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The Motsepe ethic : an exploration of the role of the BEE power elite

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Abstract

South Africa's economic policy of Black Economic Empowerment has successfully created a small group of black South Africans whose economic might can rival that of the Afrikaner Economic Empowerment elite created under the system of apartheid. Very little research has been conducted that attempts to understand the actions and motivations of this new economic elite class. This research report aims to understand the 'ethic of capital accumulation' of South Africa's wealthiest Black Economic Empowerment Elite, the mining magnate Patrice Motsepe. Motsepe's ethic is examined through the political, economic and social worlds in which he operates. The report draws on an archive of corporate and media documents as well as interviews with people close to Motsepe and former employees in order to construct his life history. Additionally, it draws upon a previous study of Afrikaner nationalism and the rise of South Africa's wealthiest Afrikaner Economic Empowerment elite, the tobacco tycoon Anton Rupert. This is done in order to provide the historical context that shaped the political, economic and social worlds into which Motsepe was born. The relations between these worlds are examined through the theoretical lens of the power elite. The central argument of this report is that Motsepe's philanthropic activities should be seen as an attempt to bridge the tensions between pressures for him to act in the national interest by the political elite and pressures to act in the interest of global capital. His first priority has become the maintenance of the globally connected economic system within South Africa, and the minerals-energy-financial complex, that relies on the exploitation of cheap labour and ecological destruction. This report is part of a growing body of research on the social, economic and environmental impact of the continuation of globalisation and capitalism on contemporary South Africa.