

LCLI CHRONICLE

Mahmood Mamdani *on the nation-state and genocide*



An illustration of the 1492 expulsion of the Jewish communities from the Spanish kingdoms.
(Photo by Fototeca Gilardi / Getty Images)

Interview with Mahmood Mamdani (Jan 9, 2024) - [Click here](#)

Occasionally one of our LCLI Fellows wonders if others would be interested in something they find significant. I then share it because, yes, I think you would be. This comes from Horst Kleinschmidt. It's a published interview with Mahmood Mandani on a theme he has long studied and for which he is renowned (his book, *Citizen and Subject*, is a seminal work on the two somewhat different strategies adopted by the French and the British in their colonization of Africa, assimilation and separation).

Current events in Israel/Palestine raise forefully the question of what the nation-state is and what that has to do with genocide, a particularly troublesome theme. As Mamdani tells it, it goes back a long way – to the expulsion of Jewish and Moor communities from Iberia in the 15th century, and the genocide of Native Americans. The fundamental flaw in the idea of the nation-state, he argues, is that it is a project of identity necessarily built on exclusion. In this interview, he responds to questions about why he sees it this way and what its implications are now.

Mamdani knows something of this himself. His parents were immigrants from India to Uganda from which he, although a committed pan-Africanist, was expelled along with other immigrants by Idi Amin in 1972 as an "Asian." Acknowledged as one of the world's top public intellectuals, he is Herbert Lehman Professor of Government at Columbia University.

Easy to read, it raises deep questions for us all about the meaning of nationhood, of genocide, of exclusion and inclusion, of what it means to want a "homeland," and of how this is possible without insisting on exclusionary identities. It is more than worth sharing with you.*

Jim Cochrane

* Disclosure: While he was at UCT as chair of African Studies, where he criticized "South African exceptionalism," I got to know Mahmood personally and have continued to value his insights.

Note: This document is for personal sharing only - copyrighted image can't be shared publicly.