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Book Review: To swim with crocodiles: land, violence, and belonging in South Africa, 1800-1996 by JILL E. KELLY. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2018, Pp. 396. \$49.95 (pbk).

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To swim with crocodiles: land, violence, and belonging in South Africa, 1800-1996 by JILL E. KELLY. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2018, Pp. 396. \$49.95 (pbk).

To Swim with Crocodiles narrates the history of the Table Mountain region of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa and makes a valuable empirical and theoretical contribution to scholarship on political authority and political violence in southern Africa. This ‘macrohistory of a microregion’ convincingly challenges claims that colonial and postcolonial interventions have rendered traditional authorities entirely illegitimate and unaccountable (xvlii). Documenting the complex interplay among traditional leaders, followers, and government officials, Jill E. Kelly shows how Table Mountain people have used long-established practices to ‘produce the polity of the chief’ through their decisions about whom to follow in difficult circumstances (10). Political violence killed thousands of South Africans and displaced many more between 1985 and 1996. Mounting a persuasive critique of causal accounts that privilege the apartheid state’s ‘total strategy’ or partisan political rivalry while disregarding the local dynamics and drivers of violence, Kelly demonstrates that multiple forces converged to shape the civil war in Table Mountain.

Opening with a prologue that likens life outside a chiefdom to swimming with a crocodile or hippopotamus, this book details how people have looked to chiefdoms as a refuge from insecurity and used *ukukhonza*, ‘a practice in which one pledged allegiance to a leader in return for security,’ for more than two centuries (xxxii). Kelly narrates the rise, decline, and division of Table Mountain polities as people shifted allegiance throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Part I and then shifts focus to the chiefdoms whose people fought one another in the civil war. Parts II and III describe how Nyavu, Maphumulo, and other leaders competed for land

and authority in a context structured by dispossession, forced relocations, and betterment policies that diminished traditional leaders' capacity to fulfill their followers' expectations. Often outmanoeuvred by leaders of the government-created Maphumulo and Gcumisa chiefdoms, leaders of the long-established Nyavu chiefdom greatly resented their lack of deference and fostered narratives of wrongful loss and dispossession. Kelly views the personalization of these grievances as one cause of the Civil War. She writes, 'The subjects of the Nyavu chief took to arms to defend a chiefdom whose leader's authority had been denied by appointed chiefs to his East and West... Members of the Nyavu personalized the loss of space and place envisioned as theirs' (210).

To Swim with Crocodiles presents a complicated and nuanced account of the interplay between communal politics, broader political transformations, and civil war violence. Beginning the introduction with the 1991 assassination of Chief Mhlabunzima Joseph Maphumulo, fourth chief of the Maphumulo and returning to this event in chapter 8, the text moves back and forth between detailed accounts of Table Mountain developments and descriptions of Chief Mhlabunzima Maphumulo's involvement in bantustan tribal authority politics, in African National Congress-aligned organizations, and in nonpartisan peace initiatives. Belying his reputation as a 'peace chief,' Maphumulo adopted an anti-Inkatha stance in the 1970s that brought sustained friction with Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi a from then onwards. His stance disturbed Maphumulo people who supported Inkatha or thought antagonizing Buthelezi was unwise. In the late 1980s, Chief Maphumulo chose to welcome large numbers of refugees who had *khonza*'d (pledged allegiance to) him onto a contested strip of Table Mountain land, a decision that deepened Nyavu anger and alienated some Maphumulo who felt he had reduced

their own security. Divisions within and across chiefdoms became increasingly partisan as aggrieved Nyavu and discontented Maphumulo aligned themselves with Inkatha while Chief Maphumulo attached himself and his people to the African National Congress-aligned Mass Democratic Movement. Local struggles and national political rivalries were intertwined by the time Inkatha-Nyavu people attacked Maphumulo's supporters, their homes, and their businesses on the contested strip of Table Mountain farmland in January 1990. The civil war in Table Mountain was a partisan struggle, a land struggle, and a struggle over belonging spurred by apartheid state training, arming, and support of Inkatha.

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