

BOOK REVIEW

Morgan Ndlovu. *Performing Indigeneity: Spectacles of Culture and Identity in Coloniality*. London: Pluto Press, 2019. Appendix: List of Cultural Villages in South Africa. References. Index. \$65.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978-0-7453-3859-0.

The decolonial movements in the global south have gained prominence in part due to failed decolonization projects. This is particularly true for South Africa, a case demonstrated by *Performing Indigeneity: Spectacles of Culture and Identity in Coloniality*, a book that shows how colonial structures still influence and shape socio-political life and identity in postcolonial South Africa. Morgan Ndlovu's book details the extent to which modernity/coloniality has had an adverse effect on colonial subjects. Exploring the context of Zulu ethnicity and performance in South Africa, Ndlovu grapples with the question of why and how colonial subjects are implicated/complicit in their own colonization. The author critically demonstrates how structure influences agency, arguing that the colonial subject is struggling to think independently beyond the snares and entanglements of the structural tentacles—a development he attributes to the colonization of knowledge, power, and imagination.

Ndlovu suggests that the victims of colonialism and apartheid have been turned into active participants in their own continued oppression by the structures of modernity/coloniality, and this has resulted in the survival of these structures long after direct colonialism and apartheid had been physically destroyed. The history of Africans is manipulated, and it is the story of Africans told by the colonizers that is performed as indigeneity. Africans themselves have been systematically denied the right to epistemically re-write their own history. As such, what some black people think of themselves is actually a construction of the colonizer. *Performing Indigeneity* becomes a corrective to the complexities of identity and performance among African subjects, and in South Africa in particular, where knowledge, together with identity, continues to be colonized.

Ndlovu predicates his book on Mahmood Mamdani's *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Harvard University Press, 2012). Mamdani describes a process whereby Africans were divided according to their ethnicity, and then certain stereotypes and behaviors were attached to the different tribes, which became the identity attached to those groups. Ndlovu explains the effects of "Define and Rule" as it was articulated by Mamdani; for example,

the Zulu identity was synonymous with violence, savagery, and barbarism, an identity which is still portrayed and performed on television media outlets and in cultural villages, where it is sold to tourists who happen to be white and from the other side of the colonial difference (82). This study highlights the fact that the actors are actually performing for their survival or needs, and most of the time what they perform is already predefined/ designed to please the European crowds (28). The entrapment of the colonial subject is further compounded by intellectuals from the global south who continue to think and write from the epistemic view of empire, thereby sustaining the power structures of modernity/ coloniality (104). The author uses the word “modernity” in tandem with “coloniality” in order to assert that modernity from its inception was the triumphal project of the Empire, while in the colonial world it was a force that destroyed indigenous ways of thinking and knowing, enslaved Africans, dispossessed people of their lands and culture, and wrought many other destructions. These are the people described by Walter Dignolo (2011) as living on the “Darker Side of Western Modernity”; these are the people who have witnessed negative modernity.

The author uses an example of the cultural village of PheZulu Safari Park to illustrate the extent to which black subjects are made to play out scenes depicting selected black culture to be marketed and sold to international tourists. At the same time, these so-called cultural villages are mostly owned by white business people whose main goal is to profit from the sale of “black culture.” These cultural villages are an attempt by the colonizer to perform indigeneity through staged acts by Zulu subjects. In this way, the culture of the Zulu people is defined by those who own these cultural villages and then acted out by the previously colonized Zulu subjects.

This is a strong academic book that balances theory and empirical evidence, it offers a decolonial alternative. The book is recommended for scholars of decolonial theory, as renewed calls for decolonization are gradually taking shape all over the global south. The book can also be a useful contribution to the burgeoning literature of decoloniality.

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doi:[10.1017/asr.2020.26](https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2020.26)

For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

- Chipeta, W. “On the Classification of African Indigenous Cooperatives.” *African Studies Review* 14 (1): 95–100. doi:[10.2307/523613](https://doi.org/10.2307/523613).
- Förster, Till, and Aïdas Sanogo. 2019. “Guest Editors’ Introduction to the Power of Performance—the Performance of Power Forum.” *African Studies Review* 62 (1): 67–75. doi:[10.1017/asr.2018.145](https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2018.145).
- Hodgson, Dorothy L. 2009. “Becoming Indigenous in Africa.” *African Studies Review* 52 (3): 1–32. doi:[10.1353/arw.0.0302](https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.0.0302).