

# Book Reviews

## The Voice of the People

*Izwi labantu* (The Voice of the People)

Edited by J. Opland and P.T. Mruze

Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1994, 255 pp.

ISBN 0-19-570857-1

Reviewed by G.V. Mona  
Centre for Cultural Studies  
University of Fort Hare

*Izwi labantu* is an anthology of verse and prose. The book comprises a representative sample of texts written in Xhosa by a broad range of renowned writers. The editors have selected material that illustrates the depth and breath of not only the literature, but also the culture from which it emerges. The approach followed in the selection of the material makes the book indispensable to anyone who wishes to study the historical development of Xhosa literature from its humble beginnings to date.

The contents of the book is divided into three sections, namely: i) orature/oral discourse, (ii) newspapers and periodicals and (iii) books. The orature section comprises riddles, proverbs, songs, folktales, oral history and oral poetry by illustrious writers, performers, and collectors amongst whom count people like R. Godfrey, R.M. Sobukwe, Victor Poto Ndamase, D.D.T. Jabavu, W.B. Rubusana, S.E.K. Mqhayi and D.L.P. Yali-Manisi. The oral material was reduced into chirography and typography during the period 1829-1988.

The second section contains material that was published through the medium of newspapers and periodicals. The first text is Anders Sparrman's 'Amagama esiXhosa' (Xhosa Words) (1783), which is a transcript of Xhosa words and their English equivalents. This material is followed by John Bennie's text 'Inkomo zonke zezika-Thixo ...' (All the Cattle Belong to God) (1823) which is recognised as the first systematic and coherent orthography of the Xhosa language.

Anti-colonial discourse by the rising Black intelligentsia which emerged during the close of the nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth century is represented by a number of poems which were published in newspapers over this period. Amongst these poems are 'Inkosi zakwaXhosa' (Xhosa Chiefs) by I.W. Wauchope (1882) (or I.W.W. Citashe). This is an exhortation to his people to leave the breechloader and embrace the pen (the spear) and paper (the shield). Nontsizi Mqgqwetho's 'Mayibuye i-Afrika! Awu' (Let Africa be Restored to its Rightful Owners) (1923) condemns the disunity that prevailed amongst black leaders during her time because it stultified the struggle for liberation of the oppressed masses. S.E.K. Mqhayi's 'Umhobe kaNtu' (The People's Anthem) (1927) adds seven stanzas to the national anthem, 'Nkosi sikelel' i-Afrika' (God Bless Africa) which was composed by Enock Sontonga. J.J.R. Jolobe's 'Imbumba yolutsha' (The Youth League) (1952) celebrates the founding of the Youth League of the African National Congress. The youthful and well-educated youth leaguers with their vibrant ideology of Africanism, aimed at revamping the ANC.

The third and last section contains extracts from material that is published through the medium of books. The section is sub-divided into three sub-sections: pioneers, stabilisation and towards freedom. The pioneers' works, amongst others, are H.M. Ndawo's *Uhambo lomhambi* (The Pilgrim's Progress) (1909), S.E.K. Mqhayi's *Ityala lamawe* (The Law-suit of the Twins) (1914), J.J.R. Jolobe's *Uzagula* (1923), V.N.M. Swaartbooi's *Umandisa*, Z.Z.T. Futshane's *Ujuzu* (1939) and A.C. Jordan's *Inggumbo yeminyanya* (The Wrath of the Ancestors) (1940).

A representative sample of poems and books that mark the stabilisation stage has been selected. Anti-apartheid discourse is evident in D.L.P. Yali-Manisi's 'Unkosi Rholihlahla Nelson Mandela' in *Inguqu* (Change) (1954), M.E.M. Nyoka's 'Izwe liyashukuma' (The World is Shaking) in *Uhadi* (A bow-like stringed musical instrument) (1962), Rustum Siyongwana's *Ubulumko bezinja* (The Wisdom of the Dogs) (1962) and R.L. Peteni's *KwaZidenge* (Hill of Fools) (1962).

A miscellany of texts extracted from books written by highly distinguished writers comment on the social, economic and religious scenario in South Africa. Amongst these works are Witness K. Tamsanqa's *Buzani kuBawo* (Ask Father) (1958), St John Page Yako's 'Uyesu waseNazarete' (Jesus of Nazareth) (1959), D.M. Jongilanga's *Ukuqhawuka kwembeleko* (The Cutting of the Umbilical Cord) (1960), S.M. Burns Ncamashe's *Masibaliselane* (Let us Tell Stories) (1961), K.S. Bongela's *Umzi omtsha* (A New House) and D.T. Ntywaku's *uNcumisa noNqabayakhe* (1972).

The last subsection, titled 'Towards freedom', contains extracts from N. Saule's *Amaciko: imidlalo endimanye yeradio* (1988) (The Eloquent

Speakers: One Act Radio Plays). The theme of these radio plays focuses on pertinent social issues. An extract from P.T. Mtuze's *Ungakhe uxelele mntu* (Do Not Tell Anybody) (1990), a collection of short stories, exposes the pain and suffering that was experienced by South Africans who opposed the vicious Apartheid system.

*Izwi labantu* is reader-friendly. Brief explanatory annotations precede each text. The notes locate the text within its context in terms of time and space, thereby enhancing the reader's conceptualisation. An additional bonus for the reader is the concise and relevant bibliography at the end of the book. The bibliography introduces the reader to some primary and secondary source material that illuminates the topics addressed in the anthology.

*Izwi labantu* has been published at a significant historical conjuncture, when the previously marginalised African Culture is struggling for its renaissance. The book will, therefore, be a source of inspiration and for research to both the present generation of cultural workers and to posterity. It is an invaluable reference work for anyone who contemplates studying the history and development of Xhosa literature.

\*\*\*\*\*

## You Can't Escape the Past

*Rope of Sand: The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Kingdom  
in the Nineteenth Century*

by John Laband

Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1995, 517pp.

ISBN 1 86842 023 X

Reviewed by Stephen Leech

Department of History

University of Durban-Westville

*Rope of Sand*, as the subtitle aptly describes it, is the story of the development of the Zulu kingdom in the early nineteenth century and its subsequent decline. These two events are linked by the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. This conflict, to all intents and purposes another British colonial campaign of the nineteenth century, remains, together with the Zulu themselves, a source of interest and debate more than a century later. In 1995 for example the Anglo-Zulu War battlefields were visited by David Bromhead, Colonel of the Royal Regiment of Wales. Part of this regiment was originally the 24th Regiment of