

### **Preface from the Editors:**

The African Peace and Conflict Network (APCN) is pleased to offer Eric Reeve's review of Mahmood Mamdani's *Saviors and Survivors* book, which originally appeared in *Dissent*. We are pleased to foster further analysis and discussion of this prominent conflict case and the views of a leading Africanist; (see also Lobban's review of the book at SSRC Blogs: Making Sense of Sudan). Please note that APCN is a neutral forum and does not endorse Reeve's or Mamdani's viewpoints, but we appreciate both as heuristic tools for furthering awareness and understanding. We hope that Reeve's paper will galvanize further discussion about the complicated issues of humanitarian intervention, sovereignty, and neo-colonialism in Africa and the Global South.

It is also important that we provide some context for Mamdani's views. The following is based on Mamdani's 2009 interview with the *Boston Globe*. Mamdani's work is rooted in three general areas of African research. First, he tries to place the violence in Darfur in its historical and cultural context of colonialism. Conflict in Africa is partially a response to "how identities are imposed from above," he avers, noting how the British arbitrarily categorized Sudanese groups as either African or Arab. This European type of racial classification has had long lasting repercussions on the Sudanese nation. Mamdani further argues that global awareness of the Darfur crisis mirrors the War on Terror. This is more than just a coincidence: the creation of the Arab "other" after 9/11 fits neatly into a western construction of genocide as carried out along racial lines (Arabs versus Africans). However, Mamdani argues that the concept of racial genocide does not explain the violence in Darfur. This does not mean he denies or justifies the killings, but represents his attempt to strip the ethnocentric elements from the discussion of Darfur.

Second, Mamdani critiques the "Save Darfur" movement. (Reeve asserts that Mamdani has conflated different groups.) He argues the movement is more of an American domestic phenomenon that includes a coalition of people that includes those who infantilize the third world, those who treat advocacy in African conflicts like a fad, and people who are actively seeking to demonize Arabs. In his view, the movement is based on mischaracterizations of the situation (as described above) and it ultimately channels energy away from important causes like protesting the American war in Iraq and the abuses in the War on Terror.

Finally, Mamdani is critical of the very idea of humanitarian intervention. He is not alone in this. Powerful international actors have long cited humanitarian intentions and causes as motivating their interventions and, in some cases, invasions. The colonization of Africa was defended on the grounds of a need to end slavery and to help the African people. Many people are consequently inherently suspicious of western interventions, like those debated for Darfur. Mamdani argues that “the language of human rights... has become the language of power and of interventionists who turn victims not into agents but into proxies. It has been subverted from a language that empowers victims to a language that serves the designs of an interventionist power on an international scale.”

We believe that Reeves and Mamdani are not as opposed to one another's views as it may first appear. Some of their ideas may be compatible, but they approach the situation from divergent angles and focus on disparate problems. They also operate on different time tables. Where Reeves is concerned with the practicalities and urgency of immediate action to end violence against civilians, Mamdani engages in diagnosis and analysis of the historical causes of violence in Darfur and in the Sudan, using a very broad lens.

## **References**

Richard Lobban, "Re-opening the Mind of the Public" SSRC Blogs: Making Sense of Sudan.

You can find the article here:

<http://blogs.ssrc.org/sudan/2009/07/23/re-opening-the-mind-of-the-public/>

Anne Mundow, “Politics and Humanitarianism: Interview with Mahmood Mamdani,” Boston Globe, March 22, 2009. You can find the article here:

[http://www.boston.com/ae/books/articles/2009/03/22/politics\\_and\\_humanitarianism/](http://www.boston.com/ae/books/articles/2009/03/22/politics_and_humanitarianism/)