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Truth is somewhere in between: an ethnographic account of Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) in South Africa - a work in progress

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Abstract

Dissertation Title: Truth is Somewhere In Between: An Ethnographic Account of Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) in South Africa

Broad Based Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) policy, codes and scorecard were finalised in 2007 in South Africa. In an attempt to eradicate economic polarity, the policy's aim is to pursue concurrent economic growth and social distribution. The goal is honourable, but is it achievable? Progress among all affected parties needs to be investigated and evaluated. In addition to much confusion arising between the policy's discourses and practices, the uneasy logic of BBBEE in the neo-capitalistic state of South Africa faces resistance and various challenges. Adopting an anthropological research approach, this paper makes particular use of participant observation in an effort to deconstruct the multilayered BBBEE concept and its practice. An examination of a firm that achieved broad based empowerment score provides the necessary ethnographic data. The dynamics of organisational culture, management and their BBBEE implementation, together with the perspectives of various stakeholders such as those within the community, government and among consultants, are all explored. BBBEE score, for all intents and purposes, was perceived as being irrelevant to the actual employees and their daily operations. To the degree that it may have been pertinent, the constant battles of culture and perceptions between various people and positions aggravated any hope of a possible point of reconciliation. Capitalist determination among all parties exists at the core of economic game they consent to play. Despite the policy's effort to transform the management paradigm, the traditional organisational structure and practice is largely upheld and consequently, empowerment remains merely in the realm of discourses among both practitioners and beneficiaries. Narrow based empowerment persists as the dominant view of many and, as a result, BBBEE remains a sheer bureaucratic baby, impotent at bringing about any meaningful cultural transformation in the current economic trend of South Africa.