

LETTER: Ronald Suresh Roberts, Mbeki and HIV/AIDS

Knocking Jonny Steinberg for reporting a recent opinion poll that found Africans in the Cape unfussed by “Mbeki’s dissidence” over HIV/AIDS, Ronald Suresh Roberts claims “Mr Steinberg also forgets Mr Mbeki’s actual HIV/AIDS policy approach, as summarised in *Fit to Govern: The Native Intelligence of Thabo Mbeki* (2007), launched at the Presidential Guest House in Pretoria, seven years ago this June.”

Roberts forgets Mbeki’s appalled reaction on reading the book. In *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred*, published later that year, Mark Gevisser recounted how Mbeki immediately moved to set the record straight and to repudiate Roberts’s opening lie that “Thabo Mbeki is not now, nor has he ever been, an AIDS dissident,” by telephoning him that month to ask whether he had read his AIDS dissident manifesto *Castro Hlongwane, Caravans, Cats, Geese, Foot & Mouth and Statistics: HIV/AIDS and the Struggle for the Humanisation of the African*, first circulated as a discussion paper at the ANC’s NEC conference in March 2002; confirmed it set out his thinking on the subject; and had his driver deliver him a massively expanded and updated version the following day.

Roberts also forgets my close interrogation of his AIDS chapters, published as *Lying and Thieving: The fraudulent scholarship of Ronald Suresh Roberts*, supporting my conclusion on the back cover that he is “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 on for any purpose, not even for directions to the post office.” And that after reading my exposé, the editor of Roberts’s book Dr James Sanders agreed and described it as “the most serious case of plagiarism and literary fraud in South African literary history.” Mbeki himself appreciated it, and asked me for an extra copy.

Roberts forgets as well that on the evidence of an independent audit by Dr James Myburgh confirming my plagiarism complaint – he found over 40 instances – the Press Council upheld this newspaper’s (former weekend edition) front-page headline charge on 17 November 2007 that Roberts had stolen masses of my research work and had set it in his book uncredited.

Steinberg claims it is Mbeki’s opinion that “HIV is not the primary cause of AIDS”. So does Roberts, who agrees with Edwin Cameron’s claim that all Mbeki did was to “ask how a virus can cause a syndrome, and to emphasise that AIDS cannot be attributed solely and exclusively to HIV.” Echoing Steinberg, Roberts goes on to allege that Mbeki was merely “engaging with medical orthodoxy ... not rejecting it”, and that “his ‘denialism’ was precisely in raising questions.”

None of this is true. Mbeki's dissent from the HIV/AIDS paradigm and his conclusions about it are very much more radical than that, and go to the little-known, core controversy: the missing virus problem.

Rather than reading it mediated and distorted by the ardently believing jabberati like Steinberg, Roberts and Cameron, all of whom share the fervent conviction that Africans – not whites, coloured and Indians – are rife with a brand-new deadly incurable venereal disease plaguing them all of a sudden since democracy, interested readers can get it direct from the horse's mouth. Mbeki's updated Castro Hlongwane masterpiece given Gevisser, in which this "profound thinker" (per Steinberg) comprehensively dismantles the HIV/AIDS construct, can be read [here](#).

Anthony Brink

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Adv Brink's first book, *Debating AZT*, then subtitled "Questions of safety and utility", "sparked" (Mbeki's word, per Gevisser) Mbeki's enquiry into the integrity of the HIV/AIDS paradigm in late 1999, before which, Frank Chikane correctly records in *The Things That Could Not Be Said: From A{IDS} to Z{imbabwe}* (2013), "Mbeki started dealing with HIV and AIDS like all of us – totally faithful to the orthodox approach and without any question." Brink's work is online at www.tig.org.za.