

Reverend Bishop Enole Ditsheko, *Wrestling Botswana Back from Khama*

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‘Wrestling Botswana Back from Khama’ is first and foremost an attack on former President Ian Khama and his 10 years of rule as Botswana’s fourth chief executive. The author Rev. Bishop Enole Ditsheko sees Khama as a violator of the country’s political culture, a believer in his right as Seretse’s first son to be President, a corrupt accumulator of national resources for his private use, and the protector of a coalition of greedy businessmen who pillaged the national riches for profit. Khama’s successor, Masisi, is by contrast, portrayed as an emerging savior of Botswana democratic values who fooled Khama into thinking nothing would change when he as Vice-President replaced Khama as President.

This portrait of Botswana government over the last decade enjoys wide current acceptance. What is not conventional is Ditsheko’s method of making his case against Khama. His most compelling argument is made through probing, verbatim interviews of the ‘pioneers’ who set in place the Botswana government over its first four decades. The reader is left with a strong impression that the founders as a group came to have nothing but disdain for Khama’s behavior and policies.

Ditsheko does not waste time with niceties. In each case, he wants to know what a particular person thought of Khama’s as President. Thus, when he interviews David Magang the conversation focuses on the fact that Seretse and Ruth encouraged their first son to think that he had a right by birth to assume the Presidency. He came to see himself as Botswana’s King. Magang is blunt on the result: Ian imposed his will on the country without consultation and to satisfy his personal whims and interests. The persons interviewed in the course of the book include Charles Tibone, Samuel Mpuchane, Elsie Alexander, Dr. Erik Verreyne, Molosiwa Selepeng, Festus Mogae, Daniel Kwelagobe, Lebang Mpotokwane, Sir Ketumile Masire, Peter Molosi, Motlhabane Maphanyane, Simon Hirschfeld, Dr. Gaositwe Chiepe (at 97), and Gomolemo Motswaledi

All these interviews go on for a number of pages, sometimes whole chapters. In each case the interviewee would almost inevitably focus on his or her experience with Seretse and then Ian. The contrast between the two Presidencies is crystal clear: the former was polite, consultative, and democratic while the latter was rude, disrespectful of expertise, and authoritarian. While many dutifully voiced their respect for Ian as the Kgosi of Bangwato, each would then frankly admit that as Botswana’s President he was destroying the very foundations they as founders had sought to build.

Particular note should be made of Ditsheko’s respect for Gomolemo Motswaledi, whom he calls Sir G. Motswaledi was to the author the citizen destined to lead the long ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) into a bright future. He was charismatic with a solid vision of Botswana’s future. Motswaledi was an emerging equivalent, according to the author, of a Martin Luther King or Nelson Madelia. As a result, Ian did everything in his power to drive Motswaledi out of the BDP, and the author implies, to even have him killed in what manifestly appeared to be an auto accident.

The second part of the book relates to Ditsheko’s experience as a pastor of a small church being harassed by the local police for making too much noise. The noise comes from a group of young street urchins whom the church seeks to rescue for a better life. With money from overseas, the youth are given brass and woodwind instruments and taught to play them. The noise their band created, as one can imagine, disturbed a number of their neighbors, including most importantly Alice Mogwe, the human rights organiser and daughter of the long-time cabinet minister, Archie Mogwe. She persistently urged on the police to use their power to bring quiet to the neighborhood. The result was that Ditsheko and a good number of his congregants are finally hauled off to the local police station where they are abused and booked for disturbing the peace. The author goes into great detail about the emotional arguments between

the police and his church members. The point of the whole story is to show how Botswana police are a rule unto themselves who illtreat citizens for no good purpose. To anybody who has had to deal with local police in Gaborone the events related by the author seem all too real.

Interspersed among the founder interviews and the church's encounters with Mogwe and the police is a third section of the book. It consists of an extensive set of detailed journalistic accounts of the worst abuses of the Khama regime, and the initial attempts by President Masisi to roll back the corruption and ill-advised policies of his predecessor. All the events reported are familiar to even casual readers of the country's private newspapers.

Ditsheko is by training a journalist. The book consists of 50 short chapters which are essentially journalistic reports of events and interviews. The result is very disjointed although the book as a whole is tied together by a variety of perspectives on the damage Ian Khama did to Botswana politics and culture. The author is at his best when he is interviewing the various founders about the ways in which Ian Khama worked to undermine the democratic political culture created by Seretse and his followers. Had the book solely consisted of these interviews, it would have been a devastating polemic.

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