

LAND, VIOLENCE, AND BELONGING IN SOUTH AFRICA

To Swim with Crocodiles: Land, Violence, and Belonging in South Africa, 1800–1996.

By Jill E. Kelly.

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Considering the implication of Mongane Serote's phrase, 'to every birth its blood,' Jill Kelly probes the deeper roots of a South African civil war. The fighting pitted Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) against the United Democratic Front (UDF) and African National Congress (ANC). During the negotiated transition from apartheid to democracy, their internecine rivalry terrorized Natal province. *To Swim with Crocodiles* examines histories, past and recent, in one zone of IFP-UDF/ANC conflict on the edge of Pietermaritzburg, capital of contemporary KwaZulu-Natal.

Divided into three parts, Kelly's monograph explores the enduring custom of *ukukhonza* (allegiance) through mutable relationships of social belonging buffeted by violent contestation. Practices of *ukukhonza* channelled fealty to ritual authority, usually a 'chief', *inkosi*, the male head of a ruling lineage. In return for loyalty, he gave subjects security in land — the material and spiritual lifeblood of each generation. Published between the 1970s and 1990s, ground-breaking studies of power struggles in Natal focused on class and ethnicity while overlooking the importance of *ukukhonza* to the longue-durée development of chiefdoms and upheavals. Some of this scholarship appeared in print as 'warriors' of Inkatha, a juggernaut of Zulu nationalism, fought 'comrades' of the nonracial UDF/ANC. Their combat put residents and researchers in black communities at mortal risk.

Unencumbered by these dangers, Kelly carefully deploys — at a discerning remove — valuable methodologies like oral interviewing, which involved forging close ties with families feeling the pain of loss in the region of Table Mountain. These informants introduced the book's compelling protagonist, Mhlabunzima Maphumulo, the 'peace chief' who promoted African heritage and rural security. In 1991, when hitmen killed Mhlabunzima for rejecting Inkatha and embracing the ANC, he became a Biko-like martyr.

The principal arguments, organizing themes, and chronological frameworks are laid out in the first third of the monograph. Chapters One and Two ambitiously trace shifting alliances and political disputes in the Table Mountain area, from the Late Iron Age to the Zulu kingdom and settler period. Kelly chronicles the complex legacy of colonial Secretary for Native Affairs Theophilus Shepstone. His strategy of upholding British indirect rule in nineteenth-century Natal entailed the preservation of 'traditional' dynamics like *ukukhonza* (to give allegiance and to serve). Other key historical actors are contextualized, including the Mdluli clan (Nyavu) and government-installed 'chief' Ngoza Majozi, Shepstone's indispensable deputy. Ngoza drew on white patronage to forge his Qamu 'tribe', the largest polity in all of Natal. It fragmented into groups, among them the Maphumulo led by *inkosi* Maguzu, grandfather of Mhlabunzima.

In the four chapters of Part Two, the narrative pace accelerates as Kelly's most original interpretations emerge in her meticulous examination of twentieth-century processes. She

assesses segregationist plans to relocate Table Mountain chiefdoms, which sparked feuds over boundaries. Using deeply sourced analysis, Kelly then charts the effects of apartheid-era ‘forced removals’. Pretoria intended to compensate chiefs for displacing their subjects, when, for example, the state built a dam or revised the limits of ‘Bantu’ areas. The perverse reward was initially dubbed betterment, a program granting (tribal) ‘wards’ control of overcrowded land. The Inkatha movement gained momentum at this time, Kelly writes, with Buthelezi capitalizing on the Bantustan system to become a mobilizer of hereditary rights to ‘traditional’ resources.

There was considerable rural opposition to the apartheid regime. Readers will learn of gender-based activism in the Table Mountain region on the eve of Sharpeville. Radicalized by growing inequality and poverty, African women joined ANC mass protests much to the chagrin of patriarchs. In the 1960s and 1970s, more chiefs defied the status quo; a youthful contingent of local leaders, advanced by the regent Mhlabunzima, went a step further. They challenged senior Inkatha men. Kelly reveals that the ensuing generational discord foreshadowed irreconcilable hostility between older ‘collaborators’ and younger militants, which nearly consumed the country by the early 1990s.

With telling testimony, the final two chapters suggest that an overwrought relationship between Buthelezi and Maphumulo sealed the protagonist’s fate. The peace chief was known for seizing opportunities to enhance his influence via Zulu monarchical and Inkatha patronage, and later alliances with Buthelezi’s foes, the UDF/ANC and its arm, the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESAs). Kelly explains why Mhlabunzima adopted this strategy: it helped to establish his chiefdom as a place of refuge in keeping with the aim of *ukukhonzisa*. As a result, Zulu nationalists called him an enemy whose ancestors were ‘spat out’ by colonial power (Ngoza’s sponsor). Soon Mhlabunzima and Buthelezi were circling each other in a martial dance. The spectacle attracted Inkatha-affiliated assassins from Pretoria’s transnational security branch trained in the Caprivi Strip, a staging zone for South African Defence Forces operating in Angola and Namibia (South West Africa).

In conclusion, Kelly deftly uncovers little-known origins of the IFP-UDF/ANC conflict. A milestone microhistory, *To Swim with Crocodiles* demonstrates that an exceptional new appraisal of ‘tradition’ and ‘tribe’ remains highly relevant today.

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SOUTH AFRICA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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