

# Cheap shots and contradictions

Author punts BEE, yet calls black service providers shoddy... really?

**Book:** *The Way I See It: The Musings of a Black Woman in the Rainbow Nation*  
**Author:** Lerato Tshabalala  
**Publisher:** Penguin Random House  
**Reviewer:** Shingai Darangwa  
**Price:** R169 on Loot.co.za

THERE'S a lot that has been written about *The Way I See It: The Musings of a Black Woman in the Rainbow Nation*, despite the fact that it has only been out a few weeks.

I received the book the day after an excerpt titled "Why I hire blue eyes before black guys" was released. This caused an uproar on social media with Tshabalala trending for a couple of days.

There were warning notes: "Guaranteed to offend!" on the front page and "Not for the faint-hearted" on the back, so I braced myself for some offensive bigotry.

In *The Way I See It*, Tshabalala shares her experiences as a black South African in post-apartheid South Africa and uses them to dissect the Rainbow Nation.

She interrogates the politics of black hair, of black families and generally of black life.

The opening chapter sees Tshabalala muse over social media and her experiences with it. This is followed by an interesting breakdown of the terms "maid", "domestic worker" and "helper".

She raises some very valid points here, describing "maid" as a swear word and explaining

how the use of the word "maid" is derogatory and misplaced. "Rejecting labels and derogatory terms is taking back our power," she says.

Then she explains the importance of ignoring racism. "Without an audience, even the biggest bullies lose interest."

In the opening chapters, she shares her personal experiences, displaying her skills as a stylish and seasoned writer. The passages in which she offers hypothetical dialogue between lovers, friends, bank employees and their debtors, are intriguing and entertaining.

After some hilarious dialogue on friends with benefits and other sex talk, the topic of race pops up like an unwelcome visitor. I say unwelcome because I was enjoying this book.

In the chapter "15 things white people should know about black people", she offers a few tips.

One of them reads, "You speak so well is something you say to a two-year-old who's just learnt how to talk. No matter how well you mean it, steer clear from saying this to a black person."

In a chapter titled "Rome could've been built in a day, but the builders moved the deadline" (this is the chapter from which the infamous extract was taken) she talks about why she has decided to hire whites instead of blacks.

"Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying all black service providers are dodgy – not at all," she says. "But sadly, the majority

of our people are chancers and don't give a damn about customer service."

Tshabalala then references Mzansi Magic's *Our Perfect Wedding* as an example of how black service providers can "totally f\*\*\* up someone's main event". She also gives examples of her run-ins with some inefficient black service providers.

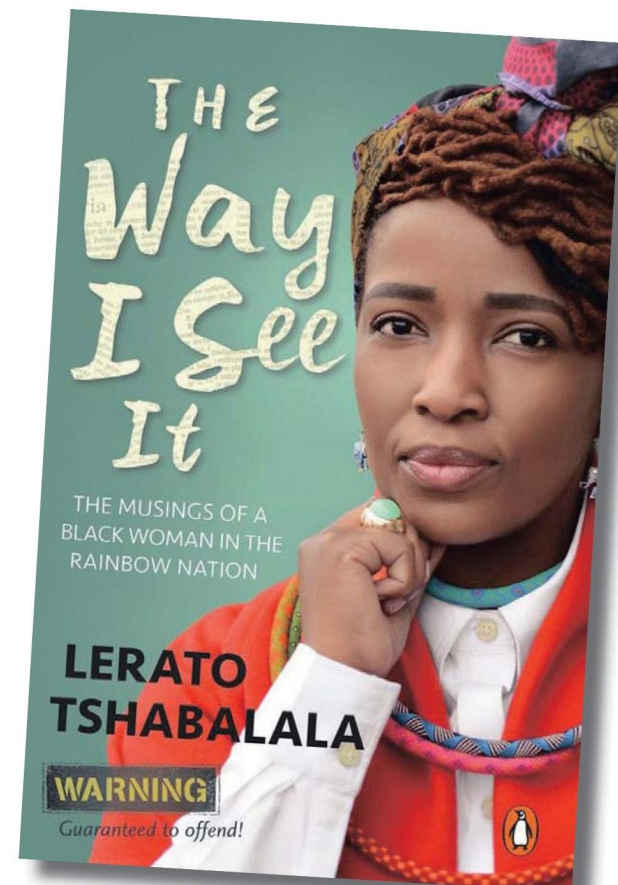
In conclusion, she adds, "having said that, I hope that instead of being s\*\*\* on by my people for generalising and bad-mouthing black service providers, that they give me examples of black builders who believe in excellence and never leave the job half-done."

I wonder whether it occurred to her that almost 90 percent of South Africa's population is black and, mathematically, the likelihood is that most of the mediocrity she's come across would be from black people. Probably not.

In the very next chapter, as if a victim of amnesia, Tshabalala goes on to support BEE, citing how blacks generally start on an unequal footing and need as much support as possible.

After quoting several articles supporting her stance, she even says, "the economic emancipation of black people in South Africa should be the most important item on the country's agenda."

The hypocrisy and contradictions within these two chapters is worth an article of its



own.

After bashing black service providers and saying she would rather employ a white person, she now bemoans the lack of economic empowerment among the black community and encourages us to support these very same blacks? I don't get it.

*The Way I See It* isn't just an attack on black people. Tshabalala also spews her inflammatory balderdash to other groups in a chapter called, "Top 5 reality checks to everydambody...". Here she dedicates five paragraphs each to whites, Indians and coloureds, gays, women, men, and, of course, blacks.

"It's not necessary to be a screaming queen all the damn time," she says of gay men. "Sometimes you can chill and have a nice quiet evening without

being loud and drawing attention to yourself and your crew."

She plays on nasty stereotypes and lectures each group on how to behave appropriately. One of the paragraphs on Indians reads: "Not to sound funny, but some of our Indian brothers from Durban need to provide subtitles when they speak. I consider myself quite good with accents, but the Indianese from KZN often leaves me confused and defeated."

Tshabalala has recently added motivational speaker to her CV. I wonder where she got that idea. This is some of the most gloomy and ominous stuff I've read, and much of the reaction reflects this.

To borrow a Denzel Washington quote she used in the book: "You pray for rain, you gotta deal with the mud. That's a part of it."