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Baba Galleli Jallow, *Defying Dictatorship: Essays on Gambian Politics, 2012 - 2017*. Publisher: CENMEDRA. 210 pp. ISBN-10: 9983953528 ISBN-13: 978-9983953527

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Defying Dictatorship chronicles the political travails of The Gambia between 2012 and 2017 with a particular focus on the 22 years of governance by President Yahaya Jammeh. Jammeh's regime, a government that was characterised by all sorts of maladministration, lacked democratic values and was rife with corruption, violence, violations of the rule of law, and abuses of fundamental human rights. In his writing, Baba Galleli Jallow, a teacher history at La Salle University in Philadelphia, PA, USA, was consistent, courageous and committed to the political emancipation of The Gambia from the clutches of President Yahaya Jammeh. From the time he was forced into exile, Jallow remained vocal from 2012 to 2017 about the need for political change in the geographical entity called The Gambia. His essays in this volume were published over the years through Gainako Newspaper, Kairo News, and Maafanta. These online news outlets have provided a vigorous platform for the Gambian intelligentsia during the reign of Yahya Jammeh.

The 187 pages of *Defying Dictatorship* are divided into 46 chapters, structured into two major parts. The first section is titled "The Many Faces of Dictatorship: The More You Look, the Less You See" and the second is titled "Towards a Government by the People." It is indeed a great work of art and a historical document of the 22 year regime of President Yahaya Jammeh. Jallow demonstrated a very deep analysis of the range of issues affecting the Gambia under the administration. The African intellectuals must borrow a leave from Baba Galleli Jallow to move the continent to the next level as there is a need for concerted effort and conscious determination to redress retrogression that is being faced by the continent.

The foreword was written by Demba Ali Jawo who confirmed that the book "underscored the experience of the author," and he stated that Baba Galleli Jallow is not an armchair critic. The preface further highlights the aptness of the book and remarked that the year 2000 was a watershed time in The Gambia when the dictatorial behaviours of the Gambian government under President Jammeh reached its peak. It was in this year that the author was pushed into exile and his parents died. Jallow was thus not able to give his parents a decent burial on account of the fear of his life.

The Introduction clearly defined the central purpose of the book to be a collection of essays detailing the oppressive regime of President Yahaya Jammeh in The Gambia and the need for the collective role of international communities to oust the regime. This theme permeated the book and its critical assessment of the regime in terms of violations of human rights of the citizens, corruption, forced exile of citizens, and the state of insecurity. The

presidential election in December of 2016, in which President Jammeh was defeated, was a catalyst for political reform in the Gambia.

Part One of *Defying Dictatorship* commenced with “critiquing Yahaya Jammeh”. The author catalogued the various atrocities which included President Jammeh’s suppression of dissenters and support of a coup against his predecessor, Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara. The book then posited that President Jammeh, who had since perfected his tactics, used arson attacks against the opposition, confiscated their properties, and tortured and murdered them. Jammeh even went so far as to ban the opposition’s use of the radio stations. These examples allowed Jallow to identify two dimensions of nationalism: the peaceful dimension and the violent one. Both dimensions have been and still are reflected in the practices of some African countries. The experience of oppression in the Gambia prompts the author to sponsor the idea that an enlightened and empowered citizenry armed with tolerance must be built a post-Jammeh era. The citizenry should seek common interests, and the government must be ready to accommodate diverse views.

Chapter 6, which focused on “Jammeh’s Way”, castigated the regime for the various human rights violations, namely the policy of seeking permission to hold rallies. The author rhetorically posed the following: “In a rule of law environment, do you need permission to assemble?” Following this, Chapter 7 analyzed the colonial mentality of President Jammeh. The author saw his style of leadership as a form of paranoia in the name of banning colonialism from Gambia. His political preferences included resistance to criticisms, intolerance to dissent, banning forms of consultation, and imposing his views and policies.

The road map later presented in Chapter 29 responds to these practices of the Jammeh administration. Thus, it is sensible as to why the author calls for the new regime in The Gambia to legitimize and protect the right of aggrieved citizens to protest. Going forward, the government must not react by arresting protesters as was the case during President Jammeh’s reign. These chapters are thematically linked, as they focus on the concept and methods of nation building.

Attempts to summon the attention of the international community are also included in this text, and the author advocates for foreign actors to do more in the Gambia. Here, the author asks nations to jettison self-interest politics that so dominantly drives the decisions of the international community. The author used the examples of Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Liberia to form his beliefs about the nature of foreign actors. He then postulated:

“Perhaps, just perhaps- Gambians will soon reach a point when committing despicade against the Jammeh regime will become a matter of life and death, and hence of genuine interest to them”

The legacy of President Nelson Mandela was an interesting inclusion by the author. Mandela’s travails were catalogued and his “noble example” of exiting office after one term was regarded as a rarity in Africa. Chapter 15 continued from where this chapter left off by showcasing an open letter to President Jammeh in which he was advised to live by Mandela’s

legacies, promoting the adoption of the one term policy and embracing the role of oppositional parties.

The concept of abiding fallacies was addressed in chapter 20 where the failure of African governments to develop their peoples was presented. Jallow argued that tolerance was higher under the colonial rule than the level of obtainable acceptance in some independent African States, using the experience of The Gambia as an example. The author concluded that some critics have had to migrate for fear of being killed, and he cautioned that the new Gambia would be devoid of human creativity under intolerant governments. However, the author challenged in Chapter 19 the commitment of African intellectuals to solving the problems of Africa by ‘speaking truth to power’. Reliance was placed on Edward Said’s postulations in *Representations of the Intellectual* where a thorough and deep exposition of the concept of intellectualism was undertaken. This chapter truly displays Jallow as a thorough bred intellectual.

In Chapter 21 titled “The Disengaged Public,” the author claimed that the African public is disengaged from the politics of their countries and in need of a “mind revolution”. In many cases, this gave rise to an African Diaspora that has and continues to face terrible conditions. This theme is additionally highlighted in Chapter 23 where the author notes the importance of civic and political education in a nation-state system. Additionally, it was posited that social media should come to the rescue of the Gambia in terms of civic learning and engagement.

The election of 1st December, 2016 was described as a big renaissance in the little Gambia and left President Jammeh with no option but to vacate the presidency. His departure from office was not expected to occur voluntarily, thus the author emphasized that all Gambians along with the international community must be active in ensuring that President Jammeh actually vacates the office. Ultimately, he departs from political leadership, although the author notes that President Jammeh may never recognize his deserved exile for the perpetual injustice that he inflicted on the Gambians.

The book discussed the new regime of President Barrow in the final chapters and advised the government to adopt a politics of accommodation. This type of environment permits dissenting views, avoids sycophancy, and discourages corruption. In Chapter 45, the author states that “We need honest, principled and bold Gambian professionals with courage of their convictions to do the right thing at all times.” From this, the need for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to heal the wounds of the past is proposed.

The concluding chapter mainly functioned to summarize the book, reiterating the misrule of President Jammeh and expressing hope in the Barrow regime. Additionally, the author reminded his audience of the need for political education to politically empower Gambians.

This collection of essays made various published materials more-handly and easily accessible through a fairly compact publication. In reaction to the atrocities committed by

President Jammeh, the book was very caustic and quite explosive in its language. Some of the essays may be good for newspaper articles but should have been toned down in the context of this text collection. Yet, Jallow and his diction may be excused, as his forced exile under the President Jammeh regime prompts strong negative opinions. Overall, the book was written in simple and lucid English. It connected its ideas well and is of interest to the ordinary citizens of Gambia. The book's encouragement of ordinary citizens in Africa to take their destinies into their hands is rousing. Thus, after reading this book, the audience may begin to own the democratic process in their countries so that the African continent can find its place in the world.

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