

Nontsizi Mqgqwetho: The poet of the people (1919-1929)

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The book under review focuses on Mqgqwetho's perspectives in *The Poet of the People (1919–1929)*. The author, Thulani Mkhize, presents the discussion in a clear and balanced manner, supporting the central arguments with relevant evidence throughout the text. The work explores a wide range of themes connected to Mqgqwetho's perspectives, particularly in literature and poetry, African culture, gender studies, feminist theory, political science, African leadership, and African-centred theory. Through its interdisciplinary approach, the book makes an important contribution to these academic fields and provides valuable insights for scholars and readers interested in African intellectual traditions and literary studies.

The intended audience of the book includes students, researchers, and academics working in literature, poetry, African cultural studies, gender studies, feminism, political science, African leadership, and African theory. The content demonstrates extensive research and engagement with both historical and literary sources.

One of the book's major strengths is the quality of its translation, which is presented clearly and effectively. Mkhize demonstrates a high level of understanding of the subject matter and shows familiarity with relevant literature. Different sources, including poetry, newspapers, biblical references, and other documents, are integrated effectively to support the arguments presented in the study. The analysis of quotations and literary extracts is particularly strong, as Mkhize explains and contextualises them in a way that keeps the reader engaged and informed.

The language and style used throughout the book are generally clear, accessible, and engaging. The author successfully unpacks complex ideas and quotations, making the discussion understandable to readers from diverse academic backgrounds. The organisation and presentation of the content are effective and enhance the book's readability.

Despite these strengths, several weaknesses and inconsistencies were identified in the work. In the discussion of the poem "*Mayibuye! I Afrika! Awu!*" (Come Back, Africa! *Awu!*), the interpretation provided by the author appears limited. While Mkhize argues that the phrase only refers to Africans returning to their senses, it could also be interpreted as referring to the return of land to Africans. This broader interpretation may have strengthened the discussion.

There are also several issues relating to consistency in terminology, spelling, and referencing. For example, the spelling of "*Umteteleli wa Bantu*" is inconsistent in the use of capitalisation. Similarly, the researcher alternates between the names "*Mgqwetho*" and "*Mgqweto*", and between terms such as "*Zemk'inkomo*" and "*Zemnk'inkomo*". These inconsistencies should be corrected by selecting the appropriate form and using it consistently throughout the text.

The use of terminology related to poetry and praise poetry also requires attention. The terms "*Imbongi*", "*Imbongikazi*", and "female *Imbongi*" are not consistently used. Since Mgqwetho is female, the terms "*Imbongikazi*" or "female *Imbongi*" would be more appropriate in discussions specifically referring to her. In addition, "*Imbongi*" should be used when referring to one poet, while "*Iimbongi*" should be used when referring to multiple poets.

Several technical and editorial issues were also noted. Some references are incomplete or incorrectly formatted, including those to Les Switzer. In-text referencing is inconsistent: some citations include only surnames, while others include names without publication years. Standard academic referencing conventions require the consistent use of surnames, publication years, and page numbers where applicable, especially in direct quotations.

Problems with quotation formatting were also identified. In some instances, quotation marks appear only at the end of quotations instead of enclosing the entire quoted passage. Some direct quotations also lack page numbers, and several quoted stanzas are not properly referenced or clearly identified according to their source poems.

The formatting of isiXhosa poetry also requires improvement. All isiXhosa stanzas should be written in italics, and all quoted stanzas from poems, newspapers, and biblical

texts should be translated consistently into English. The source of each poem stanza should also be clearly identified. Additionally, the author should ensure consistency in the choice between UK and US English spelling conventions.

There are also structural concerns in some sections of the text. On pages 12–13, for example, the author states that stanzas 11–15 will be used, implying five stanzas, yet six are included. This discrepancy should be corrected either by removing the unnecessary stanza or adjusting the numbering accordingly.

The review also identified several omissions and possible gaps in the coverage of important topics. Under Topic 1, themes such as the social and political significance of praise poetry and the political aspirations of Black South Africans could have been more fully explored. Under Topic 2, additional engagement with African philosophy, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), the impact of Christianity on Africans and Black communities, and the Africanisation of Christianity would have strengthened the work.

Under Topic 3, traditional African and Xhosa society could have been explored in greater depth. Topic 4 may have benefited from additional discussion on African traditional leadership and the definitions and representations of Black and white people within the historical context. Topic 5 could have included a clearer framework for understanding Westernism. Since aspects of these themes appear throughout the text, incorporating them more directly into the relevant chapters would improve the coherence and completeness of the discussion.

Overall, the book demonstrates that the author has a strong understanding of the chosen subject matter. The arguments are supported with relevant examples and evidence, and the discussion contributes meaningfully to scholarship in literature, African cultural studies, feminism, politics, and African theory. Although several editorial, referencing, and consistency issues need attention, these do not overshadow the overall quality of the work.

In conclusion, the book is well researched, clearly written, and intellectually engaging. Its strong translation, thoughtful analysis, and interdisciplinary approach make it a valuable contribution to the study of literature, poetry, African culture, gender studies, political science, African leadership, and African-centred theory. With further editing and greater consistency in formatting and referencing, the work could become an even stronger academic resource for scholars and students in these fields.