

### **Thapelo Ndlovu. Dear Power Monologues.**

Gaborone: Sniffdog, 2013. 151 pages, soft cover. ISBN: 978-99968-0-081-8.

Although Botswana is arguably a liberal democracy that guarantees freedom of speech and expression, political humour is not a tool that is often used to enjoy such freedoms save a few stand up comedians through the Comedy for the Nation of Botswana series (also known as ‘*Laff-A-Lot*’). Hence, Thapelo Ndlovu’s *Dear Power Monologues* is a welcome addition to the contours of freedom of speech and expression in Botswana. Nobody is safe from his acerbic tongue: Africans leaders such as Botswana’s Ian Khama, South Africa’s Jacob Zuma, Zimbabwe’s Robert Mugabe, Swaziland’s King Mswati, Libya’s Kaddafi; Kenya’s Uhuru Kenyatta, Congo’s Joseph Kabila, Malawi’s Joyce Banda, Nigeria’s Goodluck Jonathan, and Zambia’s Michael Sata are lampooned. In no small measure, Ndlovu is Botswana’s Michael Moore (see *Dude Where’s My Country?*). His pen criss-crosses national boundaries as he tackles serious issues in a very humorous way and also offers ‘advice’ to various Heads of State and governments. He irreverently says the unsayable, slays sacred cows and audaciously overdraws on the democracy vote (in fact, the vote is near empty). His contribution is singularly important for the reason that some of the issues that he tackles are not new. They are subjects of commonplace discourse albeit that they are often presented in a language that disenfranchises a majority of the readers. In fact, in most instances, writers are either talking to themselves or their peers. Ndlovu, however, uses a very different style. He delivers the message in a simple language, makes the reader feel at ease and thus he delivers his punches softly. He does this in a manner that the objects of his lampooning would not take offence.

The book is organised in ten chapters. He has Botswana’s Ian Khama (called Ntate SKI) in chapter one and Ndlovu talks to many issues here, for example, the dominance of the president in state news’ content as to be equated with dikgang (news in Setswana), his teetotaler crusade, the government’s conflicts with the private newspapers and trade unions, deportation of foreigners, same sex liaisons, the spy agency (Directorate of Intelligence and Security), bolope (sycophancy) and tshela (loosely translated as pettiness). Unforgettably, he ‘thanks’ SKI for new vocabulary such as ‘extra judicial killings’, ‘nepotism’ and ‘load-shedding’ (when the Botswana Power Corporation shuts electricity supply) that has found its way into public discourse.

In chapter two Ndlovu turns focus on South Africa’s Jacob Zuma where, notably, he is accused of presiding over a very liberal constitution that permits too much toyi-toying (public demonstrations). Other issues are Zuma’s run-ins with the law (the infamous rape case and shower) and his cozy relationships with the Guptas, growing ‘tenderpreneurism’ (a *tenderpreneur* being a government official or politician who abuses their power and influence to secure government tenders/contracts), cronyism, corruption in the security forces (particularly, the Scorpions) and nauseating poor delivery protests.

The spotlight in chapter three shines on Zimbabwe’s Mugabe and Ndlovu discusses the 1980s Matebeleland massacre, life presidency and Mugabe’s enduring health and prowess, land grabs by war veterans (some veterans being teenagers!) and ineffectual African Union talk shops overran by Mugabe and his peers. In fact, he calls the African Union a social club and argues that rules should be enforced so that enfant terribles such as SKI do not run afoul of long standing rules of seeing no evil, hearing no evil and saying no evil about events in other sovereign states.

Chapter four focuses on Swaziland’s Mswati over issues such as polygamy and extravagant monarchy amidst a starving population, conflictual government-trade unions relationships and, very importantly, that the word democracy does not exist in Mswati’s vocabulary. Chapter five ‘mourns’ the death of Libya’s Kaddafi and, at the same time, blames the all-powerful Kaddafi for failing to prevent this eventuality. Ndlovu bemoans the fact that Kaddafi could not realise his dream of a United States of Africa (USA) and the chaos and confusion that followed his ‘regrettable’ death. In chapter six he chronicles Kenya’s Uhuru troubles at the Hague-based *International Criminal Court*. Ndlovu

clears him of all the charges before the trial begins and advises him to consolidate his grip on power by harnessing technology to, amongst others, detect and, therefore, prevent outbreaks of conflict and use demagoguery to bamboozle his people. Chapter seven decries the never-ending conflict in Kabila's Congo and here Ndlovu dismisses both the United Nations (UN) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) as too ineffective to help Kabila. He instead, recommends that he seeks help from resource-rich Angola. In chapter eight he celebrates the ascension of Malawi's Joyce Banda to the presidency. Banda is commended for standing up to the African Union when it insisted that she host the ICC-wanted Omar Hassan Ahmad Al Bashir of Sudan. To ensure life presidency, Banda is advised to seek help from her predecessor's friend, Mugabe. Chapter nine lauds Nigeria's Jonathan for governing a huge, populous and very difficult-to-govern country. Ndlovu celebrates Nigerians' ingenuity in crafting schemes such as 411/419 and branding their country with the big C (Corruption). Finally, Chapter 10 chiefly discusses Zambia's Sata's crusade on corruption and dealings with the Chinese (blowing hot and cold over them; threatening to expel them from Zambia before the elections but embracing them as soon as he arrived at the state house). Vitaly, Ndlovu advises him to copy tenderpreneurism lessons from Botswana and South Africa as he settles down to enjoy power.

Overall, the book has a lot of strengths. For example, it is an easy read (it is not loaded with confusing jargon) and short length. Importantly, given its cosmopolitan orientation, at least in as far as it covers the sub-region, it is highly commended for those who are interested in political humour. Despite the foregoing strengths, a few improvements are suggested. Particularly, the book needs a glossary to explain some names that Ndlovu uses (eg, Lefesto for Festus Mogae) and Setswana English expressions such as 'playing on someone's head' (amongst others, meaning undermining someone's authority), or 'eating someone's nose raw' (viciously attacking someone). These expressions can be confusing to non-Setswana speakers of the book.

*Reviewed by Emmanuel Bothale*