



This is in every respect a significant book which will have a profound impact upon the manner in which Africa's political elites are scrutinised for demanding rewards for their grievances. In a book which must rate as one of the bravest texts of recent times, Moeletsi Mbeki speaks truth to the powerful black elites who use and abuse power in the name of liberation, where victimisation is rewarded over economic development.

Mbeki provides this as the primary factor that drives many conflicts in Africa. He can be seen as prying open an uncomfortable truth behind revolutionary rhetoric in most African states. He indirectly asks whether revolutionaries in Africa make effective transitions to democracy. And the answer is a resounding, NO. In fact, the motivation for revolution was sparked by greed, not justice.

What is the relationship between destiny and merit? Was there continuity or discontinuity between what the elites got and what they thought they deserved. What he argues is that for as long as blacks profit financially by being victims, or for as long as they use their struggle credentials to procure companies they cannot manage, blacks will always blame others for their lot. They will blame apartheid. They will

Review

Architects of Poverty: Why African Capitalism Needs Changing
(Picador Africa, Johannesburg, 2009)

Moeletsi Mbeki

Reviewed by Thebe Morake

blame the present government. They will never have to reflect on other reasons for their failure.

Mbeki's central preoccupation is the manner in which the European exploitation of Africans was replaced by equally repressive African elites. He argues that, "African political elites have driven their economies backwards" over what economic policies to pursue. Therefore, it should come as no shock to realise that revolutionaries or elites in Africa have precipitated in its decline. Repression was their game, not liberation. Power was their motivation, not justice. Like Franz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Mbeki lambastes the political elites, accusing them of joining the liberation movement only to secure their slice of the cake.

Mbeki goes on to argue that the intention of BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) was "to wean the ANC from radical economic ambitions, such as nationalising the major elements of the South African economy." In short, Mbeki stipulates that some of the elites or revolutionaries were sold to the highest bidder. He regards BEE as "the transfer of wealth from the strong to the weak."

He does concede that "the driving motive of colonization was to extract the continent's mineral and agricultural materials." However, African elites, he argues, favoured continuing with old colonial methods and some were co-opted into the economic status quo driven by white oligarchs.

The political elites are promising

one thing and practising another, using their victimhood to suggest a right to these minerals and agricultural materials.

Never simplifying or compromising the complexity of the problems facing the poor in South Africa, this book aims to reopen the debate regarding the nature of transition from apartheid to democracy. What were the real intentions of those who fought for liberation? Was it for justice or access to economic power?

Mbeki seems convinced that it was for the latter when he says that, "elites use the instruments of the state to further undermine the poor." He argues for the re-evaluation of BEE as it stifles black advancement more than racism did. He acknowledges the faults of the past regimes but prefers to take a jab at those who keep blacks from interrogating the true nature of their suffering. What Mbeki abhors is the crass and deceitful politics of tolerance that masks the roots of real underdevelopment in South Africa in particular, and Africa in general.

What we are witnessing, Mbeki argues, is the emergence of BEE to seemingly enhance and even catapult the despairing black self beyond its historical situation. BEE has come with a vengeance, preaching materialism and individualism. It serves as the necessary antidote to the persecution blacks experienced, but those very elites are the architects of poverty. LB

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