BOOK REVIEWS

The land is sung: Zulu performances and the politics of place

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The book is a carefully crafted literary work that explores how the performances of song, dance, and praise poetry connect Zulu communities to their ancestral homes and genealogies within the sphere of African spirituality. It further examines the dynamics of traditional leadership and governance in rural and migrant communities in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands and the borderlands of South Africa. Pooley navigates theories of the politics of performance through a series of critical engagements with postcolonial intellectual debates on land, national identities, language, culture, education, and environmental issues.

The structure of this book fosters coherence and good blending of chapters. Chapter one discusses the politics of belonging, focusing on land and culture and how they represent the values and aspirations of the Zulu nation in KwaZulu-Natal. The second chapter is entitled "*Umsindo*" (Noise). This chapter explores the politics of sonic space at Zulu wedding ceremonies. Chapter three examines the song of sacrifice, referred to as "*Umemulo*", as well as the politics of gender and generations. The fourth chapter examines the phenomenology of "*Ingoma*" (Song) known as "*Isishameni Dance*" and the politics of proximity. The fifth chapter focuses on the politics and poetics of popular praises known in IsiZulu as "*Umaskandi nezibongo*". Chapter six sheds light on inscribing tradition with particular reference to poverty, inequality and the politics of performance in schools. Chapter seven examines the sounds of Tongaland with a sharp focus on environmental justice at Ndumo Game Reserve. The last chapter looks at unsung melodies and reciprocity in sound, followed by a conclusion.

The book also provides a list of maps to help the reader locate the places and sites mentioned across the chapters.

One of the most striking and unique features of this book is its reflective text and extensive use of isiZulu terminology. A glossary is included, especially for the terms frequently used throughout the book. There are several reasons for using isiZulu throughout this text. One of them is to retain the original version of the narrative and to make the book user-friendly to the Zulu-speaking communities, especially those who actively participated in the data generation process.

The author probes the organic link between the Zulu musical performance and the politics of place in a South African context. He argues that sound can be seen as a means of occupation, whereas making sound is to declare a kind of territory or sonic space that is unbounded. Furthermore, the making of music plays a pivotal role in accommodating political imagination. The continued struggle in a post-colonial era for land and the resources lost is validated by the Zulu performances, which take on special historical significance not only in a South African context but also on the world stage.

The title of the book sounds poetic, intriguing and thought-provoking. Pooley argues that it is a significant addition to a long tradition of critical writing about South African series of performances in a post-apartheid dispensation. In a sense, Pooley contends that such a title will help fill gaps in South African historiography on national and cultural identities. One aspect that has received very little historiographical attention over the years is Zulu music and cultural performances. Pooley therefore chose one of the most remote and marginalised regions of South Africa, the north-eastern edges of the province of KwaZulu-Natal, known as "Kwamhlabuyalingana", which includes areas such as Jozini, Ngwavuma, Mangusi, and Ndumo. He further argues that the ongoing general discontent of the people about land ownership, governance, justice, ethics, socio-economic stability in communities, as well as genealogy, all find expression in musical performances.

The author illustrates how South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy has shaped the cultural performances of the Zulu nation, particularly in rural parts of KwaZulu-Natal. Pooley further highlights critical reflections on the legacies of colonialism and apartheid on contemporary institutions. These point to systemic challenges that the Zulu communities are confronted with, such as full ownership of land, access to the natural resources, conflicts over boundaries and territorial limits, as well as racial inequalities. Another interesting twist in the book is how the chapters on performances at Mdukatshani

and Johannesburg showcase the tenacity of the Zulu indigenous knowledge systems and the power of place in connecting the migrant workers to their rural homes. Pooley demonstrates how the politics of sonic space in communal performances are used to articulate cultural identities and status, and establish differences. The resolution of land claims on the farms of Mdukatshani re-ignited the sense of entitlement among communities in rural KwaZulu-Natal. The "*isishameni*" (loner/ bachelor) dance, which took place at Jeppe Hostel, where many migrant workers stayed, helped draw these men closer to their roots. The performances of "*izbongo*" (praise poem) invoked geographic and genealogical connections. Chapter five shows the extent to which the power of performances assisted in the assertion of cultural identities and a sense of belonging, particularly in highly contested social contexts.

In the second half of the book, the author explores performances in the municipalities of Jozini and uMhlabuyalingana in the north-eastern part of KwaZulu-Natal. These took place in schools, where music and dance competitions were held. The aim was to integrate these extramural activities into the curriculum to establish connections between the education and arts sectors in the South African school system. Pooley's writings are largely informed by the pertinent issues besetting the rural communities of northern KwaZulu-Natal. Nature conservation, for example, features prominently in the second part of the book. Indumo Game Reserve faced many problems that posed a serious threat to the area's sanctity. These included unresolved land claims, aggressive occupation of the land, and hunting and harvesting large tracts of land, all of which had a detrimental effect on endangered wildlife. Pooley argues that these issues can be better tackled through pragmatic, engaged scholarship that features dialogic engagement with relevant communities.

It is interesting to learn that Pooley's steely resolve to write this book came from his observation of the richness and depth of cultural expression that he witnessed upon his return from the United States of America. In particular, the plight of the downtrodden and marginalised communities in South Africa, political violence, and the legacies of apartheid, which continue to linger on, particularly in rural KwaZulu-Natal. One of the highlights of this masterpiece is its ability to unpack the role of music and cultural performances. The author contends that singing is a vehicle for collective memory, connecting us to our ancestors. Performances of songs and dance have the power to heal our sense of alienation and displacement.

In light of the book's layout, the author has provided deeper insights into the fundamental roles of performances of songs, dance, and praise poetry in connecting Zulu

communities to their roots, namely, ancestral homes and genealogies. The book is crisply written and well-thought-out. It is a tapestry of traditional music and dance performances and national identities, which blend social histories with pivotal moments. The outer cover has been beautifully designed and magnetic to a wider reading audience. It is indeed a must-read.