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17 June 2008

Professor Alan Dershowitz  
Harvard Law School  
Per email

And to cc list

Dear Professor Dershowitz

#### BIRDS OF A FEATHER

I write about a graduate of your law school in the early nineties, Ronald Suresh Roberts. Roberts is the author of a book *Fit to Govern: The Native Intelligence of Thabo Mbeki*, published in June 2007, in which he purported to explicate the South African President's thinking concerning the major policy issues of his time. The most inflamed of these has of course been the AIDS controversy, and Roberts devoted two central chapters to it accordingly. Since he never interviewed the President, and had nothing special to go on besides an early letter Mbeki wrote him pointing up some themes he hoped the book might pursue, but in which letter Mbeki's references to AIDS were both brief and oblique, Roberts was left to work up his case on what he claimed were the President's thoughts on the subject with no more than the public record of what he'd said and written.

To everyone's great surprise, contradicting Mbeki's open record of dissent from the contemporary American sex-virus/chemotherapy model of broken health and its treatment in Africa, Roberts opened his first AIDS chapter with the claim that 'Thabo Mbeki is not now, nor has he ever been, an AIDS dissident.' And on that crooked premise he proceeded to build his crooked case.

Mbeki himself was so appalled by Roberts's misrepresentation of his position that he immediately moved to refute it by telephoning biographer Mark Gevisser and briefing him to set the record straight in his forthcoming book *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred*. But even before Gevisser did so in his biography published in November, commentators of all shades had already rejected Roberts's fake line in his AIDS chapters as an obvious, barefaced lie.

And correctly so: after Gevisser's book came out, Mbeki wrote to him specifically to confirm that he'd been right in describing him as an AIDS dissident (adding that if he'd only look at the evidence he'd be one too).

Three days after Gevisser's book was released, I published a book of my own, *Lying and Thieving: The fraudulent scholarship of Ronald Suresh Roberts*, in which I

exposed Roberts's extensive plagiarism, historical fabrication and falsification, line by line (it can be ordered as a paperback or downloaded free at [www.lyingandthieving.com](http://www.lyingandthieving.com)). After reading my exposé, Roberts's publisher agreed that his best-selling book was a monumental hoax, and considering it a stain on its catalogue promptly cancelled the second impression about to go to press. Likewise, after reviewing my revelations, *Fit to Govern's* editor, the English historian and author Dr James Sanders, judged it 'the most serious case of plagiarism and literary fraud in South African literary history.'

I write because I was struck by the many similarities between the manner in which you cooked up *The Case for Israel* and responded to Norman Finkelstein's charge that it's 'among the most spectacular academic frauds ever published on the Israel-Palestine conflict', and Roberts's misuse and abuse of his sources in manufacturing his bogus case in *Fit to Govern* that on AIDS Mbeki is with the believers, and his response to my conclusion following my 443-page critical analysis of his book that he's 'an extensive plagiarist, a fabricator and falsifier of history, and the author of a colossal literary fraud, and accordingly so grossly unprofessional and discreditable a writer that he's unfit to be relied upon for any purpose, not even for directions to the post office.'

Both of you advanced basic theses that were outright lies: his mentioned above, and yours in falsely contending, contrary to the findings of every major human rights organization around, that Israel has a 'generally superb' human rights record.

Both of you dishonestly pretended to have read and were quoting primary sources by citing them in your footnotes rather than the secondary sources that you were actually relying on. This is to say, you stole the research work of other writers and passed it off as your own, uncredited.

Both of you failed to acknowledge the secondary sources you were looting: in your case Peter's book, because you didn't want to draw attention to the embarrassing fact that you'd been rummaging through the academic trash can and had picked out a notorious piece of junk, now universally acknowledged as such, Joan Peters's *From Time Immemorial: The Origins Of The Arab-Jewish Conflict Over Palestine*, from which to pillage her quotations of other writers and her ideas and then present them as your own research and insights; and in Roberts's case my books, both published and in preparation, because while he was attacking me in his book as a lunatic he didn't want to draw attention to the embarrassing fact that he actually thought very highly of my work, having earlier described the main one he stole from, *'Just say yes, Mr President': Mbeki and AIDS*, as 'brilliant, fucking brilliant', whose 'Swiftian acid wit' he found 'very funny, it made me laugh out loud'; another, *The trouble with nevirapine*, as 'rigorous, your best book'; and another, *Debating AZT: Mbeki and the AIDS drug controversy*, as 'very good, very important'; and all of them together as 'extremely significant ... extremely important'. As you did in regard to Peters's book, mentioning it sparingly in

your footnotes, but not in your index and bibliography, Roberts similarly wanted to conceal that he was stealing the fruits of my research over more a decade: late in his footnotes, posted online, Roberts vaguely credits my work in progress '*Just say yes, Mr President*' on the pharmaceutical industry's lavish funding of Bush's first presidential election campaign, and that's it; he never credits my book manuscript as his principle source for the many quotations I'd dug out, collected, and set in it, which he lifted and used in his AIDS chapters; and while plundering my other books for the same, he doesn't credit them at all. None of my work that he robs blind is mentioned anywhere in the pages of his book itself.

Both of you left the same give-away clues in copying the opening, closing and internal editing cuts (ellipses) made to primary source materials by the authors of the secondary sources you were plagiarizing.

Both of you left further tell-tale clues to your plagiarism in copying transcription errors made by the authors of the secondary sources you were quoting without due attribution.

Both of you failed to comply with the elementary requirement of honest writing noted in Harvard's code *Writing with Sources: A Guide for Students*, which in Section 2.1, under the heading 'QUOTING OR CITING A PASSAGE YOU FOUND QUOTED OR CITED BY ANOTHER SCHOLAR', explicitly requires that 'when you haven't actually read the original source, cite the passage as "quoted in" or "cited in" that scholar – both to credit that person for finding the quoted passage or cited text, and to protect yourself in case he or she has misquoted or misrepresented ...'

Both of you plagiarized not just source materials from the authors of the books you were copying from, but also their original ideas.

Both of you responded dishonestly to our plagiarism charges by falsely insinuating that they had no merit: Finkelstein's you said were 'funny', 'laughable', 'preposterous', and 'total nonsense'; and Roberts likewise called mine 'pure junk' – claiming of my charges concerning his fraudulent scholarship generally that 'only Mbeki's most extreme and ridiculous opponents take his suggestion seriously', whereas in truth mainstream journalist Ferial Haffajee, editor of the *Mail&Guardian*, agreed on her 'thought leader' blog on 15 November 2007 that in contending that Mbeki is not an AIDS dissident Roberts is 'a peddler of lies': his 'book denies that Mbeki was ever a dissident ... Well, that lie has been blown out of the water by the better biography, Mark Gevisser's *A [sic] Dream Deferred*. In it, Mbeki himself confirms that he is still a dissident.'

Both of you dishonestly claimed that Finkelstein and I are mentally disordered to imply that our charges against you are unsound: you alleging that Finkelstein was dismissed from a teaching position for 'mental instability' and calling him 'nutty'; and Roberts invoking VS Naipaul's demented *Man-Man of Miguel Street* character in his book to portray me as a lock-up mental case, telling the first journalist enquiring about his assorted frauds that I'd exposed that I'm 'anyway a

bit mad', and repeatedly describing me as 'loony' thereafter – even though he'd earlier pertinently condemned this favoured style of attack on me by ARV drug-promoting journalists in South Africa – hoping perhaps that if his punching was low enough I'd go down and stay down.

Both of you suggested that we occupy intellectually and morally unacceptable territory, and so our serious charges against you are unworthy of credence by decent, right-thinking people.

Both of you abused the public space at your disposal to vilify us personally in a bid to discredit our charges instead of answering them: you on your faculty website and Roberts on his blog and in his magazine columns.

Both of you persisted with your frauds after we had revealed them, instead of conceding them.

Both of you told more flagrant lies after being exposed: in your case alleging, inter alia, with breathtaking malice, that Finkelstein suspected his mother of having been a Nazi collaborator in the concentration camps, when an honest reading of what he'd written about this shows the opposite to be true; for his part Roberts telling a slew of further lies to compound those told about Mbeki and me in his book, including that Mbeki had endorsed his false account of his thinking on AIDS – all noted in the new end chapters of the expanded edition of *Lying and Thieving*, in which I deal with his response to my charges, not by pleading to them squarely but with a volley of lying broadsides against me instead, and report his disingenuous reaction to Gevisser's revelation that Mbeki had repudiated his false claim that he still goes for the sex-can-kill-you, the-blacks-have-all-got-it, and ARVs-are-good-for-you myths of the American AIDS craze.

Both of you threatened litigation against anyone repeating our charges, thereby dishonestly implying that they were false and unlawfully made: in Finkelstein's case nearly aborting the publication of *Beyond Chutzpah*, in mine spooking *Lying and Thieving's* distributor into dropping the book. (Less easily intimidated, Cape Town's best serious book store, Clarke's Books, has since taken it on.)

Both of you retaliated against our exposés of your fraudulent scholarship by moving to sabotage our livelihoods and further work as dissident writers: you derailed Finkelstein's bid for tenure as a politics professor at DePaul University in Chicago by raining a hail of deceptive and slanderous attacks on him fired off from your university to anyone at DePaul in a position to influence the tenure process – falsely alleging on the way that Harvard had investigated and dismissed his charges and had 'completely cleared' you; and Roberts mobilized big-league attorney Christine Qunta against me to get my European research/writing grant terminated, on the false grounds that I was engaged in a baseless vendetta against him, was politically offside, and was an embarrassment to the President, and then, before anyone else knew of his success in this,

immediately boasted about it on his blog. (I've fortunately landed substitute grant support for my work.)

Both of you abused your institutional/establishment connections to try killing us off as complainants who'd exposed your chicanery – like mobsters gunning down witnesses to get away with their crimes.

Both of you wrote your books with cynical contempt for the truth in service of establishment power and its political agendas: your object being to whitewash and legitimize Israel's human rights abuses, its illegal occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, its illegal settlements in those territories, and its illegal wall around them; and Roberts's purpose being to reassure the commercial classes (he wrote his book at the instance of Johannesburg Stock Exchange director Geoffrey Rothschild, and Big Business lavishly funded it) that Mbeki isn't a dissident on AIDS after all, and that in this matter he's really with the pharmaceutical industry and the banks: that Africans really are riddled with a new sexually transmitted disease they originally got from having sex with monkeys which they're spreading around with their permanently tumescent septic genitals because they have far too much sex with far too many lovers and that unless the government buys the pharmaceutical industry's ARV drugs for them to swallow every day for the rest of their lives they'll die horrible, lonely, lingering, painful, early deaths.

Both of you are given to smearing your opponents by way of vicious personal attacks to stifle the expression of critical opinion and points of view different from yours: in keeping with your goes at Finkelstein and others before him, you've venomously attacked former President Jimmy Carter for criticizing the inhumanity of Israeli behaviour in the occupied territories and matter-of-factly likening the suffering of the Palestinians to that of Africans under apartheid; in Roberts's case by assailing not only me but his critics and opponents generally with untruthful mudslinging.

Both of you have repeatedly demonstrated the same personality trait in projecting your literary and personal deficits onto those you're attacking: in your case criticizing other writers for alleged disgracefully shoddy scholarship and threatening legal action to chill criticism, while guilty of both yourself; and Roberts has demonstrated his identical penchant for this transparent, childish failing too often to recite here; *Lying and Thieving* recounts numerous examples.

Both of you have avoided engagement with our substantive criticisms of your books – that their contents are fraudulent – by bobbing and weaving only around our less important plagiarism charges.

Both of you decided against suing us, despite your claims that we'd defamed you, only because you wanted to avoid trials in which our respective complaints of lying and thieving would be ventilated in open court, and then, having been tried and tested over a couple of weeks, confirmed perfectly true in judgments handed down against you.

In the light of how closely Roberts observed the standards of scholarship and public discourse you set for him, I was wondering whether his conduct in forging and uttering his counterfeit history of President Mbeki's challenge to American germ/poison AIDS dogma, and the sleazy moves he pulled to evade accountability for his literary crimes after I exposed them, could therefore fairly be said to have been engendered and inculcated at Harvard. Would you say Roberts's behaviour is broadly consistent with the general moral and legal ethos you propound as a law professor there – in advocating, for instance, that in the 'noble causes' of quelling the Resistance and ending opposition to the Occupation, the 'automatic ... response' of the Israeli military should be collective reprisals against non-combatant civilians by way of 'the destruction of a small village which has been used as a base for terrorist operations', in the Nazi manner at Lidice, for which Karl Hermann Frank was hanged? Although it must be said that you qualified this advice in the *Jerusalem Post* on 11 March 2002, urging in your book *Why Terrorism Works* later in the year: 'The next time the terrorists attack, the village's residents would be given twenty-four hours to leave, and then Israeli troops would bulldoze the houses.' I refer also to your exhortation that suspected Palestinian militants be tortured with 'needles, being inserted beneath the nails to cause excruciating pain'. Provided that, 'Under my proposal, no torture would be permitted without a "torture warrant" being issued by a judge.' And provided also that the needles be 'sterile'.

If you're satisfied that Roberts has thoroughly imbibed and internalized the kind of criminality and barbarity you espouse at your academy, do you think he's just the sort of guy the Bush administration could use, say as junior assistant general counsel to Condoleezza Rice? And if so, would you consider giving this star alumnus of your university a testimonial to help him in, emphasizing his valuable propensity to tell lies without a qualm and just do whatever it takes to get ahead in life? As an added commendation for the position, you could mention that he's also willing to write and say anything for money, or not write and say it, as required: in *Lying and Thieving* I reveal how Roberts was quietly taking instructions from his former political and financial patron to chop and change his manuscript, all the while publicly claiming that he'd written it with a free hand; and not only did he uncomplainingly submit to this secret censorship to shield South Africa's richest mining family and its corporations from the many sharp criticisms he'd originally levelled at them in his book manuscript, he also meekly obeyed an order given him to change his basic line concerning Mbeki's radical dissension from American AIDS orthodoxy and to present it as a mere misperception, which is to say that actually he's all for the American HIV theory of AIDS and just as big into ARV drugs for Africans too.

With his track record as a corporation tool, I'm sure you'll agree that Roberts is ideally suited for such a post. And he'd greatly appreciate a letter of introduction from you right now, because he's currently looking hard for a job. The \$300,000 he got from a bank and other corporate and private financiers to write his book is all spent, and he has some big legal fees to pay after suing a newspaper for

describing him the unpleasant way he is – only the judge heartily agreed – and the sheriff will be over any day now to collect the newspaper's lawyers' bill. Which as you can imagine is tremendous.

If on the other hand you reckon Roberts's conduct is a pox on Harvard's reputation, because actually he's not just like you, what do you think should be done to protect it from being further fouled by guys like him who turn out to be the lowest of rogues, taking after certain of its professors?

Yours truly

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Cc: President Thabo Mbeki; Catharine Drew Gilpin Faust: President Harvard University; Elena Kagan: Dean, Harvard Law School; Andrew Graham: Master, Balliol College, Oxford; Norman Finkelstein; Noam Chomsky; Michael Neumann; John Pilger; Alexander Cockburn; Brendan O'Neill; South African and foreign media; other interested parties ~~including Mr and Mrs Roberts in Port of Spain~~; and online at [www.lyingandthieving.com](http://www.lyingandthieving.com)

After emailing this letter to the listed cc addressees but before posting a hardcopy to Roberts's parents, I learned of Mrs Roberts's passing:  
[www.newsday.co.tt/news/0,80727.html](http://www.newsday.co.tt/news/0,80727.html)