

Book Review

Itumeleng Meko, *Silent No More: Challenges Facing Black African Academics at South African Universities*. Cape Town: The Incwadi Press, 2016, 183 pp.

Professor Itumeleng Meko's book on the challenges facing African academics comes at a time of growing concern about the lack of meaningful contributions by Africans, people of African descent and Africa in general to academic research and knowledge and to the global discourse, be it in politics, in the economy, in security matters, banking and trade. This book is also released at a time when various stakeholders in South Africa, from civil society and the private and public sector, are grappling with the pertinent questions raised by the '#Fees Must Fall' and '#Rhodes Must Fall' campaigns. The urgency to address the limited African input into global knowledge and promote African contributions to the global discourse is accurately reflected in Carter G Woodson's warning that "When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions" (p 172). This reflection was also enunciated by the slain South African activist-scholar Steve Biko, who asserted, "the most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed". This dearth of African participation in knowledge building is not an accident of history. It has been a well-calculated and strategic design of colonialism and *apartheid*, still lingering on into the post-colonial era, to maintain White supremacy in all aspects of life. That is why today's challenges must be seen within the historic context as expressed in Biko's call that "We must relate the past to the present and demonstrate evolutions of the modern Black man" (p 157; pp 107-135).

That *Challenges facing Black Academics* has been published by The Incwadi Press, a relatively unknown publishing house, as part of their African Perspectives Book series is an encouragement for Black economic empowerment in general and for Black owned and Black controlled publishing houses in particular (pp 57-71). Itumeleng Meko's book is a compendium of articles that have been published before either by himself or, as far as chapter eight is concerned, together with Milton Nkoana and James Mtimkhulu, two young Black academics.

This book is profound in substance, arguments, policy and scholarly recommendations. Meko speaks truth to power. He speaks from an

African perspective (pp 146-164) and, as such, contributes to the transformation of society and to long-delayed restorative justice. He tries to illustrate how the Afro-centric approach and African ideas have been marginalised for too long, in academia and public discourse, in order to maintain European dominance over African research and knowledge (pp 107-135). In the first ten chapters, the author uses his personal experience at the University of Limpopo and the North-West University to describe the different personal, institutional and structural challenges facing African academics, especially those at South African universities.

Mekoa identifies the fundamental challenges haunting African academics which range from racism, intellectual censorship, managerial dictatorship, tribalism, jealousy, a contaminated working environment, lack of appreciation, lack of support, rewarding blatant loyalty at the expense of scholarly excellence, resistance to transformation, to widespread academic connection and *broerskap* (p xix; pp 1-12). While these challenges are largely experienced by African academics, non-African academics, at times, face them as well. Such unfortunate manifestations vary from one institution to the other. The complexity of these challenges requires a multi-pronged strategy if an amicable and lasting solution is to be found and efficiently applied, sometimes, according to Mekoa, at the expense of sanity (pp 72-105).

Contextually, Mekoa describes his point of departure by embracing Stanley Sayre and likeminded scholars in their conviction that "the politics of the university are so intense because the stakes are so low" (pp xv-xx). Convinced that "academic freedom is a central value in higher education", Mekoa breaks the deafening silence on the shenanigans in research, publishing and teaching, in Africa in general and in South Africa in particular.

Irrespective of its ground-breaking content, this publication, unfortunately, suffers from inaccuracies, grammatical errors, a lack of uniformity in editing and writing style and a general lack of cohesion between the chapters, especially with respect to abstracts and conclusions. It is also regrettable that many chapters have not been updated after their earlier publication in different journals. It would have been useful to have an introductory chapter to bind the following chapters together, in addition to the inspiring biographical prologue and the foreword written by Dr Mmutlan-yane Mogoba (pp ix-xii), who, coincidentally, is also the editor of the African Perspectives Book Series. All of this gives the impression that this book was hastily brought to publication.

Despite its imperfections, this publication deserves a place in any library and on the bookshelves of all Africans and persons whose fate is

tied to the African continent. And it achieves its purpose to encourage African scholarship and promote intellectual discussion amongst African academics. After all, disagreeing with established academic conventions and varying class, gender, race, geographic or epistemic locations builds scholarly enquiry.

This book is both educational and informative and it should be on the reading list for students of African affairs and other persons interested in interdisciplinary studies and educational management.

I was impressed with this book because it reflects the hurdles and challenges I personally experienced as an African scholar from the Africa Institute of South Africa (now part of the Human Sciences Research Council) to the University of Venda and the University of Limpopo and during my interactions and conversations with journal editors, research administrators and academic leaders.

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