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And to cc list

Dear Branko

'Mondli in my bedroom': Ronald Suresh Roberts: Empire: February 2008

I'm writing about the above-mentioned article, a photocopy of which was recently mailed to me – hence my late response.

You'll recall our meeting at a dinner party in Hout Bay in late 2006. You were relating your experiences in the former Yugoslavia during the Milosevic era, in which I was very interested at the time – buying books, researching the break-up of the country in depth, and about to visit Croatia. For my part I told you a bit about my odyssey over the last decade and more as a lawyer turned activist, up against the pharmaceutical industry dumping useless lethal chemicals in our country for administration to impoverished sick Africans as lifesaving drugs. You gave me your card and asked me to look you up when next in Johannesburg to talk some more. I didn't get to do so, because although in Johannesburg three times after that, it was only in transit through the airport on working trips to Europe. In the meanwhile a whole lot happened, including the launch of your magazine *Empire*, for which you engaged the very important Oxford and Harvard educated lawyer Ronald Suresh Roberts to write a column.

As we all know, Roberts released a book in June last year, *Fit to Govern: The Native Intelligence of Thabo Mbeki*, purporting to elucidate Mbeki's political/ideological thinking. Evident from two chapters given to the subject, the first excerpts from the book and articles in the newspapers about it, and the repeated theme of Roberts's talks after it was published, the big issue everyone wanted explained was Mbeki's perplexing thinking about AIDS, and what had caused the sudden cooling of his enthusiasm for the AIDS scare in late 1999. To everyone's surprise, Roberts claimed that there was nothing strange about Mbeki's thinking on AIDS to explain: Mbeki is no dissident, he

said, and never has been. Which is to say that on AIDS Roberts and Mbeki think alike. Unfortunately for Roberts, however, Mark Gevisser revealed in *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred* in November that in the same month *Fit to Govern* came out, Mbeki himself had promptly telephoned him to repudiate this core claim of Roberts's book as false, and to set the record straight.

Apart from constructing and advancing a fake historical narrative about Mbeki's political and intellectual engagement with the American HIV-AIDS construct, Roberts plagiarised my unpublished work in progress extensively – on top of which he attacked me, and more importantly the work I've done over the last twelve years, in an audaciously dishonest assault on my credibility as an ARV drug researcher and writer, blasting round after round of lying calumny at me. In a closely detailed 443-page critique entitled *Lying and Thieving: The fraudulent scholarship of Ronald Suresh Roberts*, I took Roberts's bogus claims to pieces, exposing his fabrication, his historical falsification and his plagiarism line by line. It's been widely read, and I've received tremendous feedback from across the political spectrum; and all who've read it have concurred in pronouncing Roberts guilty as charged on all counts.

You don't have to take it from me. After reading my exposé of Roberts's fraud, his publisher STE Publishers cancelled the second impression of *Fit to Govern* about to go to print; and the book's editor Dr James Saunders pronounced it 'the most serious case of plagiarism and literary fraud in South African literary history'. My plagiarism charges were extensively reported in the weekend papers.

Having been exposed as a liar and thief, dumped by his publisher as a disreputable embarrassment, condemned by his own editor as grossly dishonest and wholly unreliable, and spurned by the very subject of his book for misrepresenting him, Roberts would by now, in a more sophisticated literary culture, be doing something very different for a living – his reputation and credibility as a writer irredeemably wrecked. But in South Africa, where less exacting professional standards obtain than in Europe and the US, *Empire* engaged him as a featured columnist. I gather this was because you were feeling sorry for him. According to Sarah Britten writing on her blog on 16 November, you decided to give Roberts column space in order to 'appear to be fair'. Apparently he convinced you that the reason for his difficulty in getting published in other magazines and newspapers these days is because the country's editors have been unfair to him, rather than the actual reason, to wit that they're satisfied that he's a fake and a fraud, comprehensively exposed as such in my book, and someone who habitually abuses any public platform offered him to besmirch his detractors venomously without any regard for the truth.

No one bought Roberts's claim in *Fit to Govern* that Mbeki still subscribes to the Western HIV-AIDS model of ill-health among the African poor; and Gevisser's report in *The Dream Deferred* five months later that Mbeki 'wished the record to reflect that – despite his near-silence since it was initially distributed – he still held to the views expressed in "Castro Hlongwane"' put the issue beyond contention.

*Castro Hlongwane, Caravans, Cats, Geese, Foot & Mouth and Statistics: HIV/AIDS and the Struggle for the Humanisation of the African* is Mbeki's radical scientific and ideological analysis and debunk of the American HIV-AIDS paradigm, which he released for discussion at an ANC NEC meeting in March 2002, continued updating and expanding, and delivered to Gevisser by presidential driver to enable him to reflect correctly his dissentient thinking on HIV-AIDS in his forthcoming biography *The Dream Deferred*. Regrettably, Gevisser hammed his AIDS chapter, but at least he honestly recorded, as Mbeki wished, that Mbeki is no longer with the crowd on HIV-AIDS, as he had been, in a big way, while Deputy President under Mandela. Unlike Roberts, Gevisser didn't conflate and confuse his own eager convictions about HIV-AIDS everywhere among Africans with Mbeki's lapsed belief in it all.

In his first column in *Empire* in December, instead of conceding his enormous mistake, Roberts persisted in claiming that Mbeki is not an AIDS dissident, notwithstanding that Mbeki had himself disavowed this allegation. The London *Guardian's* headline on 6 November 2007, citing Gevisser's book, 'Mbeki admits he's still an Aids dissident six years on' was 'rather implausibl[e]', Roberts contended – which is to say Gevisser was wrong and Roberts was right in claiming in his book: 'Thabo Mbeki is not now, nor has he ever been, an AIDS dissident.' (The logic of what Roberts further writes about this in his column is so incoherent, including where he drags me into his piece, that one's left wondering whether apart from not using fact checkers *Empire* doesn't use copy editors either.)

If it wasn't already perfectly obvious that Roberts's purpose in his December column was to discredit Gevisser's truthful statement, made on Mbeki's express authority, that Mbeki dissents from Western HIV-AIDS orthodoxy, Roberts gave it away in a lying note below his column: 'This in no way means that he [Roberts] has anything to gain from calling into question the veracity of other books on the president.' The only 'other book' to which Roberts could have been referring is Gevisser's, which refuted his central false claim that on HIV-AIDS, Mbeki thinks like Roberts and nearly all whites do, namely that there's a raging epidemic of sexually transmitted disease among Africans in South Africa (not whites, coloured and Indians) from which they'll certainly die unless they swallow the pharmaceutical industry's ARV drugs every day until they die on them. By 'calling into question the veracity'

of Gevisser's *The Dream Deferred*, as indeed he did, Roberts's obvious motive was to suggest that his account of Mbeki's thinking on AIDS in *Fit to Govern* was the truthful one, rather than the false one in the contest between the two. Roberts clearly had everything 'to gain' by suggesting that Gevisser was unreliable in his report about Mbeki's dissident thinking on AIDS: he was trying to claw back his lost credibility at Gevisser's expense, and Roberts's contrary claim here was a transparent, childish lie.

It bears mentioning that although goaded to do so, Gevisser has never bothered to respond to any of Roberts's several bids to discredit his account of how Mbeki confirmed to him on the phone that he's a dissident on AIDS. Deeming Roberts's sort of fraudulent writing beneath serious scholarship, Gevisser pointedly omitted *Fit to Govern* from his bibliography.

Instead of answering my capital charges of plagiarism, fabrication and falsification on dozens of counts, Roberts has responded with broadsides against me – in the newspapers, on his *Mail&Guardian* 'thought leader' blog, and finally in *Empire* – using exactly the sort of tactics he's on record himself denouncing as illegitimate in fair discourse:

Having headed his first article in *Empire* in December 'The smear of denialism', which he understands correctly as being 'intended to trigger intolerance against ... opponents', and make them appear, as Edwin Cameron puts it, 'reprehensible morally' and 'discreditable intellectually', Roberts proceeds in his February column, 'Mondli in my bedroom', to smear me with exactly that poisonous intent. Although *Sunday Times* editor Mondli Makhanya features in the title, I was the major target of his piece, commencing with a slew of lying slurs, and ending with a lying contortion of some humorously ironic email that I'd sent him and a friend in the US.

After twice previously deprecating, in writing, the *Mail&Guardian's* 'loony' jibes at me as 'gross unfairness' (see *Lying and Thieving*, page 44), Roberts begins his piece by calling me just that.

Roberts derides me irrelevantly as 'self-published' (like Mark Twain, Margaret Atwood, Leo Tolstoy, Virginia Woolf, Edgar Allen Poe, Friedrich Nietzsche, Walt Whitman and William Blake). This is perhaps because he's currently the most thoroughly discredited un-published author in South Africa – un-published in the sense that after discovering from *Lying and Thieving* that *Fit to Govern* was a colossal fraud, his publisher cancelled the reprint of this bestselling book, writing off the profits he could have made on a second print run. No foreign publisher is interested in either of Roberts's Gordimer and Mbeki books, and with his literary chicanery and whoring (mentioned below) exposed, it's unlikely that any other publisher in South Africa will ever publish anything of his again. In other words, for Roberts as a published author it's all over.

Next he's smearing me as an AIDS denialist in terms precisely 'intended to trigger intolerance against' me, and make me appear 'reprehensible morally' and 'discreditable intellectually'. Roberts's reeking dishonesty in typecasting me this way is aggravated by the fact that he twice pertinently condemned the use of this 'denialist' smear in *Fit to Govern*, and again for a third time in his talk about it at Wits on 30 August, correctly identifying it as a form of hate speech (see *Lying and Thieving*, pages 58, 202 and 378).

Since Roberts doesn't dispute his conviction declaimed in *Fit to Govern* and noted in *Lying and Thieving* that poor African women, unlike white women, are riddled with 'HIV-AIDS' and that as lovers they are therefore potentially deadly 'germ carriers' (Mbeki's scathing expression) best avoided for that reason, it seems unnecessary to treat this aspect, as much as Roberts huffs and puffs over it.

Roberts concludes his piece by asking rhetorically, 'Why is Brink himself so coy about his anger?' The question itself is another of his lies, because Brink was never 'coy about his anger' at all: as *Lying and Thieving* candidly tells, I was exceedingly pissed off by his wholesale plagiarism of my work and his vicious lying defamation of me in his book. Which is to say, Roberts knows exactly why I was angry, yet he dissembles that the 'reality' was because we'd 'fallen out over a woman'. We never did. I'd introduced him to an American writer to help him find a publisher for his Gordimer biography. A few days after his departure for the US and Trinidad in December, I'd come across a duplicitous fax he'd just sent to *New York Times Book Review* writer and editor Rachel Donadio, and saw from it that he was fixing to knife me in the back in his book, which he did (see *Lying and Thieving*, page 54). That marked the end of our friendship for me, hence, 'This was Brink's last email to me.'

Roberts's mocking description of my close friendship and professional collaboration with my writer friend in New York, conducted by email and telephone over many years, as a 'pursu[it]' of 'manic fruitlessness' is another flagrant lie of his, but being a stranger to the truth, a characteristic one.

My email (sent before I saw the Donadio letter) was indeed 'a joke' between the three of us, and Roberts well appreciated it at the time, playing along in his response, which he copied to me in good spirit. Knowing my humour well, my American friend caught it immediately too, responding with what Roberts accurately describes as a 'wry reply'. My next email, written in the style of the novelist JP Donleavy, mimicked his arch voice and idiosyncratic grammatical and punctuation style, and Roberts realized this too, because I'd given him a copy of Donleavy's *The Unexpurgated Code* for his amusement (we were good friends once). But his lying rendition of this ironic email written in the same humorous vein is that I 'beseech[ed] her not to meet' him. In fact, although ostensibly addressed to her, my email was sent to him – I was

having a teasing dig at him – with her in the cc address line. Roberts’s wresting of my tongue-in-cheek emails into a death threat and a jealous fit in his February column in *Empire*, in retaliation for revealing his lying and thieving in his book, demonstrates yet again that his deceitfulness as a writer has no limits as he exploits public space given him to settle personal scores:

By January, a couple of weeks before Roberts’s go at me in *Empire*, the ‘anger’ was all his. In that month, the *Mail&Guardian*, *Die Burger*, *Sunday Times*, *Sunday World* and *Weekend Witness* all reported my further exposé that Roberts had written *Fit to Govern* to order, chopping and changing his manuscript on Essop Pahad’s secret instructions (Mbeki had nothing to do with it). In a new chapter of the expanded edition of *Lying and Thieving*, I detailed how Pahad had ordered numerous cuts to be made to Roberts’s book. But more important than his censorship, I showed how Pahad had evidently dictated Roberts’s false line concerning Mbeki’s thinking on AIDS to white out the record of Mbeki’s challenge to American HIV-AIDS orthodoxy at the turn of the century – described by Roberts in the current issue of *BBC Focus on Africa* as a ‘public relations disaster’ (see *Lying and Thieving*, page 417).

This is to say, after I’d exposed him for inventing and falsifying history and for massive plagiarism, I further outed him as an intellectual whore churning out lying damage control propaganda as a political service for major cash (~R2.5 million, all in).

I’m told by my friend in New York that Roberts was stung by my ribbing emails – and this accounts for the breathtaking venom with which he flailed at me, his good friend for nearly two years, in his book. (Her further reports would be unkind to repeat.)

Roberts claims I prevailed on *Sunday Times* editor Mondli Makhanya not to meet him; I think he means not to publish him, but either way it’s another lie. Roberts’s and my open exchange over several weeks on the letters page of that newspaper is archived under ‘Articles and Reviews’ at [lyingandthieving.com](http://lyingandthieving.com). His allegation that ‘Makhanya [is] apparently Brink’s new best friend’ is a further lying smear – as if Makhanya and I are at one piece politically, when for my campaigning against the poisoning of the African poor his ARV-promoting journalists have done their best to rubbish me with repeated attacks on my integrity.

It’s entirely your prerogative to publish the self-serving lies of a notoriously untruthful and unreliable writer – a plagiarist and literary prostitute too; and by all means, if you consider this will enhance your magazine’s literary reputation and/or increase its sales, he’s all yours. But please check everything Roberts says before you publish it in future, particularly where it concerns me, because as you can see he’s fantastically dishonest, and like a scheming

criminal or slimy lawyer, he'll tell any lie he bargains on getting away with if he thinks it will get him ahead (had he been in business or legal practice he'd certainly have been jailed or struck off long ago). So you've really got to watch it with this guy.

As *Mail&Guardian* editor Ferial Haffajee summed up aptly on her 'thought leader' blog on 15 November, 'Ronald's style is innuendo and, of late, blue lies ... parading attack as debate; innuendo as critical thought. Bile is his style. ... Many might be impressed by his turn of phrase, but you'll soon tire of it; there is nothing beyond the bitter heart; little but inane point-scoring; personal puffery rather than a clever take on society. ... He is a peddler of lies.' Perhaps you missed it.

Would you publish a 500-word reply to clean this mess up?

Yours sincerely

ANTHONY BRINK

[www.lyingandthieving.com](http://www.lyingandthieving.com) (*Lying and Thieving* available as a free download)

[www.tig.org.za](http://www.tig.org.za)

Encl:

1. *Lying and Thieving: The fraudulent scholarship of Ronald Suresh Roberts*
2. Letter to Peter Lewenstein: editor in chief: *BBC Focus on Africa*

Cc: President Thabo Mbeki, *Empire* co-editors Phillip De Wet and Kevin Bloom, the Press Ombudsman, all national and major regional South African newspaper editors, South African National Editors Forum, the *Guardian*, *BBC Focus on Africa*, *New African*, Khanyisiwe Mkhonza, Christine Qunta, Thami Mazwai, Shadrack Gutto, Bertrand Aristide, Dumisa Ntsebeza, Mark Gevisser, Rian Malan, Martin Welz, Nic Dawes, Don Makatile, Megan Power, Andrew Donaldson, Jeremy Gordin, Ray Hartley, Drew Forrest, Fred Khumalo, Sue Segar, Richard Calland, Patrick Bond, Steven Friedman, Max du Preez, Justice Malala, Xolela Mangcu, Brian Ashley, Ben McLennan, Anton Harber, Guy Berger, Robert Brand, Lizette Rabe, James Sanders, other interested parties including Mr and Mrs Roberts in Port of Spain, and online at [www.lyingandthieving.com](http://www.lyingandthieving.com)