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Jill E. Kelly. *To Swim with Crocodiles: Land, Violence, and Belonging in South Africa, 1800-1996.* African History and Culture Series. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2018. Illustrations. 396 pp. $49.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-61186-285-0.

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Environmental changes, policies, and practices are inseparable from politics. Whether the topic is soil erosion or climate change, the ways that people think about, experience, and act on environmental changes are shaped by their relationships to institutions and governments. In *To Swim with Crocodiles*, historian Jill E. Kelly provides an intricate look at the local and national politics of land, violence, and belonging in the Table Mountain area in what is now KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa (not Table Mountain in Cape Town). This is not a work that focuses on the environment, but its nuanced analysis and innovative arguments illustrate a political and cultural context that scholars of environmental studies can learn from. Rather than expressing a primary interest in environment, Kelly seeks to understand the political roots of the violence of the 1980s and 1990s, often oversimplified by Western media as tribal.

Kelly uses a pair of what she calls cultural inheritances to guide her analysis that covers two hundred years in this Zulu-speaking locale. *To Swim with Crocodiles* takes readers from circa 1800, when identities in southern Africa derived from family-based chiefdoms, through multiple phases of White-supremacist rule and Black political struggle, and finally, to the years following multiparty elections in 1994. First, Kelly defines the cultural inheritance of *ukukhonza* as "one of affiliation, a social agreement that historically bound together subjects and leaders to provide land and security" (p. xxxii). In this reciprocal relationship, chiefs provided land and security to their subjects, while subjects "khonza-ed" their chiefs by paying tribute as livestock, labor, or cash. Kelly argues that *ukukhonza* has been fluid and has continued to shape the relationships between chiefs and subjects "even as those bonds were transformed by colonial and apartheid rule" (p. xxxvi).

Second, Kelly asserts that *ukukhonza* combined with genealogy to provide "the language for social and political membership, bringing to life new or imagined relationships between peoples and with land" (p. xxxvi). This cosmology is what historian Christopher Lee has called a genealogical imagination in *Unreasonable Histories: Nativism, Multiracial Lives, and the Genealogical Imagination in British Africa* (2014). Within these cultural inheritances, "land operated as both physical and cosmological space and a historical place" (p. xxxvii). Situating these arguments in the literature on authority, land, and violence, the author acknowledges that "chiefly connections with colonial and apartheid agents" interfered with the contract between chiefs and commoners (p. xl). But

Kelly stresses that overemphasizing this perspective obscures how Africans held leaders accountable. Furthermore, the author suggests that these cultural inheritances should be considered when rethinking the role of chiefs in administering land in a deeply inequitable South Africa.

Chapter 1 synthesizes archaeological, ethnographic, and documentary evidence to provide readers with a solid foundation of chieftainship. An elaboration of the Central Cattle Pattern, as Africanists know it, illustrates how chiefs and commoners related to one another through land allocation, cattle loans, and tribute rendered through labor, livestock, or military service. This system sustained well-being, yet it had inequities built into it such as between older families and later arrivals to a chiefship. Chapter 2 explains how British authorities employed chiefs to carry out indirect rule. In rural South Africa, this colonial apparatus regulated land allocation in ways that favored White settlers. Additionally, chiefs helped collect taxes, which along with dispossessing Africans of land, served to compel people to work in mines and on commercial farms. But chiefs handled this duty in varied ways, often blurring the lines between collaboration and resistance. On this subject, Kelly uses archival cases from the secretary of Native Affairs effectively to support her argument that *ukukhonza*, always evolving, remained central to the relationship between chiefs, commoners, and land.

Chapter 3 examines how the government bodies that formed the Union of South Africa in 1910 created new chiefships, drew new jurisdictions, and strengthened segregationist systems. Of special note is the story of how "Maguzu Maphumulo became the chief of the newly established Maphumulo chiefdom" at Table Mountain in 1905 (p. 66). The Nyavu chiefdom, however, had already been there. The politics between these two chiefdoms and how their people used genealogical imagination to claim belonging becomes a central theme throughout the book. Following the formation of the Union in 1910, the government passed a series of legislation to dispossess Africans from various tenancy arrangements in the region, sending many scrambling to find space in these chiefdoms. Kelly explains how new arrivals sought security and living space at Table Mountain using *ukukhonza*.

In chapters 4-5 the author explores the political and cultural dimensions of how betterment schemes—government
rural development projects—played out near Table Mountain. This section is of special interest to H-Environment readers. At the center is Nagle Dam, conceived of in 1935 to supply Durban with water and completed in 1951. Kelly uses an impressive collection of oral histories and detailed maps to show how people were removed, where they moved to, and how they used *ukukhonza* to navigate this injustice. Here, the book builds on, among others, Elizabeth Colson's work on the social consequences of Kariba Dam in Zambia, ***The Social Consequences of Resettlement: The Impact of the Kariba Resettlement upon the Gwembe Tonga*** (1971). Government efforts to promote commercial agriculture, control livestock, and consolidate villages provoked resistance. Frequently seen as agents of a coercive state, chiefs and agricultural officials were often targets of protest. Addressing the "androcentrism of betterment schemes," Kelly narrates how women resisted in the 1950s by destroying cattle-dipping tanks in an action that one interviewee described as "writing a letter to the authorities which they could read" (pp. 126, 127).

This book's strength is in how it reconstructs historical micropolitics to help explain recent conflict in political terms. Chapters 6-8 demonstrate this approach and its supporting methodology. Readers gain insight on how chiefs navigated the apartheid government's efforts in the 1970s to consolidate Africans into independent Bantustans. We see opportunists like Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi establish the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) that provided a Zulu-nationalist counterweight to liber-

ation parties under the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM), especially the African National Congress. Meanwhile, Chief Mhlabunzima Maphumulo earned the nickname "peace chief" by navigating the fraught spaces between local politics, MDM, and after 1987, the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa. But as the final chapters clarify through a detailed examination of the civil war in the 1980s and 1990s, politics was far more complicated than these affiliations reveal. It is through *ukukhonza*, above all, that people align themselves. The apartheid government's support for IFP bears substantial responsibility for the violence of these years, including the assassination of Mhlabunzima Maphumulo. But understanding people's motivations means assembling a longer history of how individuals, families, and chiefdoms saw themselves in relation to various lineages and to the land that they claim as theirs.

In *To Swim with Crocodiles*, Kelly demonstrates how documentary and oral evidence, combined with a sense of place, can improve our knowledge of political, social, and cultural change. Scholars and students of African history and politics, South African studies, and conflict studies will find this book rich in its analysis and enlightening in its findings. General readers, however, may find the naming of chiefs and chiefdoms difficult to follow at times. H-Environment readers will long for more about ecological changes, not for the sake of nature as backdrop, but as changes that are inseparable from political processes. Readers wanting an ecological analysis of Nagle Dam on par with Allen and Barbara Isaacman's book on Cahora Bassa Dam in Mozambique, *Dams, Displacement, and the Delusion of Development: Cahora Bassa and Its Legacies in Mozambique, 1965–2007* (2013), will have to look elsewhere. Environmental studies readers, however, will learn much about the local politics of policymaking, implementation, and resistance in South Africa in ways reminiscent of such works as Marsha Weisiger's *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country* (2011).

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