

**LAURI KUBUITSILE (2019). *BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL*. CAPE TOWN: PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE. ISBN: 978-1-4859-0382-6, 264pp.**

**Reviewer:** Wazha Lopang<sup>1</sup>

Lauri Kubuitsile is without a doubt the most successful writer of fiction in Botswana. She has written extensively across both children and adult fiction. Her books have been prescribed for secondary school students in Botswana. In addition, she has won international prizes and received recognition for her work from the Ministry of Youth and Culture in Botswana.

*But Deliver Us from Evil* (2019) follows in the footsteps of Kubuitsile's *The Scattering* (2016). The latter is a very different offering from the former which won the 2017 prize for best international fiction at the Sharjah International Book Fair. This is not to say that *But Deliver Us from Evil* is not a prize winning text. It is a wonderful read that comes in the wake of its more famous sibling. If one has not read *The Scattering*, this novel will truly soar. However, for those who have, *But Deliver Us from Evil* does not quite reach the stars.

The novel is set in 1871 and is loosely based on a family that has been torn apart by accusations of witchcraft. At the start of the novel, the protagonist, Nthebolang, watches how baseless allegations lead to the hasty trial and cruel execution of her father. She is just five years old. Her resolve to get justice for this terrible crime is chilling in its maturity and determination. She says to the Kgosi (Chief), "We'll leave this place, my mother and I, but know that you have done wrong today. You have murdered an innocent man. I owe my father a debt for what has happened to him and I will find a way to pay it, no matter what it costs me" (p.28). At about the same time, but many kilometres away, another girl, Beatrice, is savagely torn from her family. Like Nthebolang's fate, an accusation is made over her heritage. The two fascinating girls are destined to meet later in the text, each chasing a dream but bound to each other by circumstances far larger than what their young lives have prepared them for.

Thus, loss sets the tone early in the text. And just as in *The Scattering*, displacement is a recurring theme, a motif even. We also get the idea that greed and self-importance are the Achilles heel in the composition of man. It is refreshing that female protagonists dominate the text and credit goes to Lauri Kubuitsile for giving Beatrice and Nthebolang wisdom far beyond their years. As can be expected in such a periodic tale, the missionary footprint is given much traction, though not as a symbol of righteousness by any means. In fact, the title of the novel is a tongue in cheek jab at the role of the church in creating conflict in the lives of those it seeks to "save". Thomas Milner is a

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missionary who marries Beatrice in what is effectively an arranged marriage and the whole relationship is an obscene gesture to the missionary influence in Africa. He is a vile man, as lecherous as he is murderous. Many a time, his wife Beatrice bears the brunt of his violent ways. On finding out that she has become pregnant, he goes berserk:

Thomas Milner arrives at the house red with fury. He picks Beatrice up and throws her to the ground. He punches her face. He screams at her. 'You black whore!' he bellows. 'You have ruined everything' (p.66).

Lauri Kubuitsile's narrative is simple yet heartfelt. She has mastered the art of short explosive sentences that draw out the emotion of the scene. The use of repetition and the contrast of red and black are beautifully done without overwhelming the reader. There are many such nuggets of beauty in the text. Furthermore, her descriptive style, told in the present tense, helps accentuate the ever present reality of gender-based violence. The female characters give as much as they get and the manner in which this is described, the reasoning behind the violence, is emotionally satisfying. However, this is much more than a novel about abuse and loss. It is about love, sweeping in its intensity from one part of the country to the next. This pervasive theme of love is as rich as the emotions Kubuitsile puts into her female characters. We want them to find love for they touch us deeply – not necessarily because they are so young but essentially because they are good characters.

Readers of this novel will be carried along by the writer's simple style, her fast paced development of plot and the seamless transition at the beginning of Nthebolang's world with that of Beatrice's. However, some readers may question the level of maturity displayed by these two characters. They are too pure of heart, too slick of thought (Beatrice in particular) that at times we need to constantly remind ourselves that they are children. This is the most apparent flaw in *But Deliver Us from Evil*. Other than this, it is an immensely satisfying novel. A must read.