

Pahad 'censored' Mbeki book'

Aids sceptic Anthony Brink says Ronald Suresh Roberts's biography was written under instruction from Essop Pahad.

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CONTROVERSIAL author Ronald Suresh Roberts has been accused by a former friend, Aids sceptic Anthony Brink, of chopping and changing the manuscript of his book on President Thabo Mbeki according to the secret instructions of the minister in the presidency, Essop Pahad.

Brink, who has also accused Roberts of being a liar and a plagiarist who plundered his research, and of misrepresenting Mbeki's view on HIV/Aids, makes the allegation in the expanded version of his book, *Lying and Thieving: The Fraudulent Scholarship of Ronald Suresh Roberts*.

The spat appears to be the latest personal fallout in the life of Roberts, who, in 2005, sued *Sunday Times* journalist Chris Barron for an article entitled "The Unlikeable Mr Roberts", in which Barron said that "most relationships involving the author end in bitterness and regret for the other party".

At the time, author Nadine Gordimer had also fallen out with Roberts and disowned his biography of her. Roberts made it clear that he was not prepared to take directions from his subject.

Roberts told the *London Guardian* that Gordimer, supposedly a champion of free speech, had wanted "complete control, tsar-like, which would have turned the manuscript into pious crap".

But, in Brink's 376-page book, which is available to be downloaded from a website called www.lyingandthieving.com, Brink alleges that Roberts — whom he describes as "an intellectual prostitute who no one wants anymore" — wrote *Fit to Govern* "to order", and made cuts to his copy under the direction of Pahad.

The allegations fly in the face of claims by Roberts that Mbeki did not try to change his manuscript. In an interview in *Die Burger* in June, he said Mbeki "did not try changing a jot or a title" of the book.

Roberts contends that the effect of the changes is to take the softer line on the Oppenheimer family and on veteran liberal



Ronald Suresh Roberts (left), author of *Fit to Govern: The Native Intelligence of Thabo Mbeki*, and Anthony Brink (above), his former friend who now accuses him of allowing the book to be censored.

ing the Oppenheimer quote on p.35. 3) 63 Delete reference to Helen Suzman eight lines from the bottom; and ... 63) 131 Delete the reference/comparison — "Reagan-Thatcher-Suzman-Oppenheimer".

Roberts co-operated with 10 of these points, but said this week that the purpose of the changes was to reflect Mbeki's views on the legacy of the Oppenheims. He said the peremptory tone of the document can be explained by the fact that the note was directed to the publisher and not to him. Roberts said the document was simply asking for changes that had previously been agreed.

In an e-mail response to questions from *Weekend Witness*, Roberts added: "These and many other of the comments received from the president, Essop and others were both appropriate and helpful, in the same spirit as were many of the comments that I received from Gordimer, with which I agreed and which, as here, I implemented. I acted neither on Gordimer's 'instructions' in such instances, nor on Essop's 'instructions' in the instances to which you refer. In instances where I did not act, no changes were made. All the changes appearing on this document were previously agreed."

Roberts continued: "The changes accurately reflected the difference between my strong views on the role of illiberal capital and the president's almost-astounding views. Rather than placing my views in his mouth (as [Mark] Gevisser repeatedly and

even imaginatively does in his biography), the strength of my book is its authoritativeness as an account of President Mbeki's world view, not least on the Aids issue, where Brink has systematically tried to put words in the president's mouth. These comments add to the authority of the book as an accurate reflection of the subject."

Roberts went on to say that no word or African leader has been expressed as strong a critique of De Beers and Anglo as has Mbeki. "Part of proper respect for his radicalism is in not misrepresenting it."

Accusing Brink of having

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"habitually attributed the full and varied range of his own view to the president", Roberts said: "Both on Oppenheimer and on Aids, my book gives an accurate reflection of the president's thinking, precisely because it is informed by these and many other comments from the president, Essop and others."

But Brink contends that Roberts never communicated with Mbeki about the issue. "Roberts never interviewed, phoned or e-mailed Mbeki. He was working for Pahad all along, writing what Pahad told him to, and what not to. He was taking all his instructions from Pahad and Pahad wanted the stuff cut."

"If Mbeki was directing cuts, as Roberts now pretends, he would have directed that the misrepresentation of his position on

Aids be addressed — the big issue that really mattered to him, which he fixed with Mark Gevisser (author of the biography *Thabo Mbeki, the Dream Deferred*) in the month *Fit to Govern* came out.

"Don't let him throw sand in your eyes over this", Brink continues. "Mbeki didn't try changing the manuscript. The reason for this is that Mbeki was not involved in the writing. Replying to a post on his blog on November 23, 2007 that he'd never even interviewed Mbeki for his book, Roberts ... lamely depicted the value of interviewing a subject, and confirmed: 'When we had chats, I didn't pretend they were work'."

"Although he'd suggested in his letter to Mbeki on February 22, 2006 that no interview by e-mail ... would be useful, none took place. Consequently, generally speaking, but specifically concerning Mbeki's thinking on Aids, *Fit to Govern* was no more than a mix of Roberts's own conventional, media-framed understanding, prejudice, preconception, myth, ignorance, and fantasitication. Point is: after reading Roberts's first draft, and then writing his letter to him, Mbeki took no further interest in the progress of the book until he saw the sickening final product. This is because the book was Pahad's project. And it was Pahad who oversaw it and ordered all the changes ..."

"Most of these related to the Oppenheims, and Brink says: 'Roberts rounded on the Oppenheims throughout the manuscript. For interesting reasons ... Pahad didn't like this at all. He didn't like Roberts attacking his Oppenheims. And so when writing his successive drafts back from Pahad, after submitting them to him for censoring, like in prison, Roberts was struck by the fact that the only thing Pahad really turned for was his criticism of the Oppenheimer family, and the drafts were accordingly returned peppered with Pahad's, disapproving annotations to indicate the cuts he wanted made. ... all relating to these rich white people who'd made their unbelievable monopoly fortune from the vicious exploitation of the country's African people."