity as descendants of escaped slave communities.

In contrast, Spanish colonial rulers did sometimes draw on their own version of indirect rule to control indigenous peoples. Where indigenous peoples had pre-conquest state structures, their nobility was sometimes retained. While the racial hierarchy quickly became complicated by widespread miscegenation, the ethnic hierarchy remained clearly-defined, with those closest to Spain at the top, followed by those phenotypically similar but born in the colonies, and so forth. By the early twentieth century, nationalist and revolutionary currents, driven largely by the Mexican revolution, legitimated mixed race peoples—for the first time—as the "Cosmic Race." Indigenous peoples could claim political citizenship, but only if they traded in their ethnic identities for nationalism.

In Mexico—home of Latin America's largest indigenous population— discrimination is clearly ethnicized more than racialized (though at the top, the ruling tribe of technocrats is almost exclusively Caucasian). While most of the population has some indigenous origin in racial terms, disenfranchisement is most extreme for those "original" Mexicans who do not speak Spanish as their first language. One could argue that for them—at least one in ten Mexicans—Spanish is still a colonial language.[8] In spite of the post-revolutionary state's glorification of the nation's indigenous past, both the state and civil society ethnicize access to rights in practice. Not long ago, this was quite overt. As recently as the mid-1950s, indigenous people walking the streets of the colonial highland town of San Cristóbal de las Casas—recently made famous by the Zapatista rebels' takeover—were not permitted to walk on the sidewalks. San Cristóbal, like many other urban trading centers in majority indigenous regions, had long been dominated by a non-indigenous elite that lived off of the surrounding rural majority. Semi-servile relations persisted on many hacienda estates until not so long ago, including debt-peonage and landlords' customary sexual "right" to their workers' daughters. Like the African chiefs Mamdani describes, these regional elites fused all dimensions of state and market power simultaneously, "like a clenched fist." These regional bosses are literally known in Mexico as "chiefs," (the term *caciques* later traveled to Mexico's cities to refer to a wide range of informal bosses able to fuse political and economic power and use coercion with impunity). With local bosses reinforced by their role as channels for central-state "development" resources, it took repeated waves of combative grassroots regional mass movements in the 1970s and 1980s

to weaken these regional authoritarian regimes. Even today, many of these authoritarian enclaves remain intact and few are completely broken.[9]

The distinction between race and ethnicity is relevant here, since in many indigenous and rural Afro-Latin American regions, authoritarian bosses tend to be of mixed-race. They often lack the legitimacy conferred by ostensibly "traditional" authority (thereby increasing the level of coercion needed to maintain control). Nevertheless, in some regions, national political elites did delegate political authority to local bosses who could claim the mantle of ethnic legitimacy, sometimes leading to extreme despotism that presented itself as "traditional" to the outside world—quite reminiscent of the African pattern.[10]

Proposition 3. Mamdani questions whether any democratic content remains in "customary" authority structures.

Pre-colonial governance structures included a wide range of power relations and decision making processes, from more authoritarian to more democratic and accountable. Mamdani stresses that colonial rulers generally managed to strip much of the democratic content out of Africa's "traditional" patterns of governance, leaving a system of "decentralized despotism." This pattern was somewhat different in most of indigenous Latin America. On the one hand, western systems of state governance were dominant, penetrating further into the countryside than appears to be the case for much of Africa. On the other hand, in many Latin American indigenous regions, non-western governance structures, though highly syncretic, retained high levels of local autonomy, participation and accountability well into the twentieth century.

Because of its combination of authoritarian and "popular" legacies, "customary" law can be a two-edged sword for democratization. This raises an empirical question about Mamdani's argument: were colonial governments really that successful at wiping out more popular traditions of governance? Where enclaves of relative autonomy and accountable governance structure survived, why did they, and how can those traditions--or even the mere memory of those traditions--be harnessed to a broader democratic project? This is one of the main challenges that Latin American indigenous movements are facing.

The single most important issue on many Latin American indigenous political agendas now involves the "scaling up" of this legacy of local autonomy, to create higher levels of territorial autonomy within nation-states. In the contemporary Mexican debate, Western-minded intellectuals that oppose indigenous autonomy repeatedly use the examples of South African Bantustans and U.S. tribal reservations to argue that ceding territorial autonomy and some kind of ethnic political representation would be a disaster (though they rarely propose how existing regimes might be reformed to extend effective political equality to indigenous citizens). Other critics argue that customary law would lead to authoritarian rule within indigenous territories. Indigenous rights advocates reply that they are in the

midst of a process of reinventing "customary law" to stress its democratic content, while regional autonomy would improve the currently dysfunctional system of checks and balances with the nation-state.

Proposition 4. Proposition for debate: Mass participation and representation are not dichotomous.

Mamdani concludes with the proposition that African regimes based on political party representation are inherently urban-biased, while systems of non-party mass mobilization permit more participation by the (rural) majority. If one specifies concepts such as partisan "representation" and non-party "participation" with precision, however, this dichotomy does not hold up.

First, if an elected civilian regime fails to guarantee political rights to the rural population, then it falls short of even the conventional liberal definition of democracy (freedom of the press, association, free and fair elections, etc.). Where effective political competition is limited to an urban elite, the label of "representative democracy" simply does not fit.[11] Regimes based on conventionally elected political parties certainly impose many constraints on more popular and participatory visions of democracy, but calling electoral regimes "representative" that clearly fall short of any rigorous application of the minimum conditions for (narrowly-defined) democracy does not permit one to identify those obstacles specific to competitive party systems.

Second, mobilization is treated as necessarily participatory and democratic. Mass mobilization is certainly effective for building national states, or for carrying out major social reforms, such as land redistribution, but there is nothing necessarily participatory or democratic about mobilization per se. States and ruling parties can use a wide range of non-democratic inducements and threats to generate the kind of mobilization they want, as single-party regimes have consistently shown throughout the world. In practice, electoral regimes are often not representative, while regimes based on mass mobilization are rarely participatory.

Table 1. A False Dichotomy: Representative vs. Participatory Politics

Modes of Mass Representation	*Modes of Mass Political Action*	
All can be either vertical or horizontal:	Mobilization: (vertical)	Participation: (horizontal)
•) political parties	•) induced	•) informed, voluntary
•) economic interest groups	•) controlled or coerced	•) accountable leadership
•) ethnic organizations	•) based on clientelism, ethnic patronage or corporatism	•) internal pluralism, tolerance for dissent

Therefore, posing a dichotomy between the two terms ends up gutting them of content.

If "genuine" participation is by definition autonomous, then it is most likely to be sustained in regimes that respect political pluralism and competition. Electoral parties are most likely to be at least partially representative of the citizenry in regimes where social actors sustain their own autonomous, representative mass organizations. Neither democratic nor socialist ideologies provide protection against the "Iron Law of Oligarchy," which threatens parties and mass organizations equally.

One way to reframe the problem is to distinguish conceptually between modes of mass representation and modes of mass action. Representation is defined here as indirect, while participation is direct. As the table suggests, channels of "representation" can be either horizontal or vertical, regardless of whether they are parties, interest groups, ethnic associations or civic organizations. Similarly, channels for mass action can be either vertical, based on threats and inducements, or horizontal, based on informed, autonomous and pluralist decision making.

One of the most important themes to emerge from Mamdani's incisive synthesis is that one cannot understand the prospects for the democratization of regimes without taking into account the impact of the past on structures of governance deeply embedded in civil society. Similarly, the democratization of civil society depends significantly on the consolidation of regimes that are capable of creating a hospitable environment for democratic initiatives from below. In short, one of the most powerful general propositions that emerges is that authoritarian legacies in the state and civil society are interdependent, and therefore democratic advances in one arena require democratic advances in the other.

NOTES

1. Certainly growing numbers of regimes throughout the world are dominated by techno-bureaucrats and economists, whose cultural affinities and shared status hierarchies might lead one to consider them to constitute an emerging transnational "tribe."

2. Against this backdrop, the widespread withdrawal of state support for peasant agriculture in Latin America encouraged the ethnic politicization of many indigenous movements in the region. See Deborah Yashar (forthcoming).

3. In Latin America the distinctiveness of diverse indigenous groups in Latin America was subsumed under the generic category of the Indian "other, in a period when the Catholic Inquisition deemed them to lack human souls. This racialized homogenization of ethnic diversity differs from the late nineteenth century imperial acceptance of the distinctiveness of African ethnic groups, which appears to have been driven by the strategy of indirect rule.

4. The vast majority of Latin America's indigenous population lives in Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador. Most Afro-Latin Americans live in Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Venezuela, Dominican Republic, Peru, as well as the smaller Caribbean countries. For useful introductions to race, ethnicity and politics in Latin America, see, among others, Graham (1990, Minority Rights Group 1995); Urban and Sherzer (1991); Van Cott (1994); and Wade (1996) and the thematic issues of *NACLA Report on the Americas* on post-conquest identities, indigenous peoples and Afro-Latin Americans (issues 24(5), Feb. 1991; 25(3), Dec., 1991, and 25(4), Feb. 1992 respectively). The

NACLA series estimated that 5.8 percent of Latin America's population is indigenous, while 9-17.2 percent is of African origin (with all the debates and lack of uniform categories that one can imagine). As Wade puts it, "native Americans have from a very early date occupied the institutional position of Other, as essentially different from their observers, whereas the descendents of black Africans have been located much more ambiguously, both inside and outside the society of their masters and observers" (1997, p. 3).

5. For a classic early study that suggests the important role of internal colonialism for understanding interethnic relations, including an unusual analysis of both the Ivory Coast and Mexico, see Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1975).

6. For further discussion of how the literature on democratization in Latin America assumed national homogeneity, and therefore missed the qualitatively distinct dynamics of rural politics, see Fox (1990, 1992).

7. This study of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil's most African city, is being carried out by Ana Tereza Ramos-Nelson (see "Gross Human Rights Violations in Bahia, Brazil: The Task of Social Control in a Bureaucratic-Patrimonial State," University of Notre Dame Government Department, in progress).

8. Indeed, the Mexican state defines "indigenousness" narrowly, in terms of language. The census only considers those who must wait to learn the national language in school (if at all) to be "officially" indigenous. Even then, the census does not count children under five in these families as indigenous. The rationale for this exclusion is not clear, but the result is a massive undercounting of the ethnic minority population. Perhaps state managers are counting on the public education system to "castellanize" the youngest indigenous people and thereby change their ethnic status.

9. For further discussion, see Fox (1996).

10. For a highly nuanced study of the classic case of state-structured "ethnic" authoritarian rule at the local level, see Jan Rus (1994).

11. For an argument that calls for a more rigorous conceptual application of the minimum conditions for political democracy, see Fox (1994).

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POST-COLONIAL POLITICS AND POWER

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The period since the end of the Cold War has not been an easy one for most of Africa. Changing superpower policies, together with new international economic patterns, have destabilized states and societies across the continent. In the late 1980s, these changes looked promising: as superpower support for dictators declined, political scientists hoped that the collapse of strong states might offer new possibilities for increased popular participation in government, while economists claimed that market liberalization would create new opportunities for economic growth.

But in the 1990s, international discussions of African politics tend to be more pessimistic. A decade of civil wars across the continent has pushed policy makers and scholars alike toward a more gloomy outlook. Where once scholars argued that Africa's 'civil society' held the key to democratization, now they are far more likely to place African societies in a special category, seeing them as a primordial swamp of ethnic loyalties, irrational militias and corrupt bureaucrats. Unable either to attract international investment or to find their own dynamic for growth or development, African societies are treated as driven by 'tribal loyalties' instead of

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