

Betrayal sits with me like a bead of mercury — profoundly dangerous, liquid, impossible to touch. Each time I try to capture that bead's centre, to point to some cohering force, it bursts away from me in all directions, and I am left with nothing under finger. Afterwards, I watch in fascinated horror as those dispersed beads move inexorably together, forming again that silvery whole. Betrayal is like this: beguilingly simple, neat and fully formed. Someone is a turncoat, a defector, and all those around him or her are filled with disgust. Often all interactions with that person are rewritten after the revelation of their betrayal, and all moments are overlaid with a retrospective patina of suspicion. After a while, those betrayed announce that they always knew the betrayer was a coward. The whole business is put down to the betrayer's bad innards, their lack of courage, their inability to take pain, their weak personalities, their yielding loyalties. In short, says the betrayed: he¹ was always a morally dubious man, and in the end, proved himself so. Yet, the question remains: would you remain loyal and die? Or would you defect and live? And what if the question becomes even more complex? After being tortured for months, after your family is threatened, after you have been isolated and your sense of history and moral reasoning have been systematically undermined and pulled apart, fingernail by fingernail, what choice is it possible to make then? These questions burst apart an easy wholeness. As Ray Lalla says: "We [in the ANC] believed that, as revolutionaries, it was do or die. But, when faced with the choice, we did not want to die." (Dlamini, 2014: 125)

Often there is no need to go to such extremes. Rather, knowing these extremes are possible does the trick. You always imagine that you would hide a Jew in Nazi Germany, or would join the underground fight against apartheid, that you would have the courage to risk everything for what is right. But few actually did — and few would, I imagine, given the opportunity, despite what we hope for ourselves. Here is the other end of betrayal: passivity.

For months I hacked away at the edges of Jacob Dlamini's *Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle* (2014), reading memoirs from Stalinist Russia and uncovering conspiracy theories about the ANC in exile. I

¹ Though there were women askaris, for the most part they were men. Little is known about these women; Dlamini states: "The story of female askaris has yet to be told." (2014: 199)

read about death squads and intelligence agencies, contemplated James Bond and the notion of the glamorous spy alongside murderous defectors such as Joe Mamasela, who admitted to killing up to 35 anti-apartheid activists but now cheerfully runs a training business for security personnel². I trawled libraries and the internet, typing in search terms like McCarthyism and Pinochet's Chile — I did everything except focus on Dlamini's book. Why? What could I not face?

This: an investigation of betrayal in apartheid as an umbrella term for the spectrum from passive complicity to forthright collaboration implicates me as a white person. And this: my intimacy with both Dlamini and his subject, the betrayer Glory Sedibe, is one whose terms I cannot decipher. Do I dare? Do I presume to speak? Sedibe stares out in a mugshot, black and white, in the first of the sets of pictures in the book. Can I see malice? Anemari Jansen used Eugene de Kock to measure her own complicity³; is Sedibe to be my measure? Or, stranger still, will it be Dlamini?

The project of tackling a book written by a black person about a black person and of countenancing its content's terrible relevance or at least resonance in my life had me either wildly punching blind or desperately backing away. Finally, the parameters of what we deem right or moral constantly eluded me. Its bounds moved in and out from situation to circumstance, always dissolving in the immensity of the complex individual. As Dlamini puts it, "There is no truth with a definite article in the world of collaborators." (16)

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Askari tracks the life of Sedibe, the former Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) cadre-cum-askari, by asking: why did he switch sides? Why did he go from being a high-ranking MK operative to working feverishly for the apartheid government? The phenomenon of defection is complex, and *Askari* considers it by contemplating Vichy France, the South American juntas and the Stasi in the German Democratic Republic, among others, but never quite comes to any conclusions. Sedibe joined the ANC in exile in

² See: Maughan, Karyn. "Joe Mamasela, apartheid askari and remorseless killer" in *Mail & Guardian Online* 22 April 2016 [Accessed: 28 April 2016]

³ In the first chapter of this PhD, I focused on Anemari Jansen's biography *Eugene de Kock: Assassin for the State* (2015).

1977 and gave the oath to become part of its military wing, MK. By 1983, he had been appointed head of military intelligence for Transvaal. In 1986, he was captured by apartheid security branch operatives in an operation headed by De Kock, tortured for three months and turned⁴ into an askari: a government agent. He played this role on Vlakplaas with what MK cadre Barry Gilder describes as a passion — “He would go out of his way to find us and hurt us.” (98) Sedibe also testified against his erstwhile colleagues in court as Mr X1. He died in 1994 of suspected poisoning. Being captured and tortured makes Sedibe a victim, but the relish with which he took up his new role also makes him a perpetrator⁵. Dlamini’s book is about this tension, articulated via moral agency — “to see [Sedibe] as only a ‘victim’ is to hide from historical view his agency and to diminish his capacity to act, regardless of his circumstances.” (15). This articulation is also an attempt to situate Sedibe temporally and geographically, as in, to “understand where he came from” (140) within a particular social and economic trajectory, and then to apprehend this in the context of the apartheid regime.

But Dlamini has a big problem. While countenancing betrayal and complicity with oppressive regimes at large, and without falling into the moral relativism that insinuates everyone is somehow a victim, Dlamini must discover, reveal, uncover, expose or explore the askari Sedibe, and other black askaris, without becoming either judgmental or overly empathetic. The problem is finding this balance while immersed in something so politically, socially and ethically imbricated, emotionally vexing and dangerous. This has Dlamini punching blind or backing away — just as he seems to feel close to, even protective, of his subjects, he becomes violently disgusted by them and, importantly, disgusted *by himself*, perhaps for feeling anything but hatred for many of these bloodthirsty collaborators. It is for Dlamini, as he says of all political wars in South Africa, “an intimate affair” (10). All sorts of types and levels of

⁴ ‘Turned’ was the euphemistic term used for defection from the ANC to the state.

⁵ Early in the text, Dlamini states that he wishes to “avoid the simplistic binary of perpetrator and victim favoured by the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission].” (2014: 16) Though the commission reported a sense of discomfort in its definitions, it wrote into its mandate the following: “the word ‘perpetrator’ ... describe[s] all persons found by the Commission to have committed gross violations of human rights” (1999: Vol 1, Para 40). And “the person against whom that violation is committed can only be described as a victim.” (1999: Vol 1, Para 38) The Commission notes that the categories of victim and perpetrator are not mutually exclusive (1999: Vol 1, Para 89), but it still imagines the two binaristically. My use of the terms acknowledge their severe limitations, especially in fraught cases such as that of Glory Sedibe — and indeed of almost all askaris.

intimacy are at the heart of this book; it is a “fatal intimacy” (2), as Dlamini puts it, using Njabulo Ndebele’s formulation, that characterised apartheid. Dlamini comments: “Political conflict in South Africa has always been a racially promiscuous affair.” (9) Again, he uses the term ‘affair’ to indicate intimacy, but the sexual overtone changes the timbre of this affair. Race in apartheid South Africa was never racial purity: as much as many agitated against the regime, some did not; some were even intimate with their oppressors, working for them to uphold the state with something like relish. Dlamini suggests that both sides’ recollections “are tainted by fear and the desire to give apartheid secrets an afterlife in democratic South Africa.” (3) Both fearing and desiring the exposure of these secrets, or, rather, the exposure of the fact of the secret, seems again to indicate an affair of sorts: there are secrets, but I will not say; I will both hide and reveal. Dlamini’s relationship with Sedibe and the rest of the defectors seems to be one characterised by both fear and desire. But he also uses the term ‘tainted’, indicating that these men’s intentions when recalling their actions in the past are *spoiled* by this fear and desire. The slightly moralising tone attached to the word ‘tainted’ suggests that apartheid secrets do not deserve to have an afterlife in democracy. Dlamini states: “Instead of allowing for a full reckoning with the messy business of collaboration, South Africans have allowed the secrets of the past to gain an afterlife. Instead of the nation using the secrets of the past to come to grips with the pervasiveness of complicity, some are using these secrets to fight contemporary political battles.” (250) Here is referring to the mudslinging that involves accusing a political rival of being an apartheid agent⁶. But what does he mean about apartheid secrets gaining an afterlife? Do they continue to cause more damage? What characterises this afterlife? Dlamini seems somewhat uncertain

⁶ There are two types of askaris in Dlamini’s book: the named agent, such as Sedibe and Mamasela, and the unnamed agent, those whose status as one-time apartheid agents is not known by many. What is missing altogether from the book are the misnamed agents, those falsely accused of collaborating with the government and then punished or killed by the ANC. The unnamed askaris and other colluders who remain unidentified create for upwardly mobile politicians opportunities for serious slander. We can see this in the brouhaha that erupted when Mathews Phosa sent a document to ANC deputy secretary general Jessie Duarte he alleged was left anonymously at his doorstep. In it, Mpumalanga premier David Mabuza is reportedly revealed as an apartheid agent and spy responsible for a number of deaths. Mabuza’s attempt to sue Phosa for defamation was dismissed. Phosa said in a newspaper article: “The reason why I gave [the report] to the leadership of the ANC was [that] the document contained very serious allegations [that] need to be investigated. People have died in the Struggle. Until today we don't know who killed them.” These secrets do indeed live on. See: Nkosi, Bongani. “David Mabuza believes he has been cleared of apartheid-era police spy allegations” in *The Sowetan Live Online* 16 May 2016. <http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2016/05/16/david-mabuza-believes-he-has-been-cleared-of-apartheid-era-police-spy-allegations> [Accessed: 21 May 2016].

himself, writing: “But does the messiness of life mean that we should let apartheid secrets go to the grave?” (250) This seems to suggest we *should not* let them “go to the grave” where before it seemed that to give them an afterlife was part of the fear and desire of those pundits of apartheid, on either side. Also, surely, as a historian, it is Dlamini’s job is to give these secrets an afterlife? Part of the intimacy in the book lies in his difficult relationship with his role as historian and the manner in which to work with his material. Is he to be a cold historian, a warm human or a stern judge?

Amid all this the askari in *Askari*, Sedibe, never quite surfaces. In my reading of the book, we hear his voice clearly only once, through the mouth of former MK cadre Thembi Nwedamutswu, the late former ANC treasurer and MEC of education in Limpopo. In 1994, Sedibe tried to return to the ANC, and Nwedamutswu was one of a group of ANC members he met to discuss this possibility. When asked why he turned, he reportedly said: “I wanted to save my life because these people [the security branch] were going to kill me.” (224) This does not suggest a dearth of Sedibe in the book: he is everywhere, in court transcripts and in his police file, in the archive and in the words of other askaris. But this sentence seems to me the first instance he emerges simple and honest. Almost all of what he is supposed to have said before is tainted by various pressures put on him by his handlers, what was at stake for other askaris in talking about him, and the thin emptiness of the material on him. Sedibe is an apartheid secret given an afterlife by Dlamini, who can never quite find him. The askari is exactly this type of ‘living dead’, only half out the grave, haunting *Askari* and Dlamini, slipping behind his mug shot and all the names he named in his police file. The reader, like Dlamini, cannot find Sedibe either. It is not him, the ghost in the book, who is its central character, but Dlamini himself. By this, I do not mean that Dlamini writes egotistically; rather, he reveals himself throughout the text in a gradual striptease of slippages and paradoxes that speak a second layer of language beneath the written words. It is the reader’s intimacy not with Sedibe but with Dlamini that makes *Askari* equally compelling and frustrating.

The first section of this chapter will look into Dlamini’s various relationships — with his subjects in general, with Sedibe in particular, and with himself — to suggest he creates a moral structure through which to exclude himself from being part of the

continuum of betrayal while safely creating a series of provocations. His fear and desire around betrayal is illuminated by his oddly protective relationship with his askaris, which then morphs into disgust — but not quite for Sedibe, that spectral figure Dlamini never captures.

But there is also a different type of emptiness and intimacy in the book. *Askari* is about the nature of collaboration: what constitutes collaboration or complicity and how can we think along more complicated lines when we turn to the narratives about the past. Its other major concern is about the point at which narratives of victimhood depart into narratives of the perpetrator alongside the notion of the individual's moral agency. What the book cannot think through, though, is the question: what is the result of the askari? What it cannot consider is the ANC's reactions to the phenomenon of betrayal — worse, *racial* betrayal. In fact, Dlamini generally does not go into much detail about the ANC in exile. I argue in the second part of this chapter that the book has a mirror self, a whole scene that eerily reflects the story of capture, torture and turning, this time from the ANC in the camps in exile.

The historian's ghost

Dlamini's introductory chapter includes two personal stories. The first of these starts with the line: "It is 1986 and I am a Standard Six pupil at Poneno Secondary School in Katlehong." (5) Dlamini has brought us into the present tense of his past. This makes the section feel more urgent and relevant, and, importantly, makes it feel as though these moments are still being produced, as though the events could still shift, and that the choices remain available, fresh and ongoing. The story describes how schools are under military occupation while the Congress of South African Students (Cosas) upholds a years-long campaign to boycott schools, which most students heed. But, Dlamini says, "I don't believe in class boycotts. I defy the call, as do a handful of other students." (*Ibid*) Of the students who turn up at school, most don't wear uniforms, but Dlamini does: "My mother insists on it," (*Ibid*) he states. He describes pointing out to two white soldiers stationed at his school the direction from which boycotting schoolchildren threw stones. Later, he is afraid and rushes home, but

nothing happens to him. “[W]ere these the actions of a collaborator?” (6) Dlamini asks. The change in tense indicates that we are in the present of the book, and this voice is Dlamini looking at back at his past to ask what constitutes betrayal, and how we participate in oppression. The story suggests that the author is placing himself somewhere along the spectrum of complicity to allude to the uneasy complexity of betrayal. Dlamini writes: “I relate these experiences because, in a modest way, they suggest a need to think critically about collaboration and complicity in South African history.” (8) Being a part of a continuum — with willing defectors on one end, and any one of those who lived under apartheid and did not protest on the other — Dlamini’s risk in telling a story of his own small collaboration makes the reader trust his evaluation of other potential traitors. He, too, could have been one. But, in various ways, Dlamini risks nothing.

When he says he does not believe in the boycotts, he presents a boy already engaged in national politics, and one who has formulated a belief — presumably he believes in education and *not* in the boycotts. Saying that he defied the call to boycott suggests not that he participated in a government-run institution that, for those in Cosas certainly and for many others, was an abiding symbol of structural oppression. Rather, by *defying* the call, it seems as though he had the courage to stick to his convictions, knowingly putting himself in danger from the boycotting schoolchildren. To defy a call also indicates a definite choice was made; the boy Dlamini was agentive. But this is overturned when he remarks that it was his mother who insisted he wear a uniform. The comment implies that he acquiesced to his mother’s authority on the matter — presumably because he had no choice in this particular decision. But it also indicates a shift in power and, subtly, in blame. It was not only him involved in this scenario’s choices; it was also his mother. He *chose* to defy a call but was *forced* to wear that defiance’s mark. Incidentally, this puts him in double danger, but he braves it out. Thus the child has been carefully formulated before he answers those soldiers. The story raises some questions: Does the boy generally bow to authority figures? Is it really him who does not believe in boycotts, or is it his mother? What retrospective work might have gone into this story to present the child Dlamini in particular ways, and to what end? These questions do not undermine the gist of the tale: it remains a powerful window into the intricacies of betrayal. But they do twist the certainty that

Dlamini is willing to align himself, even in a tiny way, with askaris or other traitors. Later, he says more directly: “In my defence, let me say that I was not collaborating with the soldiers who occupied my school,” (7) putting paid to any possibility of blame or responsibility on his side — and perhaps rightly so.

Something similar happens in his second story. It is also in present tense, set in the following year at the same school. When older boys, whom Dlamini describes as lazy, disruptive “activists” (6), tell the teacher she did not alert the class about an upcoming test, the boy Dlamini puts up his hand and says she did. He is the only one to do this. “No one remembers [the class being told about the test], not even my deskmate and friend Elias,” (7) Dlamini says. He writes the test after receiving threats from the big boys, including calling him a sell-out. He states: “I am scared. But I cannot turn back now.” (*Ibid*) After again asking if the “episode makes [him] a collaborator” (*Ibid*), Dlamini writes: “I was certainly not taking sides by writing that Biblical Studies exam. I simply believed it was the right thing to do.” (8) Again, any suggestion that Dlamini might be a sell-out is wiped out by the *simple* — “I simply believed” — notion of right and wrong. He believed it was right to defend the teacher, and that, it seems, is that. In fact, he is himself the victim of betrayal by his friend Elias. Though he was afraid, he again remained stoic — not turning back on his choices. Here, rather than opening up the possibility of personal responsibility in collaboration, the way in which the story is told firmly shuts it down. Vitaly, both scenarios are explained via notions of moral correctness — wrong and right — and show Dlamini to be, to use a phrase often used in *Askari*, a (righteous) moral agent.

Far from the stories’ seeming intentions — to ask risky questions that expose the writer to criticism and open up the taboo subject of helping the oppressor — they begin the work of building a strict moral structure that carefully unstitches Dlamini from the fabric of complicity, and that finds completion and solidification by the end of the text. As the above analysis of Dlamini’s personal stories indicates, it is in the use of language that much of this moralising becomes discernable. Dlamini constantly asserts that although askaris were turned under often-terrible circumstances, they remained moral agents. Over and over, especially in the second half of the book, he ends the chapters with this assertion. This mantra gets Dlamini out of trouble when

considering the more devastating effects of, say, torture on the human body and psyche. But moral agency is never defined. It acts as a cover-all caveat, absconding and absolving Dlamini from making any of the risky statements he sets out to or seems to make in writing a book about black perpetrators. This notion, and the whole undefined but very alive moral structure that lives just behind it, allows Dlamini to suggest certain provocative things while removing any responsibility for them. Importantly, this moral structure is not applied uniformly. What applies to certain groups does not apply to others. In the book, certain people and groups become themselves taboo, or, if not totally taboo, then above scrutiny. Much of this can be seen in the language used to describe certain acts.

In *Askari's* introduction, Mr X1, Sedibe, is called a “defector” (1). His moving from MK to the South African Police (SAP) is called “defection” and then “conversion”, while his “collaboration” turns him into a “notorious turncoat” (*Ibid*). Several orders of things are happening in this use of language. Superficially, Dlamini’s use of different words that connote betrayal might be simply an editorial choice — a way not to repeat the same word in a short space of writing. But the words each hold a particular charge, and, I would argue, often because of what they insinuate or suggest, they also conceal as much as they reveal. To defect is to abandon a cause for its opposing one. Its Latin root comes from the word for “failed”⁷. Defection, and to be a defector, is thus to fall short, to fail. Conversion is either neutral, as in converting one thing into another, or suggests something religious. Collaboration, like conversion, can be understood neutrally but, again, collaboration turns Mr X1 into a turncoat, which is certainly not a neutral term but a term used often in the book. The word has contested origins, but is defined as: “One who changes his principles or party; a renegade; an apostate.”⁸

But each term also potentially hides something. The term ‘conversion’ is a powerful example. If not taken neutrally, and there is much to suggest that it is full rather than empty of meaning, conversion connotes an action and a choice. Someone has been

⁷ See ‘Defect’ in *Oxford Dictionaries*. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/defect> [Accessed: 13 July 2016]

⁸ See ‘Turncoat’ in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/207680?rskey=Jv3Xtr&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid> [Accessed: 13 July 2016]

converted from one thing to another by something — usually some tract, doctrine or ideology — or someone. One is reminded of the scales falling from Saul’s eyes in one of Christianity’s most famous conversion stories. The word finds its obverse in a term such as ‘turncoat’, which denotes, among other things, spiritual decrepitude. But the act of converting someone and that person’s choice to be converted is seldom simple. In the context of the book, the term suggests the euphemism used by the apartheid police whenever they captured and converted insurgents — ‘turned’. But what terms such as ‘turned’ and ‘converted’ obscure is what compelled the action. In many instances, askaris were “‘turned’ through torture”(4). Thus the ‘choice’ to convert was often the choice between life or death⁹.

Dlamini is not unaware of the possibilities of concealment, and certainly not in terms of bodies of information. When looking at the archive from which he sourced much of the book’s facts, he is careful to note that the “primary source materials on which the book relies [cannot] be trusted.” (2) In a later chapter, Dlamini details how police records and the like give a timeline of cold facts, each of them shorn of motives and pressures — what compelled the action is missing — personal and political perspectives, detailed interactions: in short, they provide only a “skeleton of facts” (17). Dlamini also states that *Askari* has no reliable narrators. Sedibe constantly lied, his colleagues, both in MK and at Vlakplaas, are “tainted by ... fear and desire” (3), and Dlamini himself “cannot say [he has] not judged [Sedibe].” (2) Further, Dlamini acknowledges the historian’s constant lateness and thus the impossibility of capturing exactly what happened.¹⁰ He adds that representing the story’s uncertainty should be done “without assuming a position of innocence or objectivity.” (5)

⁹ And even this is putting it too simply — torture and its consequences are difficult to assess in general because of what Elaine Scarry suggests is pain’s unspeakability: “when one is suddenly put in pain... language not only disappears, but you can actually chart its disappearance across the sudden reaching for monosyllables or for the kinds of cries and whispers that one made before one learned language.” (Scarry in Smith, 2006: 224) Torture is very important in *Askari* in so far as representing Sedibe as a moral agent, something deeply complicated by the shattering effect of torture on the ego. Dlamini touches on some of these effects, but never seriously considers them in his argument. Lecturer in social anthropology at North-West University in Potchefstroom, Gcobani Qambela goes so far as to suggest that claiming Sedibe remained a moral agent after torture “is a form of violent erasure”. See: Qambela, Gcobani. “Torture removed any 'choice' from askari betrayals” in *Mail & Guardian Online* 13 February 2015 [Accessed: 4 June 2016].

¹⁰ Dlamini references Hungarian scholar István Rév for these ideas.

In the introduction, Dlamini never uses the word askari, foregrounding, rather, a set of terms to denote betrayal. The word askari is Swahili for policeman, and refers to the use of Kenyans loyal to the British in the Mau Mau insurgency. According to Dlamini, in the apartheid context, askari “referred to the ANC and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) members, who, through voluntary defection or torture, had switched sides to fight against their former comrades as part of a domestic counterinsurgency campaign.” (37) Askaris were different to the lowly informers or the high-up double agents, though they played those roles, too¹¹, and they were also different to policemen¹², although many askaris graduated to this position. According to De Kock, an askari “was a traitor” (40); certainly they were people of “dubious loyalties” and almost all of them were drunkards (41). The word carried with it a moral taint (42). An askari who became a policeman avoided some of this moral taint — which is why Almond Nofomela, the man who exposed the police death squads, and Sedibe¹³ both insisted on being called policemen. Along with being a teacher, like Ephraim Sedibe, Glory Sedibe’s father, becoming a policeman was one of the few good jobs a black person could get under apartheid, though both mostly meant working for the state. Anthropologist Julia Hornberger suggests that during apartheid, it was a real achievement to get into the police¹⁴, though this does not explain why “black people [would] voluntarily submit to a system that systematically discriminated against them” (Hornberger, 2011: 33 in Dlamini, 2014: 12)¹⁵.

¹¹ According to Dlamini, “askaris always did more than track their former comrades. They served as agents provocateurs, assassins, bounty hunters, double agents, informers, intelligence analysts, spies and, of course, state witnesses.” (39)

¹² Dlamini puts the number of woman Vlakplaas askaris at five (2014: 199). He only managed to speak to one of them, who struck him as the only one of the many askaris he interviewed who was willing to directly refer to the violence she perpetrated (202).

¹³ While acting as state witness against his former MK comrades, Sedibe explained his defection simply: “I am now a policeman.” (Dlamini, 2014: 22)

¹⁴ Interview 6 May 2016. She goes on to think about the nostalgia felt by former apartheid policemen for the terms of absolute masculinity, the power and even the violence. See Hornberger, Julia. *Policing and Human Rights: The meaning of violence and justice in the everyday policing of Johannesburg*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

¹⁵ A person who defected and then became a policeman is certainly different to someone who simply became a policeman, so for my purposes I will refer to those who have defected to the side of the apartheid as ‘askaris’, keeping in mind the subtle differences between an askari and a policeman within this category. It is interesting to note how askari policemen put a lot of stock into being named police officers as opposed to soldiers, which most of them were before turning — soldiers in MK. This is an opposite inclination to the one I found in *Eugene de Kock: Assassin for the State* (2015) in the first chapter. In that book, there was a lot at stake in aligning oneself with being a soldier who was given orders and thus had no choice as opposed to being a policeman, who did.

But the term askari will not settle on a neat definition, vying wildly in Dlamini's book from connoting evil to meaning someone very capable, the cream of the betrayal crop. In the book's second chapter, called *The Askari*, Dlamini writes: "But Sedibe was more than a turncoat. He became an *askari*." (36) Here, the author ascribes a particular value to a turncoat versus an askari, with a turncoat being something inferior in the way one would say *merely* a turncoat, implying that to be an askari was to be better than a turncoat by being worse in general. A turncoat seems to be someone like state witness Bruno Mtolo, also a Mr X and the man who testified in the Rivonia Trial against Nelson Mandela and others. Mtolo said he did it because he did not want to "[die] for a stupid cause" (Mtolo, 1966: 130 in Dlamini, 2014: 36). Etymologically, the term turncoat came from the act of turning a coat inside out to change sides in a battle. It is linked to both a political act of changing allegiance and to a religious act of moral abandonment. It, and its related terms, including 'renegade' and 'apostate', are indeed damning, casting the person who has won this name to the far edges of what is considered morally, socially and politically permissible. This is a traitor to every form of faith, to every cause, especially, in its early use, to Christianity, but also to kith, kin and country. Certainly, in Dlamini's superficial use of the term, it seems to suggest a low dog indeed, an informer, lower than any other betrayer. But I wonder at the notion of 'turning' held in the word — to turn, or to be turned (from one side to the other), being the way in which the act of defection is described in the book and generally by those involved in it. The ANC called the act of defecting back to the party after having been a government agent to "re-turn" (119), suggesting as complex an act as turning in the first place. Thus, turncoat holds a series of meanings that extend beyond swapping sides for personal gain or because of an opinion, like Mtolo, but also contains the act of turning, that moment in which the choice was made. This moment holds *Askari*'s central question, which revolves around choice in turning — remaining a moral agent no matter what the conditions. Does this moral overlay in 'turning' then loop back to its foundations in the term turncoat — to be morally defunct? Is to be a turncoat to be morally deaf? Or is being a turncoat being a moral agent who makes a choice to turn despite the obvious decrepitude it shows? And thus, is being an askari, which is considered better than being a turncoat, to have a hold on what is right? Dlamini's use of the term to show

what an askari is not is not in any way simple, but intimates a whole web of associations, especially the moral implications that come to signify in ‘turncoat’.

In an explanation of the use in law of evidence rendered by an accomplice against a principle ‘criminal’, the author refers to the “rehabilitated terrorist” (36), the term used for Sedibe as Mr X1. It is used first in Italian then South African law to indicate to a person who has repented for and rejected his or her old life. British state witnesses, however, are called ‘converted terrorists’ and are deemed cowards, giving evidence to avoid prosecution. The implication is that those who are *only* state witnesses, like informers in Britain, called supergrasses¹⁶, are one type of turncoat: treacherous, the scum of the betrayal world, apostates, renegades¹⁷; whereas to be an askari seems to suggest at least an active commitment to the work of terror. Dlamini states: “At first askaris were treated as informers and paid about R200 ... [but by] the end of January 1982, the Security Branch changed the askaris’ status from informers to police officers ... at salaries ranging ... from R600 to R700 a month.” (37) Again, informers are ranked lower than the higher-paid askari police officers¹⁸. All this seems to imply that there are classes or hierarchies of defectors, and on the bottom are turncoats or informers. By not being either of the above, askaris take on a series of values by comparison or by elimination. These are ascribed and curated by Dlamini. But why, and to what end?

The book’s strange and only glaring factual error (all others are at least referenced) might provide a clue. It comes right after the descriptions above. Nofomela is quoted describing the intense and very deadly weapons and operations training he underwent at Vlakplaas. To drive home the violence inherent in this training and at Vlakplaas, Dlamini recounts the murder of lawyer Griffiths Mxenge, who was “butchered” (39) by Nofomela, Mamasela and others: “Using knives to make the killing look like a

¹⁶ For more on the term and the use of supergrasses in law, especially in Northern Ireland, see: Hillyard, Paddy and Janie Percy-Smith. “Converting Terrorists: The Use of Supergrasses in Northern Ireland” in *Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Winter, 1984), pp. 335-355.

¹⁷ Someone like Adrian Leftwich, who wrote the famous article for *Granta* magazine in 2002, “I gave the names”. In it, he describes testifying against his friends. In that trial, even the judge was deeply repulsed and “disgusted by Leftwich’s treachery” (Dlamini, 2014: 243).

¹⁸ But Dlamini still has a strong disdain for these men and women, as is seen in the line: “After defecting from the liberation movements, many had attended the segregated Hammanskraal Police College for conversion to ‘proper’ police officers.” (37) This sentence drips with irony and sarcasm by highlighting the segregated nature of the police college and putting quotation marks around ‘proper’.

robbery, they almost severed Mxenge's head. They then stole his car, wristwatch and leather jacket *for trophies.*" (*Ibid*, my italics). The change in tone in these sentences is striking. From a string of facts and state witness voices — some of the chapter is set in the disconnected space of the courtroom, where testimony and the gallows remain quite far apart, and much of its content contains numbers of askaris, how much they were paid, dates and so on — suddenly a butchering takes place. Knives flash in the night. Mxenge's severed head rolls into view, and the reader is slammed out of the lull of information.

Mxenge was butchered that night. His face was cut till it was unrecognisable. But the killers did not take trophies off him. In the proceedings held on 5 November 1996 for one-time Vlakplaas commander Dirk Coetzee's amnesty application, Coetzee states: "Well, as I said, [Mxenge] should be killed with knives, and ... his belongings should be sort of taken to make it look like a robbery." He goes on to relate what happened to these belongings: "[Officers Paul van Dyk, Braam du Preez and Coetzee] returned to the Golela River, and ... next to the river, we turned into a small little road, where Mr Mxenge's jacket and wallet was burned, and his watch and the number plates of the vehicle was thrown into the reeds next to the river." Later in the testimony, Coetzee describes Mxenge's Audi being burned in a plantation near the Swaziland border by himself, Van Dyk and operative Koos Vermeulen¹⁹. Perhaps Dlamini was referring to the actions of Mamasela, who put on Mxenge's jacket and watch at a pub after the operation (as Coetzee relates in the abovementioned testimony). But these items were handed over soon after. It is clear that Mxenge's things were not taken as trophies. In fact, it is very unlikely this would ever happen. These operations were covert and illegal. They could be investigated; there was significant risk in leaving any kind of evidence. As Coetzee puts it, in the same amnesty hearing: "the 11th commandment [for security police was], 'Don't get caught', so you always had to prepare the mission that you were on in such a way that tracks were not at all left for the CID [criminal investigation department] — to force them kind of to finding out."

¹⁹ See: "Killing Of Griffiths Mxenge (Part 1)": Coetzee, D (0063/96); Nofomela, Ba (0064/96); Tshikalanga, Nd (0065/96). Proceedings held in Durban on 5 November 1996. <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans%5Cdurban/coetsee1.htm> [Accessed: 26 May 2016]

This factual error could have been a simple oversight, but the rigour of the rest of the book's references suggests otherwise. So why did Dlamini say these askaris took trophies when easily accessible information contradicts him? The violence of the murder shows readers the nature of these men's actions, but taking trophies shows us the brutality of these men's natures. To take a trophy shows a triumphant numbness at best, or a total disregard for life at worst. Either way, it is reprehensible, inhuman, despicable. If Dlamini was setting up a hierarchy of betrayal, with perfidious informers on one end, then these killers are on the other. Yet we know that Dlamini's turncoats are not simply venal stoolpigeons, and neither are these men on the other end simply heartless killers. It does not seem to make sense, though, for Dlamini to state that askaris are 'better' than turncoats (those moral bottom feeders), but when we find them in action in the book, they are shown to be the very worst kind of human, beyond the pale, ruined even. What is going on here?

To understand this, we must ask, who takes trophies? And what does it connote? The most obvious association with trophy taking is with animal trophies and hunting. *Askari*, like *Eugene de Kock: Assassin for the State* (2015), contains animal imagery. Dlamini describes askaris as "hunt[ing] in packs" (58) while at Vlakplaas. He quotes the ANC pamphlet on state torture, which asserts that government operatives are "racist sadists who converge on the captive like vultures on carrion." (70) On being asked how long the askari Oscar Linda Moni withheld facts from his keepers at Vlakplaas, he replied: "Well, I would say until I became tamed." (168) This was during a state trial in which Moni took the stand against activists Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, Mandla Maseko and Simon Dladla. Later he clarified: "I got tamed when I entered a witness box." (*Ibid*) To be an askari was to be an animal that hunted; to be an insurgent was to be the hunted, the captured, the carrion upon whom vulturous men descended. Moni's statements are interesting, too. To be an askari, and thus to hunt in packs, one had to first be "tamed", and this act of taming was final when the askari testified against a group of men sitting right in front of him in court.²⁰ Dlamini suggests that 'breaking' under torture relates to the act of "'breaking' animals as a

²⁰ Dlamini speculates that testifying against their former comrades in court is the moment most askaris identify as their final 'turning', or as their act of total treachery. Everything else, all the names given and the photos identified, do not equal the betrayal of men to their faces. This moment is also the most traumatic. Askari Judas Mpho Tladi recalled wanting to say to his cross-examiner: "If you only you knew how I got here." (164)

way of domesticating them.” (*Ibid*) The racist implications are clear. Dlamini states that exchanges like the one Moni had with cross-examiner Kessie Naidu “underscores the role of language in the business of collaboration.” (*Ibid*) But he goes further into it, associating askaris with animal imagery and its related language. We cannot forget that in this scenario humans are being hunted, and something needs to take place for this to be permissible. The human must become the animal; he or she must be subhuman.

An example of this took place in the Pacific in World War II in which American troops sent home parts of dead Japanese soldiers as mementos. This ghoulish trophy taking came about in no small part because of the mass media drive that depicted the Japanese as vermin, dogs or snakes to be eradicated. Americans even issued fake hunting licences pronouncing it “open season with no limit”²¹. “In the minds of many American soldiers, combat against Japanese troops assumed the character of a hunt, the object of which was the killing of cunning, but distinctly inhuman creatures.” (Weingartner, 1992: 55) Some of this logic comes through for De Kock in *Assassin for the State* when he begins to see insurgents as barbaric terrorists, not human, and thus killable. In butchering Mxenge, did Nofomela and Mamasela and others see the activist lawyer as an animal, killable? Certainly, Dlamini’s use of the term ‘butchered’ suggests this. But, being animals themselves — the pack that hunts other animals, the insurgents — it seems less likely that askaris could take animal trophies in this sense. That is left to their masters, like De Kock. Besides, taking trophies *off of* a dead man, as opposed to the dead man or parts of him being the trophies, suggests something different to your average stuffed and mounted Kudu head, literal or figurative. It holds that same sense of conquest, but also contains a kind of

²¹ Issuing hunting licences for Japanese people, even if they are fake, seems barbaric, but the practice continues today. In the United States, Missouri Republican gubernatorial candidate Eric Greitens, a former navy seal, sold “ISIS hunting permits” to raise money for his campaign in 2016, causing major concerns for the Muslim community. (See: <http://thinkprogress.org/politics/2016/07/05/3795460/missouri-isis-hunting-permit/>, <http://fox2now.com/2016/07/01/missouri-candidates-isis-hunting-permits-concern-muslim-community/> and <http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2016/06/30/isis-hunting-permits/>. [All accessed: 4 August 2016]). These are similar to “terrorist hunting permits” on sale on an American website, rather macabrely under the header ‘Terrorist Hunting License Gifts’. (See: <http://www.cafepress.com/+terrorist-hunting-license+gifts>. [Accessed: 4 August 2016]). Of course, South Africa and Namibia, then called South-West Africa, have their own histories of issuing human hunting licences, and these were not fake. Though the dates are contested, hunters could apply for a licence to shoot so-called bushmen and women up until 1937 in Namibia and 1926 in South Africa. (See: <http://www.bdlive.co.za/life/books/2013/06/25/a-journey-into-the-heart-of-bleakness>. [Accessed: 4 August 2016])

malevolence. This is not to rob a body, which spells a biting practicality. This is intimate. A skull or a letter opener made from an arm bone²² speaks more directly: this is raw power, man over animal, something to be whistled at and admired, or something to shake a fist at and be appalled. A watch or jacket is wearable, personal. It is not itself an obvious memento; it only means something to the butcher. You can get into the skin of the person you killed by getting under their accoutrements. Serial killers take these types of trophies²³.

By setting up Nofomela and Mamasela as not only betrayers but also trophy takers, Dlamini seems to be delineating the very extreme end of the spectrum of traitors; here the collaborator falls off the scale of ‘human’ altogether, to something like psychopathic. To do this is to create a sense of comfort, strangely. These men are mentally ill; they are sick. This excludes Dlamini, and us — not ill, not crazy — from ever being like those men. The worst possibility is that we are all capable, maybe even just one electric shock or under-foot beating away, from being Nofomela or Mamasela. But Dlamini, with this odd factual error, has frogmarched these men into oblivion; they are not seen with any empathy, they are not forgivable. De Kock is quoted in *Askari*: “There’s always been some universal emotion of disgust and loathing reserved for traitors, no matter whose traitors they are.” (176) In making these men out to be monsters of sorts, certainly an act of loathing, it seems Dlamini feels something like disgust. Craig Higson-Smith, director of research at the Centre for Victims of Torture, suggests that “the feeling of disgust, that physical nausea we feel, is about stopping ourselves from being poisoned – or tainted. There’s an absolute disgust for betrayers that enables the kinds of cruelty reserved for people labelled as such.”²⁴ Indeed, disgust “evolved to help our omnivorous species decide what to eat in a world full of parasites” (Schnall *et al*, 2008: 2), but became “an emotion of social rejection” (*Ibid.*) Importantly, disgust is a *moral* emotion — “feelings of disgust ... tell us about boundaries that we should not cross.” (1) By showing disgust for these askaris — deeming them inhuman, a cruelty perhaps like the type suggested by

²² According to Weingartner, a column in the *New York Times* in 1944 describes “the presentation to President Franklin D Roosevelt by Pennsylvania congressman Francis Walter of a letter-opener purportedly fashioned from an arm bone of a Japanese soldier.” (1992: 60-61)

²³ See, for instance: Knight, Zelda G. “Some Thoughts on the Psychological Roots of the Behavior of Serial Killers as Narcissists: An Object Relations Perspective” in *Social Behavior and Personality: An international journal*, Volume 34, Number 10, 2006, pp. 1189-1206.

²⁴ Personal interview, 18 May 2016.

Higson-Smith reserved for betrayers — Dlamini judges them as tainted. He delineates again what is right and what is wrong, and by finding Nofomela and Mamasela disgusting, he finds them morally wanting and outside the parameters of acceptable society. Here again, we find the moral structure set up early in the book; here again, Dlamini defines himself as totally outside the continuum of betrayal by being nothing like these men — because he is not ill, and because he stands in judgment of them. Higson-Smith comments that the nausea brought on by disgust stems from the rejection of some poison. Schnell *et al* agree, connecting disgust with the “very physical process of food expulsion to protect the body from harmful contaminants.” (11) Nofomela and Mamsela are social contaminants, physically rejected out of the body of the morally acceptable. When Dlamini asks whether his actions make him a collaborator, he asks if they are “proof of [his] own taint” (2014: 7), meaning proof of moral poison, a deep, even unforgivable, corruption of the spirit, impossible to return from. Being on the side of the morally outraged or disgusted, Dlamini’s answer is firmly no — he is not tainted like these men. Thus, we find the full moral spectrum of collaborators while we see the full moral spectrum of Dlamini’s feelings towards them. He pulls closer to the askaris, rescuing them from the ignominy of being the moral delinquent that is the turncoat, but flies away again, ejecting them from polite society, turning his back altogether. This, I would argue, is his fear and desire.

Yet Dlamini seems to reserve some of this judgment when it comes to Sedibe, becoming almost protective of him. Here is an example: the askari given the pseudonym Judas Mpho Tladi was openly hostile towards Sedibe when Dlamini interviewed him, accusing Sedibe of assassinating ANC members with something like glee. Tladi (translated from Zulu in the book): “I would look at the expression on his face as he said this and ask myself how a man could talk about killing another human being like that.” (128-129) He was, in Tladi’s words, “a terrible person” (128). But after this description, Dlamini states: “There is no way to determine whether Tladi’s account is truthful,” (129) noting that he is the only askari to say Sedibe killed ANC members and the only one who seemed to hate the man. According to Dlamini, Tladi said life was terrible at Vlakplaas, but “despite these sentiments, there seemed to be a faint hint of longing for the place.” (*Ibid.*) This is a condemning statement. To yearn for your place of oppression where you also nonetheless claimed a lot of power as an

askari — often the power over life and death — smacks of being unhinged, immediately casting Tladi's previous statements into doubt. It would be horrifying indeed if Dlamini found the man he was looking for were a monster. Dlamini feels for Sedibe, but if he were as bad as Tladi makes out, that empathy would be an indictment on the author. But I don't think Dlamini is saving face when he casts doubt over Tladi's comments. I think he is protecting Sedibe, a dead man with whom he is deeply intimate — he responds to slander on Sedibe's behalf. His relationship with Sedibe is complex. Like his relationship with the other askaris, he pulls close to and then rejects him over and over, becoming increasingly frustrated at the empty air he grasps around Sedibe's ghost.

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Early in the book, Dlamini states: "individuals could still act, choose and take moral stands. They could refuse to collaborate." (12) But this 'choice' becomes more complex the longer you look at it. After mentioning that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) considered Sedibe only a victim, Dlamini claims: "But to see Mr X1 as only a victim is to hide from a historical view of his agency and to diminish his capacity to act regardless of his circumstances. Being a victim of torture might help explain Mr X1's choices. It did not absolve him of moral responsibility for his subsequent actions." (15) When talking about Sedibe's history, Dlamini hopes to: "understand ... Sedibe as a historical actor who did not come fully formed into the world as a traitor, but as a subject who emerged through a series of actions and choices." (20) Dlamini relates why Sedibe joined the MK in exile. His older brother, Kaborone Sedibe, went to study law at Turfloop, where he became conscientised. After leading a rally that became a mass movement, Kaborone and eight others were charged with terrorism. He received a five-year sentence on Robben Island. Dlamini asserts that Kaborone's prison sentence left a lasting impression on Sedibe. "[He] recalled that the five-year sentence against his brother, the first person in the family to go to university, left him 'heart sore'." (25) Sedibe visited his brother in prison. Dlamini writes: "Kaborone recalled, 'He spoke to me about leaving [South Africa]. He told me he would leave the first chance he got. He told me there was no alternative.'" (*Ibid*) Here, Sedibe says he has no alternative, which suggests he has *no*

choice but to go into exile. Dlamini highlights the intimacy at the heart of “Sedibe’s decision, fresh from the sentencing of his brother, to forsake his family and go into exile.” (26) Notice the strong language here in ‘forsake’. To forsake is to abandon or renounce.²⁵ But Sedibe’s relationship with his family is not represented as carrying this kind of emotional or practical weight. He was not a breadwinner, nor was he someone depicted as particularly relied upon by his family, though he was loved. Dlamini wants to highlight with this word the choice or decision Sedibe made, to fill it with meaning and feeling: care, or, as he puts it, intimacy compelled Sedibe to go into exile — a choice for which he had no alternative.

Similarly, when Sedibe was turned by torture, Nofomela states: “‘He had no alternative ... the boers... those guys know how to assault a person’” (74); and again: “‘He betrayed them on the point of torture. He had no alternative.’” (75) The phrase ‘no alternative’ is repeated twice here to talk about Sedibe’s betrayal under torture, but it also mirrors Sedibe’s use of the term in having no alternative but to go into exile. This mirrored language suggests that neither choice was actually available, but were somehow historical, familial (intimate) or physical compulsions.

Something complicates this straightforward explanation. “Sedibe left South Africa in the hope of furthering his studies” (28) and became an insurgent only because he heard a rousing speech by Jacob Zuma. Here, the clearness of his choice, to go because his brother was jailed, which suggests a clean-cut political decision, became muddy. He wanted to study. Does this suggest a personal motive? Dlamini seems to take this up later in the book. He states that Sedibe wanted to pursue a bachelor of administration degree, which could be used to work for the Lebowa bantustan – all that stopped him was a lack of funds (144). Four years later, in 1977 at the age of 24, Sedibe went into exile to pursue his education, as Dlamini suggests – although, I assume, of a different sort.²⁶

²⁵ See: ‘Forsake’ in *Oxford Dictionaries* <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/forsake> [Accessed 26 July 2016]

²⁶ There is something at stake with the assertion that Sedibe wanted to be educated in terms of how Dlamini represents the ANC camps. He writes: “The ANC tried to turn the camps into havens for intellectual exchange, complete with news monitoring services and libraries.” (29) He then quotes a number of books one camp commander sent away for. “MK member Sam Mtileni said Sedibe liked to read,” he adds (*Ibid*). Dlamini then explains Sedibe’s specialised training in East Germany. Those chosen for this were “considered the cream of MK.” (30) A picture of Sedibe is emerging. He craves

When Sedibe is tortured, Dlamini writes: “But even that knowledge [from a manual dispersed by the ANC describing state torture] could not have prepared Sedibe for the blows and the pain, the brutality and humiliation. He could not prepare himself for the loss of control over bodily functions. He could not have known beforehand how long it would take to ‘break’” (70) There is a definite change in tone and style in this sentence. The chapter titled *The Farm* goes through some history, takes up some theory of collaboration, and includes some stories of other people under other regimes confessing under torture. Here, there is a glimpse of empathy. The sentence slows down the pace of the chapter, while the repeat of ‘could not’ speaks to Sedibe’s deep vulnerability. Dlamini goes on to defend Sedibe from the accusations of cowardice from comrades, colleagues and writers, saying: “there is no acknowledgement [by these critics] of the role of torture in Sedibe’s ‘choice’ to turn, even though it was a widely known fact ... that the SAP were among the world’s leading torturers.” (76) By putting choice in inverted commas, Dlamini suggests that this was no choice at all, or that to call it a choice was to hide the fact of torture. His empathy extends out to Sedibe in this chapter one last time, towards the end: “Sedibe ‘decided’ on that lonely farm to become a collaborator” (*Ibid*). Again, decided is in inverted commas and emotive language is used: the lonely farm, highlighting again Sedibe’s vulnerability, and the essential loneliness and isolation of torture. But Dlamini warns us at the end of this section: “We cannot pretend Sedibe was only a victim of police violence and not a perpetrator of violence himself.” This turnaround marks the major tension in the text, but even here, subtly, Dlamini remains on Sedibe’s side. To be a perpetrator of violence is not necessarily to perpetrate that violence for one political cause over another. Betrayal is not written into this warning. This is the first use of the term perpetrator, with all its legal, and thus distancing, implications in terms of the TRC.

When talking about Sedibe being held under section 29 of the Internal Security Act of 1982, and being asked by an inspector how he was being treated, Dlamini remarks: “Sedibe could do nothing but play his part and say ‘No complaints’.” (78) Again, the

education — and, importantly, he *finds* education in those camps and in his specialised training. Dlamini states: “Life in MK camps was difficult but filled with purpose. The thousands of recruits that streamed into camp believed they were changing the world.” (29) But a note suggests something more sinister: “The camps in Angola were also places of tremendous brutality and violence.” (note 40) Dlamini does not elaborate.

language here suggests Sedibe was helpless in these circumstances, and implies that he had *no choice* but to say he had no complaints.

The next four chapters in *Askari* go into detail about Sedibe's various acts of betrayal and their consequences. Dlamini then states: Sedibe ... was a moral agent who made informed choices along the way. He decided to become an insurgent. The structure of apartheid society did not decide that for him, even though it shaped the conditions under which he took that decision. He was forced, at the risk of death, to become a counterinsurgent. But he persisted with that 'choice' and took it up with apparent relish." (152) Here, Dlamini draws a line in the sand, contradicting his careful word choices earlier in the text by stating unequivocally that Sedibe did, in fact, have choices — and not 'no alternatives'. He made decisions. This marks a turnaround in the text in terms of Dlamini's feelings towards his subject. Via the moral structure of personal agency, which, up until this point, is shown to be contingent at best, Dlamini's relationship with Sedibe is changed. Why? I believe it is the tension between the siren call of the storyteller and the authority and responsibility of the historian.

Dlamini writes: "My attempt to deal with the ethical implications of this book without 'illegitimate moralising' included asking a few of those named in Sedibe's file for permission to quote his claims about them." (122) The phrase 'illegitimate moralising' comes from historian István Rév's essay "The Man in the White Raincoat", but Dlamini does not go into further detail about it, skipping over its complex argument about the role of the historian. In the essay, Rév talks about the accusation of illegitimate moralising levelled against the historian who judges his subject, suggesting that "the historian is not entitled to moral judgment since he is not in possession of all the relevant facts; some things always remain hidden from sight." (2008: 27) But Rév argues that this "emphasis on the specificities of particular — and never fully knowable — historical facts serves as a general blank acquittal from possible historical responsibility: the (unknown, undisclosed, unattainable, perished, destroyed) particular facts would shed a different light on the historical act, the (moral) consequences of which would be essentially different if all the facts could have properly been taken into consideration." (28) He warns, though, that "the

historian cannot usurp the role of judge.” (*Ibid*) Yet Rév states that, in our ordinary lives, we do not know all the facts but are still able to “form reasonable, usable opinions about incidents in the lives of others; despite the fact that those others are different from us, have a different gender, a different past, come with a different tradition, were raised in a different environment, have different reflexes, react in a different way.” (*Ibid*) Thus Rév highlights the contingent position of the historian faced with “controversial archives” (Dlamini, 2014: 122), suggesting only that the historian foreground uncertainty in historical reconstructions. This argument demonstrates the difficulty Dlamini faces in this book, as he calls into focus his performance as a historian: he must use the archive, but it is always unreliable and incomplete. He must not judge, nor must he fall into blank amnesties and moral relativism.²⁷ The Archive, Chapter 11 of *Askari*, could have really contemplated some of the vexed issues around the use of information, who gets to use it and how, along with questions of ascribing moral responsibility while not judging based on uncertain and incomplete sets of evidence. But it fails to be reflexive: Dlamini does not contemplate further his interaction with his material.

As a storyteller, Dlamini is moved by Sedibe’s tale; he is compelled by its complexity; he is filled with horror seeing Sedibe in that small room being tortured while his wife and child stay hidden in a whites-only hotel organised by his torturer De Kock; he burns for the killer Sedibe became, white hot then ice cold — understanding him, loving him even, and despising him too. As a historian, Sedibe, that vivid man much alive for the storyteller, fades down into scraps of paper and rumours, thin facts trying to be verified by years-old memory and dusty archives. This man, the historian, responsible, capable, must hold Sedibe to task, must shout back to the storyteller: but what about moral agency? What about *responsibility*? In the second half of the book, almost every chapter ends with the question of moral agency — the book’s ‘Yes, but...’. The question is never answered.

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²⁷ To say he dealt with the possibility of illegitimate moralising by asking permission is to avoid the complexity of this point, to bypass the hard stuff of Rév’s essay by making a legal rather than philosophical point.

Chapter 6, called *The File*, opens with writer Mark Behr's confession that he worked for the apartheid government while he was a student. He asserts that although he gave the government information, none of his activities led to direct harm.²⁸ But Dlamini strongly refutes the assumption that there is such a thing as *only* spying or giving trivial information, using the Stasi's 62 500 tonnes of personal files as an example: "The trivia about people's affairs, drinking problems and other minutiae that informers fed into the Stasi system mattered." (115) He uses this to foreground the dangerousness of the seeming triviality of the details in Sedibe's police file, a stack of papers saved from what scholars Terry Bell and Dumisa Buhle Ntsebeza call South Africa's paper Auschwitz, in which 44 tonnes of files were destroyed in 1993. "All evidence of the nightmare memories of the tortured and the living dead ... the venal ... the secret whisperers ... the betrayers were turned to ashes." (Bell and Ntsebeza, 2003: 9) Following the trail of Sedibe's file, Dlamini suggests it might have survived because someone held it for insurance — "to keep Sedibe revealing what he knew" (119), as in who in the ANC worked for the apartheid government. This was because the ANC had 're-turned' some collaborators, and was trying to "win back" (*Ibid*) others. MK cadre Gilder confirms that some askaris were re-turned, but others were "eliminated, executed ... and [Sedibe] was a target for that." (120) Dlamini is quick to say: "This did not mean the ANC was adverse to winning Sedibe back." (*Ibid*) He then returns to the file.

In writing about it, Dlamini notes: "The file's attempt at exhaustiveness means that no detail is too insignificant, no biography too small." (124) But he also maintains, as mentioned earlier, the file gives only a "skeleton of facts" (17), shorn of reasons, showing only movement, names, addresses in a vacuum. Sedibe is not in the police file, Dlamini insists. But neither is he, I think, in this text. Is this book, then, Dlamini's 'file' on Sedibe and the other black askaris, not exhaustive but suggestive, never fully coming to one thing or another? Is *Askari*, filled with and generated from trial records, this (empty) police file, interviews and stories, yet again, not more than another skeleton of facts, based on a skeletal man, fleeting?

²⁸ Olivia Forsyth, a self-confessed triple agent, makes a similar point in her tell-all memoir *Agent 407: A South African Spy Breaks Her Silence* (2015).

Where is Sedibe? He is not in his police file, filled with intricate detail, pored over by Dlamini, who tries to write out of this strange object, faced, as a historian, with ill-gained fact. He is not in the trivial detail. Almost all the book's chapters are similarly rendered: complicating factors are foregrounded and commented upon, but the subject is seldom there. Sedibe slips away behind these things.

Besides hearing Sedibe once, his voice ringing out, announcing he defected because he was going to be killed (answering, then, Dlamini's original question: why did Mr X1 turn?), I glimpsed him only once in the book. He and his family moved to Verwoerdburg²⁹, to a former whites-only suburb in a town named after the architect of apartheid and peopled by fat, slow ministers. They could afford the house there because, in 1990, Sedibe began working for military intelligence — a job with a polite name in which dirty deeds continued as though Vlakplaas had never been closed down. He died in that town, “depressed but in middle-class comfort” (193). I see him there in his neat home, nothing like the chaos inside him, his address telling on him, showing something hidden, his Judas exchange, or just his success at work. In an earlier house, in the township Letlhabile, Sedibe also “attained a semblance of ... ‘normal’ life” (192). He raised his daughters, started to study. But it is another address, a post box near Piet Retief, where I believe Sedibe always really lived. It was to this post box that handlers sent the creeping missives for his missions: names, addresses, instructions. I imagine these tiny graves dotting the country, far from their owners, the already dead in letters rotting in them. That post box, that tiny grave, hidden, that is where I see him. Dlamini disagrees: “It is in our persons,” he writes, “that the secrets of the past have found a home.” (255)

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A wave throws items up on a beach where everyone has been shipwrecked, and then another waves pulls that thing out of sight again, even as you rush into the sea after it. Betrayal is impossible to capture, to arrest, to interrogate, to take to court, to judge, to pass sentence and to hang. This is what lies between the reader and Dlamini, this ghost body turning and turning in the gallows.

²⁹ Now Centurion.

There is Dlamini. There is the reader looking at Dlamini looking at Sedibe, seeing Dlamini find himself in Sedibe and reject that self, disgusted. Falling, running always towards stories that never existed in the first place. The reader sees Dlamini and sees herself and sees Dlamini searching for Sedibe, scrambling around, digging in this part of the beach and in another, finding only the thinnest things, a belt buckle, a shoelace. Something pulled up and dusted off and laid on to a white sheet, pored over, deciphered, evaluated. Look: here is a hair; here is a fingerprint. But Sedibe is massive, a large and ever-moving self, a person, a vast universe, impossible to capture, not only because his bones are all we have, but also because the magnitude of the human being is always beyond reach. Here is Dlamini and his thin bones before him. This is the man, he says to the reader; this, picking up an arm bone, is the betrayer; this, picking up a leg bone, is the victim; this, picking up his pelvis, is the perpetrator. He lays everything back neatly. He tried, he tells us in the book, to put flesh on those bones, but all the flesh never made him live again. Rather, it is Dlamini who lives. It is him who takes up the burden of Sedibe, who remains a ghost who lives in all the small places in the book. There he is, you yell, the reader, thinking you've seen him, thinking you might know just a part of Sedibe, but it was nothing, just a shadow. He slips and slides, haunts, runs up against the words, the bones, the reader and Dlamini, who is looking for Sedibe. We are all there. I watch Dlamini watching for Sedibe. I watch Dlamini watching for himself. Picking up Sedibe's habits – this happens when you live with someone – as he begins to skid and skate, running himself behind words, hiding as he reveals. This is what Sedibe did.

Sedibe hid as much as he revealed. De Kock says Sedibe told him (see Sedibe disappear now behind De Kock, who invokes his voice but not its timbre, not its tone. See De Kock disappear behind Dlamini) that he told Vlakplaas and the government only about 10% of what he knew. There. He gets to keep his secrets. He gets to hold something outside the light. Perhaps Sedibe, too, had in front of him a white sheet on which he had water-soaked books, and coded letters, and a broom from a safe house and seven names scrambled. A piece of rope. A handful of sand. At least, he might have thought, I never told them that, or this, touching that, then this on his clean white sheet. The betrayer hides and reveals, trading pain for goods. Pain for books and

letters and names. Holding back and giving out. Nonetheless, even though Sedibe says he gave only 10%, he destroyed MK's Swaziland network. People died. Many people died. He cannot undo this, no matter how much information he has shored up, laid out for himself only, touchstones to help him wake up in the morning. Let the pain stop. Only that. Let the pain stop. Sedibe, the ghost man, slides away again from me, from Dlamini, from any reader. Gone, the trail cold and now there is just us. Dlamini and I. In the space left, I turn to Dlamini. Listen, I say, let me relate a story:

I live on a street that is a thoroughfare between the poorer neighbourhood of Windsor East and a main road. There is a lot of foot traffic; in the early mornings, women with children walk down the road to drop their kids at crèches in Windsor, and then up again to catch taxis at the main road. Men walk in twos or singly, carrying their lunch. Then there is a lull, and the neighbourhood snoozes in the sun. At 3pm, schoolchildren yell, laugh and skip down, followed in trickles and then in droves by road runners, dog walkers and those men and women, walking in the opposite direction after the work day. At night, sometimes men trump loudly up the road setting off the dogs as they go. In the very early hours of one morning a week, recyclers, pulling their ubiquitous trolleys, start on the bins. One day, a woman came to the gate to get us to sign a petition to boom the area. My husband signed, noting that a friend's house had gone up by R100 000 after his road was boomed. Also, he said, we will be safer. Our house had been broken into before and, like most South Africans, we lived in fear. He handed me the pen. Booming the road would mean many of the people who use it will have to walk along a parallel main road, which stress-crazed drivers scream down and which has a very uneven pathway. Of course, the dog walkers and Run Walk for Lifers could still use our road, as could we, but people not from the neighbourhood (read: black, poor) would be barred. We would be enacting a form of apartheid-style insularity by removing from the public a public space. "Well?" the woman asked while I held the pen. I own 50% of our house and my signature could mean the difference between unanimity or not.

What did I do? What choice did I make? This small thing. Surely this small thing is nothing like collaboration, like betrayal. It is nothing like a collection of facts: skew teeth and limbs, car colours and addresses. What is betrayal now?

Dlamini, I see you there. You are like me. Or rather, I am like you. Our dreams are wild and disturbed...

“You are not the same.”

I land, thud, in a paper-filled room. My supervisor waits.

“No, yes. We are not the same,” I agree.

“You are white, Robyn.”

My schoolhood spools out down my leg and across the carpet. While waiting for my mom to pick me up and take me home where I can have a swim, I doodle the name of a boy I like.

“Why do you want to claim intimacy with Dlamini?”

“Because,” I think, but say nothing among the papers, seared. “We are both implicated somehow. Or: no, not that. Certainly not that. We are made mad by things that burst out of our hands, trip-riddles impossible to solve. Or: we are both caught on both sides, cross-stitched one over the other until it’s impossible to pick out one thread from a thousand.” I drift.

...Our dreams are wild and disturbed, Dlamini’s and mine. What have we done, we ask, hand dripping, the beach in our dreams and in front of us littered with thigh bones and letters, unburned watches gleaming, a wedding ring, teeth knocked out, still bloody? What have we done? Nothing. I did not create this beach, nor did I contribute to its wreckage. These items are for the archive. My job is to categorise them: torture, betrayal, pain. Create a taxonomy, a list. Tick things off. Hold things up by their corners, trying not to ruin them and trying not to be ruined by them right back. As though you haven’t just a moment ago washed up this on this beach, too. As though the shipwreck was not also yours.

You cannot talk about complicity, write about, delve into the sand and dig for complicity without also becoming dirty, tainted, as you say. By not naming them traitors, cowards, turncoats, to be rejected and expunged, wiped away, lost, ignored, names dismantled, lives vanished, are you complicit, too? Are you an informer? Am I,

latching and attaching my story on to your book, and on to you, the confessor for all now?

This is a new type of confession. It is not the ones given in cold, carpeted rooms with cameras and mics and sorrow and repentance. This is something said behind where words live. Shhh, don't tell. But. Don't say anything but I too have something to confess. I too misunderstood, or worse, understood. I too am tainted. We all awake on the beach among the dead and the detritus, and turn to each other and say, we made it! Everything will be okay now. Only later do the perpetrators, the spies and murderers, the state witnesses, the policemen, the soldiers, the businessmen, the mechanics, the women who wrote letters to the boys on the border, who shooed away the beggar, who gave instructions in the kitchen – see me there in my sunny kitchen, instructing another woman to clean this, then that – only later do they talk, or remain silent, or clink cans of beer around a braai. This is a darker confession. No one, you find, is unscathed. We're all sick with this terror. All tainted, all filled with almost lethal amounts of mercury. That is betrayal. That is complicity. Writers comb the beach, looking for something, archiving. How can we face ourselves? How can I face myself while facing Dlamini? How can Dlamini face himself while facing Sedibe? Sedibe glimmering in and out of the light. The not man. Sedibe in pictures. Sedibe's voice on the tongues of others. And then on yours, Dlamini. That is what the beachcomber gets. The hard and soft; the shell and its innards. It's always too late. And so many terrible things happened. Look: the dead in a haze of red. The dead in a puff of smoke, a pall of ash, the stink in a ditch. The dead hanging between Dlamini and I, and Dlamini looks at Sedibe looking back at him. Snap, click. Capture that. Those two frozen, fatally intimate, and I.

The Terrible Mirror

“[Askari] Mfalapitsa: ‘You are mutilating my history.’
[TRC Advocate] Gcabashe: ‘It’s my job to do that.’”³⁰

³⁰ Dlamini, 2014: 215

“We all know so-and-so did it,” said a man to an author at the launch of her book about a murder in Kenya. He actually used the phrase so-and-so.

The author had said she could not name certain names — that of the alleged murderer — in her book for legal reasons and because she risked being murdered herself. Though, she had added ruefully, the name’s connection with the murder was a matter of public record.

The two were discussing someone they clearly both understood to be the culprit; there was no hesitation, no searching pause to wonder if the speaker had the same man in mind as the author. Simultaneously, most members of the audience were on their phones or laptops, no doubt googling the name *not* being bandied around. Soon, it seemed, everyone was in on this secret, everyone knew the name not named, this so-and-so. Yet his name remained unsaid.

Afterwards, one of my colleagues came up to me and another staff member. “I’ve worked out who it is,” he said. “Who?” I asked — I hadn’t managed to google him. “*So-and-so*,” he whispered, saying the name. “Wow,” I said. “Everyone knows that,” said the staff member.

What was going on? Why could the name be used when there were three of us in relative privacy and not on a public platform? If it’s true, as the staff and audience member both said, that everyone knows, why was it not mentioned? Could there be spies in this pre-lunchtime audience of academics in a cold building in Johannesburg? “Perhaps unwitting spies,” said a colleague when I posed the question to her. “Sometimes you’re being used as a spy and you don’t even know it.”³¹ I tried to imagine a scenario like that. Perhaps it would be a matter of passing on information without full knowledge of what was at stake in sharing it and thinking it was for a different context than the one in which it would eventually be used. “Or someone could post something about it on Facebook,” she added. Then, in a few seconds or

³¹ When I mentioned my research and its connection to spies and spying, she said: “Be careful.” When I sent her an email later asking for details, she said she was tired that day and didn’t mean anything too sinister. My slow paranoia began here.

minutes or days, that author would be perceived as a possible threat — and in a paranoid regime, whether a threat is real or not does not really matter. That is the risk.

Why haven't I used his name now? Here he remains, tantalisingly, unnamed, and that gap, held open with placeholders like so-and-so, or covered over with my obscuring *so-and-so*, begins to take on a life of its own. It has power. Dlamini contemplates something of this power in *Askari* when he writes about rumours of who in the ANC now might have been apartheid collaborators. These hushed accusations are “used in post-apartheid South Africa to silence political rivals ... render[ing] them morally suspect and politically unreliable in democracy ... [T]hose subjected to such whispers and claims are victims of secrets that refuse to be revealed.” (250) In this case, the secrets can never be revealed because much of the documentation that would have proved someone an agent is lost or burned. The collaborators alive today, who could number in the hundreds, according to Dlamini, will remain unnamed unless there is a hidden archive somewhere, or the collaborators' handlers are tracked down and willing to talk, something General Herman Stadler, former head of the special branch intelligence, unequivocally stated would be impossible. (Harris, 1998) Without evidence, only the threat remains. Dlamini suggests that “the power of secrets they [the accusers] were purporting to share resided, not in the content of the secrets themselves, but in the mere hint that there were secrets.” (Dlamini, 2014: 250) Here, the name behind the placeholder or mask doesn't exist. All that remains is the possibility of a name. And when the placeholder reads “apartheid agent”, that possibility spells a threat. In this case, the ‘everyone knows’ of the previous scenario changes to ‘no one knows’, or perhaps ‘it could be anyone’. That thing obscuring the name of the alleged murderer at the book launch becomes itself the threat, the terror — the placeholder itself and not what it stands in for or obfuscates becomes the threat. The moral stain of collaboration constitutes that threat.

That people could betray the cause — of liberation and an end to oppression — profoundly affected the ANC and its strategies in exile. Now, a named apartheid agent is morally dubious, disloyal, stained. Then, an apartheid agent was the architect of death and destruction. In turn, if possible, that agent was hunted down and

assassinated by the security arm of the ANC.³² But it is, as Dlamini suggests, taboo to bring this up because the askari or traitor tears up the ANC's narrative of the past, reminding us that the past was not so simple and clean as is claimed.

Tlhomedi Ephraim Mfalapitsa is a minor askari in the book. But when you look at him carefully, he reflects the silent places from which *Askari* turns bodily away. Mfalapitsa grew up with the Musi family, who lived near him in Krugersdorp. He and the elder brothers of that family went into exile together. When Mfalapitsa became a government agent after re-entering the country, the younger Musi brother, 18 at the time, asked if Mfalapitsa would help him and three friends to go into exile. This is what he said in his amnesty hearing:

I thought maybe because ... I ... just recently arrived at Vlakplaas and somebody [had] a suspicion that I was [a double agent for the ANC], and I thought perhaps Musi, he's sent by the South African Police to trap me and if I don't report the incident or my meeting with him, and the contents of our meeting ... then [it could] work against me and I end up being assassinated.³³

He reported the incident to his superiors, who came up with a plan. Mfalapitsa told the boys exile was too dangerous just then, but that he would provide weapons training. He and Mamasela took them to a mine in the West Rand and into a pump house rigged with explosives. Mfalapitsa showed the boys some grenades in the room, said he had to get more weapons, and left, locking the door. The explosives were detonated. Only Musi survived. The boys became known as the Cosas 4.

Mfalapitsa first pops up in the second chapter, *The Askari*. When he "became an askari in January 1982, a month after defecting from the ANC," writes Dlamini, "the Security Branch gave him new clothes, food rations and 'some few hundred rands' as a stipend." (37) In this early chapter, Dlamini uses Mfalapitsa's story mostly to show how intimacy or trust was used in acts of betrayal. It allows him to extend his argument that this intimacy went beyond the bounds of interpersonal relationships and

³² One of the ways in which Dlamini brushes over the subjects of perpetrators in the ANC is to use different words for the same act. The ANC killers of apartheid agents are always called assassins, whereas, for instance, the actions of someone like the men who led a death squad against the ANC were not called assassinations but were part of a "campaign of murder and mayhem" (2014: 219).

³³ See: "Cosas Four" WF Schoon and others (AM3592/96) Proceedings held on 4 May 1999 (Day 2) http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/1999/99050321_jhb_990504jh.htm [Accessed: 6 August 2016].

came through “fictions of racial solidarity” (42), which were “assumptions founded on the myth that because every black person was formally a victim of apartheid, every black person was by definition opposed to apartheid.” (*Ibid*) The intimacy here is of race: how could a black man help the savage white oppressor of black men and women like him? Mfalapitsa’s personal intimacy with his victims is used to show the social intimacy he and other askaris shared with the black activists they harmed or killed. Dlamini describes askaris as “a breed apart” (*Ibid*) because “as former freedom fighters they were fluent in the rhetoric of revolution.” (*Ibid*) This made it very difficult to distinguish between an actual activist and a former activist-turned-government agent: they looked and sounded exactly the same, just as the agent Mfalapitsa seemed exactly the same as the activist Mfalapitsa, beguiling people he knew intimately and who trusted him.

For Dlamini, this *racial* traitor had a number of possible consequences. He uses Tobias Kelly and Sharika Thiranagama’s provocative question to detail its magnitude: “What if the accusation of treachery reveals not the presence of the venal traitor but the absence of any concrete basis for the people?” (2010: 11 in Dlamini, 2014: 13) That traitors exist suggests that ‘the people’ are no longer or perhaps never was cohered; it shows that a mass movement and its individuals are never equal to each other. “The ANC itself was aware that there might not be a clearly defined people with an identifiable set of characteristics and interests that bind them together. The organisation understood that the imagined community in whose name it was fighting was in fact more imagined than community,” writes Dlamini (13). What binds us? Not race, clearly. Collaborators announce: nothing. Nothing binds us. We are all free-floating entities, individuals with massively varied pressures and circumstances making a series of choices. This unravelling causes things that looked solid to dissolve. In this estimation, the ANC is emptied of its centre, divested of its fullness. Dlamini writes: “Sedibe’s defection destroyed his comrades’ shared sense of struggle.” (97) But the ANC needs these ‘fictions of racial solidarity’, this shared sense of struggle, for its both its narrative unity and narratives of unity. The ANC has a particular struggle narrative that is at pains to depict all black people as a homogenous unit who suffered and fought, and white people as the oppressors. Of course, books like Dlamini’s suggest that black people in no way experienced

apartheid the same. Nor did they all have the same reaction to oppression. The ANC's narrative of unity is constitutive of its narrative of purity – of democracy, a Freedom Charter for the people, a Constitution unrivalled, honourable, discursive, equal. But it is this very unity that black askaris used to their favour. Askari Gregory Sibisiso Radebe suggests askaris were “ordinary South Africans like you see every day ... There were guys of notable intelligence. It was your overall mix of South Africans, and that probably is what made that unit [the askari unit at Vlakplaas] the spearhead in the Security Branch's fight against the ANC. I think it was the unit that could blend in anywhere in the country and bring information in the shortest time possible.” (41) They could do this because they were *the same* as everyone else because they could talk revolution, which members of the ANC had taught them. They were the same, a mirror image, but twisted, made perverse.

Much later in *Askari*, Dlamini again refers to Mfalapitsa, this time to look at parts of his exchange with Advocate Gcabashe at his amnesty hearing for the Cosas 4, some of which can be found verbatim from the trial transcript. He does this ostensibly to “provide insight into the post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD] that seems to have been the hallmark of the askari experience.” (213) But far from taking seriously this consideration — by looking into the symptoms of PTSD, for example — a few sentences later, Dlamini states that Mfalapitsa “cast himself as a helpless and alienated victim of circumstances” (213). Then he states the askari's exchange with Advocate Gcabashe is “a window into the tortured and tormented world of askaris. It gives us insight into how askaris ‘lived’ with themselves.” (*Ibid*) Two orders of things seem to be happening here: first empathy, then judgment. Reading Mfalapitsa's interactions during his amnesty trial as symptomatic of PTSD suggests empathy, but stating unequivocally that Mfalapitsa purposefully — “casts himself” — takes up the position of victim overturns this. Again, in seeing the askari's interaction with the advocate as a window into a tormented world, Dlamini reads this exchange with empathy. But by putting ‘living’ in quotation marks, that empathy is twisted and becomes something closer to disgust. His observation is not untoward. Many perpetrators figure themselves as victims for various ends, not least, perhaps, to get through the day. His use of ‘living’ denotes that what a perpetrator can hope for is not any sort of *real* life, but rather a contingent, ghostly existence. They are the living

dead of our history, the ghouls. That Dlamini's feelings towards them yaw from empathy to disgust twice in the space of a few sentences shows again his struggle with these paradoxical complicities.

Mfalapitsa says, in the parts of the trial quoted in the book, “[T]his history we didn’t invent it, invent it ... in the back yard of my mother.” (215) I imagined history being invented in a back yard and had a sense that the idea behind the image was sound. Though Mfalapitsa was trying to argue that history is a bigger thing altogether, that the larger *politics* of the day swept him up — thus making him a victim — history is also invented in the back yards of our mothers, in intimate personal spaces. This is also perhaps Dlamini’s point in *Askari*: that moral agency means understanding history both as small and familiar as your back yard at home, and as large and strange as a country like South Africa. Mfalapitsa says: “I’m setting straight a history which was my part, which began as political and which [went] terribly wrong. There are many people in South Africa who have this *historical problem with their past*.” (*Ibid*, my italics) The idea that people might have a historical problem with their pasts rings: the problem with the past is history, or how forms of history can be used both as a way to argue for innocence because of the individual’s incapacity in the face of a country’s politics *and* as a way to argue for personal agency, the individual a part of a series of small choices for which he or she is responsible. If you look at history as a large thing, then few, if anyone, can be truly responsible as everyone is a victim of time and circumstance. “I was inspired by all forces taken together,” states Mfalapitsa when defending himself against the charge of self-preservation. “I was one person. I was one person with fear.” (216) This makes single men handless, headless, incapable of doing anything against the forces ‘inspiring’ them; it fills them with fear. But these men had very good reason to fear, because a place like Vlakplaas was “not a moral democracy in which the occasional attack of conscience was allowed.” (46) You did as you were told. Yet this does not absolve the man who killed three teenagers and tried to kill another, Musi, a member of a family that trusted him completely.³⁴ Notice, again, the impasse: being an askari was not to be a free man who could make good

³⁴Mfalapitsa said: “I was like a member of the family of Musi.” (Dlamini, 2014: 43) Also see: AC/2001/198 TRC Amnesty Committee. Application in terms of Section 18 of the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No. 34 Of 1995. Mfalapitsa and his co-accused, his handlers at Vlakplaas, were all denied amnesty for these killings.

choices — you were under the thrall of authority. But Mfalapitsa killed or tried to kill people almost kin to him, a deeply intimate act, something, certainly, made in the back yard of his mother.

Beyond this, Mfalapitsa is not mentioned again in *Askari*. The trouble is, Musi was not the first close friend he attempted to kill; he attended another amnesty trial for other crimes and he did not defect in the same way other askaris did, as Dlamini seems to make out. While working in the operations department of the ANC under Joe Modise, Keith Mokoape and Charles (a mononymous commander using a travelling or code name), Mfalapitsa lured his friend Dladla to a place where he was arrested on suspicion of being an agent³⁵. Dladla was tortured and killed. According to his amnesty application for acts perpetrated while in the ANC — a mirror to his other trial detailed above — Mfalapitsa participated in the torture of at least five suspected agents (later on in the trial he mentions another name, Ace):

Mr Mfalapitsa: Should I have named names?

[Leader Of Evidence] Mr Mapoma: Yes, you must tell the committee the assault of whom must the committee grant you amnesty for?

Mr Mfalapitsa: That is Disco, that is Dladla, that is Dumisang, that is ...
(intervention)

Judge De Jager: Sorry, the last name mentioned?

Mr Mapoma: Dumisang.

Judge De Jager: Dumisang.

Mr Mfalapitsa: Yes. That is Wellington, Oshkosh.³⁶

He also murdered another, Shorty. The only clue that Mfalapitsa was different to other askaris comes through when Dlamini writes: “Mfalapitsa ... defected to the SAP in November 1981 after participating in ANC torture of a man suspected of

³⁵ Mfalapitsa puts it this way in his amnesty trial: “I don't think I ever said I did anything to ... [indistinct] the unrest, but I was used to arrest certain members like Dladla. Dladla was my closest friend, but I was instructed by Joe Modise to go and tell him that we have a mission to go and take food to Angola, because normally we should transport food to Angola to the camps, so I was instructed again to take him under the pretext that we are taking food to Angola with trucks and he came with me as a friend, but suddenly he was arrested, so we used to arrest people ... [indistinct] operation department, under the instructions of either Joe Modise or Keith. See “Murder of Thembisile Tuku” Thaledi Ephraim Mfalapitsa (AM3592/96) Proceedings held on 25 July 2000 (Day 5) <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/2000/200725pt.htm> [Accessed: 5 August 2016]

³⁶ *Ibid.*

being an apartheid agent in Lusaka.” (43) Notice the slight misinformation about torturing only one man. Dlamini does not go into it further. This intrigued me. What ANC torture did he participate in exactly and why would that make him defect to the SAP? It must have been severe for a person to go over to the other side after having participated in it. But even this assumption, that Mfalapitsa had defected, is not quite true. In his amnesty hearing, he elaborates on what took place:

I told the South African Police that I am not interested in joining either side of the conflict. I wanted them to debrief me and set me free because there was nowhere else to go and this is my country. And it was my experience and my arrest in Botswana. I saw many people who were stateless, who had no place to go ... And then, they refused me. They said they could not let me, after having been in military structure in which Joe Modise is the chief of the armed forces of the MK. So I helped, and I was forced to join the South African Police.³⁷

In fact, he did not simply defect to the other side, but rather wished to leave the fray altogether. Historian Thula Simpson describes how he left exile. At a meeting of the MK operations department chaired by Modise and attended by Mfalapitsa, among others, it is decided that bases need to be set up on the Botswana border to provide launch points for missions into South Africa. Modise instructs Mfalapitsa, then a member of that department, to accompany a group of specially trained cadres to do reconnaissance and begin establishing bases. A series of mishaps occur in which Mfalapitsa loses his group several times. While wandering around trying to find his comrades, he begins to think about the torture he was involved in. Suddenly “he starts to walk purposefully in the direction of Derdepoort... and [at the border] surrenders to the security police. He says he has come to South Africa because it is the land of his birth, but he is not interested in joining either side of the conflict. He wants to go home.” (2016: 283)

I see a walking man one day wandering out of a life, striding through dense bush, beating his way away from what he has done: arrested men, once arrested a friend, held him down while he was tortured

³⁷ TRC, Vol 6, Section 3, Chapter 1, Page 221.

Mr Mfalapitsa: ... with [a golf stick] until he bled under his feet.³⁸

How sad, this walking man, home again in his country of birth, grasped by the other side, becoming that agent he helped beat out of men in that other bush at that other time. Becoming a torturer again, for Vlakplaas, becoming a killer — a killer of friend and kin. Again. How strange this absent reflection in *Askari*. Mfalapitsa is both: a torturer and killer for one side and for the other. He is a mirror, showing how betrayal shoots through, turns and re-turns. Showing how betrayal works *both ways*. Mfalapitsa did not defect in the way Sedibe and many others did, which is by being caught and tortured or in other ways coerced by the security branch. He also did not defect because he was tired of exile, as many askaris stated as state witnesses in their trials (truly or otherwise). Mfalapitsa left the ANC because of what members of the ANC were doing in camps and prisons in exile. He left it disillusioned, even perhaps in disgust. He says: “the objective of freedom and what happened that time [the torture of suspected MK cadres] contradicted one another.”³⁹ When asked if this sort of assault was completely contrary to the regulations of the ANC’s discipline, Mfalapitsa agrees.

How did it happen that members of the ANC came to be torturers?

After the 1976 student uprising in Soweto, thousands of youths across the country joined the MK in exile to be trained to fight the apartheid government. Stadler, former head of the special branch intelligence, put the number of people who fled across borders at around 6 000, stating that a large number of them were apartheid agents (Harris, 1998)⁴⁰. The ANC routinely used biographies to vet people joining the struggle in exile. The idea was that a candidate would write their life story — their biography — sometimes over and over. This was to see if they would begin making mistakes, alerting the ANC in exile that this candidate might be a spy for the apartheid government. But the massive influx of new recruits made it almost impossible for the ANC to vet everyone. In 1981, the ANC’s intelligence and security

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Interview in the documentary *Unfinished Business* Dir. Kevin Harris. Kevin Harris Productions, 1998. DVD

organ uncovered a large spy network, which comprised camp commanders and heads of security (Ellis & Sechaba, 1998: 116), including men named Elliot “Piper” Mazibuko, Oshkosh — one of the men Mfalapitsa helped assault — and Kenneth “Chief” Mahamba.⁴¹ This discovery brought about a strong sense of paranoia. “The ANC [was] convinced that there [was] a much wider spy network within its ranks” (Simpson, 2016: 280) — which provoked a “suspicion so general as to cast doubt on the loyalty of any ANC soldier” (Ellis & Sechaba, 1998: 118). This blanket mistrust was so pervasive that, according to a TRC senior researcher Zwelinzima Khoisan, “at one stage, 50% of the people in [MK military training camp] Quibaxe were suspects.” (Harris, 1998) Though this seems absurd, it is important to keep in mind that the apartheid government’s security branch had a massive network of informants, and sent thousands into exile to “send out information, as far as the ANC’s strategy, tactics and movements were concerned” (Stadler in Harris, 1998). It is perhaps unlikely that half the people in a single camp would be government spies, but it is not impossible. Comrades began to watch other comrades for anything that might seem suspicious. “We’re dealing with quite a volatile situation,” Khoisan suggests, “when people are being constantly monitored by other people.” (Harris, 1998) Any kind of ill discipline or other types of acting out was seen with suspicion.⁴² This is how the ANC described agents in exile in its second submission to the TRC:

Some agents were tasked not only with passing on information ... but also with carrying out acts such as poisoning and sabotage of essential equipment. Others were trained in the psychological warfare field; their

⁴¹ Mahamba’s real name was Timothy Seremane, brother to Joe Seremane, the former chief land claims commissioner and now retired federal chairperson for the Democratic Alliance. Joe Seremane tried for years to find out the exact circumstances of his brother’s death in Quatro Prison where he was being held on suspicion of being an agent. He wanted to appeal to Timothy’s killer to come forward and show Joe where his brother’s bones are buried so he can rebury them at home. Gabriel Mthembu, commander at Quatro, admitted to torturing Timothy till his face was unrecognisable. Timothy was dragged out back and shot in a ravine close to the prison. Joe was never allowed to access his remains. He remains adamant that his brother was not a spy. See: *Unfinished Business* Dir. Kevin Harris. Kevin Harris Productions, 1998. DVD; “Seremane 'torturer' to co-operate with TRC” in *Mail & Guardian Online* 28 July 1997 <http://mg.co.za/article/1997-07-28-seremane-torturer-to-co-operate-with-trc> [Accessed: 28 April 2016]; Smith, Charlene. “‘Sorry I killed your brother’” in *Mail & Guardian Online* 13 November 1998. <http://mg.co.za/article/1998-11-13-sorry-i-killed-your-brother> [Accessed: 21 April 2016]

⁴² Scholar Sean Morrow states in an article on the ANC’s Dakawa Development Centre in Tanzania, a school of sorts: “it was necessary to screen new arrivals, since there were undoubtedly spies and agents provocateurs for Pretoria amongst those arriving in Tanzania. However, this could lead to a kind of paranoia where ‘indisciplined’ people seen as ‘very rude against the administration’ were assumed to be spies.” (Morrow, 1998: 503)

work aimed at destroying the ANC from within, and they usually took on the role of agent provocateur. They sought to damage MK and the ANC in general through stirring up dissent, tribalism or other forms of factionalism, spreading false rumours, encouraging general demoralisation, creating suspicion within structures, damaging relationships, and instigating or encouraging acts of indiscipline.⁴³

The camps themselves were not easy places to be, often without enough food, water and activity⁴⁴ — though James Ngculu, one of the founding members of MK military intelligence, states “the camaraderie among recruits more than made up for their deprivations.” (Dlamini, 2014: 28)⁴⁵ The main difficulty the ANC faced was “large numbers of radicalised young people, in flight from repression and bantu education, eager to fight against the regime, but unorganised, untrained, and, though eager, sometimes politically naive.” (Morrow, 1998: 499) Dlamini agrees. “In truth,” he writes, “the ANC’s biggest problem was not much the enemy infiltration as it was how to integrate the thousands of young members, such as Sedibe, who joined in the wake of the 1976 uprising.” (156) Put through training course after training course, these young activists became restless to fight in South Africa and no longer wanted to participate in Angola’s civil war while in that country. This coupled with complaints of abuses⁴⁶ perpetrated by the ANC’s military intelligence arm, called Mbokodo (the grindstone), led to a strong call for the ANC leaders to hold a meeting in which cadres could air their grievances. According to Mfalapitsa: “After this general meeting, arrests of different cadres took place ... I witnessed the arrest and the torture.”⁴⁷ The

⁴³ See: Further Submissions and Responses by the African National Congress to Questions Raised by the TRC 12 May 1997 <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/submit/anc2.htm> [Accessed: 25 April 2016].

⁴⁴ See: The Stuart Commission under “Camp conditions” and “Welfare” <http://www.anc.org.za/content/stuart-commission-report>

⁴⁵ Gabriel Mthembu, first commander of the prison camp Quatro, stated: “It’s difficult to describe the conditions we were exposed to. The conditions were extreme, in a word I would say inhuman, because of deprivation ... most of us were affected and are still affected.” This seems at odds with Ngculu’s statement, as well as in general with Dlamini’s description of the camps as places of education (Dlamini, 2014: 29) See: “The execution of a camp commander” in *Mail & Guardian Online* 30 October 1998. <http://mg.co.za/article/1998-10-30-the-execution-of-a-camp-commander> [Accessed: 5 June 2016].

⁴⁶ See: The Stuart Commission under ‘Administration’: “There is a general abuse of authority on the part of most members of the administration in the camps.” <http://www.anc.org.za/content/stuart-commission-report>. [Accessed 16 July 2016]

⁴⁷ “Murder of Thembisile Tuku” Thaledi Ephraim Mfalapitsa (AM3592/96) Proceedings held on 25 July 2000 (Day 5) <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/2000/200725pt.htm> [Accessed: 5 August 2016]

situation considerably worsened over the next 10 years as waves of mutinies hit the camps, with cadres agitating against corrupt commanders, bad conditions and harsh punishments meted out by Mbokodo. People under investigation were tied to trees, where they slept for the duration of the inquiry⁴⁸, while others disappeared altogether or were sent to detention centres. Several men were summarily executed for the mutinies.

What story does this tell? It is primarily one of fear, I think. A worse fear than being at war: of apartheid prisons, of death. It is the thought that each man and woman in the camps, in MK, in the ANC was a potential turncoat, his or her skin showing nothing, hiding everything. It is the fear of the self, the same turned inside out, twisted but identical. As racial traitors swell the ranks, the unity of the struggle is sundered; the knot is cut; its true then, they think, nothing binds us. Suddenly unbound, loosed, men and women free floating; panic sets in. If nothing binds, they must *be* bound — to trees if necessary. Unity is replaced with *uniformity*: specifically, a fascist uniformity, where complaint is always potential provocation. The people, so contingent already, become the loyalists — or the suspected. And everyone begins watching everyone else. Files are kept by Mbokodo: men are taught the art of spying and intelligence gathering by those master watchers, East Germany's Stasi. They look ever inward. Dlamini picks up on this only obliquely by quoting a character in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*, who suggests that apartheid worked "by making [the ANC] insecure about our own members ... we remain suspicious, incriminate the innocent, and do terrible things to our own people." (2000: 196 in Dlamini, 2014: 138)

Those suspected of being apartheid agents, and other dissidents and mutineers were put in detention centres and prisons across Southern and Central Africa. An ANC prison in Angola called Quatro by those who feared it took its name from the Old Fort on what is now Constitution Hill in Johannesburg. Otherwise a 'whites only' prison, the Old Fort had a section called Number Four, which was reserved for black men. It was notorious for its violent treatment of prisoners. The official name for Quatro Prison was first Camp 32, but later it was renamed the Morris Seabello Rehabilitation

⁴⁸ "The execution of a camp commander" in *Mail & Guardian Online* 30 October 1998. <http://mg.co.za/article/1998-10-30-the-execution-of-a-camp-commander> [Accessed: 5 June 2016]

Centre, after Seabello, an MK cadre, was killed in the Maseru raid⁴⁹ in Lesotho. Its first commander was 19-year-old Gabriel Mthembu, a confessed torturer. Discord had spread across many camps in Angola including Quibaxe, Panga, Viana and the Nova Catengue camp; the prison held suspected enemy agents as well as people accused of creating dissension in MK. Some Quatro detainees were held for up to seven years without trial. Some had no trial at all.⁵⁰ Before being remanded at Quatro, suspected enemy agents were often forced to confess by torture⁵¹. Once in the prison, inmates were routinely beaten, humiliated, punitively starved and tortured while living in inadequately ventilated and overcrowded cells.⁵² The human rights abuses that took place while the ANC was in exile are well documented (See: Stuart Commission 1984; Skweyiya Commission 1992; Ellis and Sechaba 1992; Motsuenyane Commission 1993; TRC Final Report 1998⁵³; Trewhela 2009; Ellis 2012). What interests me, though, is another mirror, another sample of twisted sameness. I found it in the use of term ‘rehabilitation centre’ — because there is another place that called itself a rehabilitation centre: Vlakplaas.⁵⁴ What took place at the Morris Seabello Rehabilitation Centre and at Vlakplaas was remarkably similar — mostly MK cadres were kidnapped, imprisoned without trial, tortured and sometimes killed. And often the result of this process — at least, before death — was exactly the same: the creation of an enemy agent. In both the Morris Seabello Rehabilitation Centre and at

⁴⁹ The Maseru raid, a South African Defence Force (SADF) special forces operation, claimed the lives of 42 people: 30 South Africans and 12 Basotho citizens. Of these, six were school-going teenagers and two were children. The raid was mounted, according to General Constand Viljoen, then chief of the SADF, against 12 ANC targets who were supposedly “planning and control headquarters for ANC action against South Africa, Transkei and Ciskei, and were used as a springboard for terrorist action.” (TRC Vol 2 Chapter 2, Section 40, Paragraph 428) See:

<http://www.sabctrc.saha.org.za/reports/volume2/chapter2/subsection40.htm&tab=report>

⁵⁰ See *Section F: Conditions of Detention* in the Skweyiya Commission Report: Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Complaints by former African National Congress Prisoners and Detainees (1992) at <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=95> [Accessed 3 May 2016]. The Skweyiya Commission report came out of an internal commission of inquiry set up in March 1992 by former president Nelson Mandela. The commission was tasked with investigating allegations of severe maltreatment in ANC prisons. It focused on Quatro. The commission found that abuses had taken place: “The issue ... is not whether abuses were perpetrated. That is now openly acknowledged by some of the most senior ANC officials. That such abuses did indeed take place is beyond doubt.” *Section E: The Evidence* in the report. It is one of three similar commissions of inquiry launched by the ANC into the same abuses.

⁵¹ See *Section K: Forced Confessions* in the Skweyiya Commission Report: Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Complaints by former African National Congress Prisoners and Detainees (1992) at <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=95> [Accessed 3 May 2016]

⁵² *Ibid.* See *Section G: Physical Conditions of Detention*

⁵³ Specifically Vol 2, Chapter 4, Subsection 12

⁵⁴ “The security branch referred to Vlakplaas as a rehabilitation centre for former terrorists.” (Dlamini, 2014: 38) “The purpose of Vlakplaas ... was ostensibly as a place to rehabilitate ‘turned terrorists’ or, as they were called, askaris.” TRC Final Report (Vol 2, chapter 6, section 66, para 17)

Vlakplaas, torturers would cause detainees so much pain that they would do anything to have it stop⁵⁵, including confessing to what the torturer believed they had done — in most cases at the Morris Seabello Rehabilitation Centre it was spying for the government, or, at Vlakplaas, ‘choosing’ to work for the apartheid state.⁵⁶ Either way, at least bureaucratically, an enemy agent emerged after the process. And Mfalapitsa, like Mthembu, Sedibe and so many others in the ANC *and* in the apartheid government, were part of this. This intimacy goes far deeper than skin, the one becoming the other.

It is important to note, though, that although these two places, uprooted from their contexts and held side by side, form a perverse mirror of each other, they are not morally the same. Or, more accurately, the bodies that governed them are not. To directly compare them would be to make those who created the situation — the apartheid government and particularly the handlers of informants and informants themselves — the same as those reacting to the situation — the ANC and its intelligence and security branches. I belabour this point because when looking up Quatro online, over and over I stumbled upon excerpts, mostly on racist and right-wing websites, describing the dire conditions of the prison and the human rights abuses that took place there.⁵⁷ These sites use this material as proof that the ANC is in fact *worse* than the apartheid government, that the ‘terrorists’⁵⁸ were and still are evil in the absolute sense, and that faced with this type of brutality, the apartheid government was justified in what it did. Finally, some of these rabid sites suggest that this sort of violence is inherent in black people and this thus explains the so-called white genocide taking place in South Africa.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ This is confirmed in the Skweyiya Commission Report: “Most of the witnesses who appeared before the commission from whom confessions were allegedly extracted by torture stated that they had made the confessions simply to escape the pain. They denied that their confessions were true.” *Section K: Forced Confessions*

⁵⁶ The other choice was death.

⁵⁷ The excerpts were mostly taken from Paul Trehwela’s *Inside Quatro: Uncovering the Exile History of the ANC and SWAPO* (2009), Mwezi Twala and Ed Bernard’s *Mbokodo! Inside MK: Mwezi Twala — A Soldier’s Story* (1994) and Stephen Ellis and Tsepho Sechaba’s *Comrades Against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile* (1992). Twala’s book is quoted in *Askari*, but only for Twala’s astonishment at the detailed personal knowledge of him the security police had. Dlamini does not mention its pervading critique of Mbokodo and camp life in exile.

⁵⁸ This term was used for those whom we call freedom fighters now — the men and women fighting apartheid, and thus most often those involved in MK and the ANC.

⁵⁹ See: <http://censorbugbear-reports.blogspot.co.za/2012/07/why-does-zuma-order-whites-killed.html>; http://www.volkstaat.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=275:mbokodo-the-soldiers-of-the-anc-inside-its-hell&catid=70:anc-eng&Itemid=127; and <http://crime-of->

In two letters written to Nelson Mandela in March and April of 1991 and published in *Searchlight South Africa*, Olefile Samuel Mngqibisa, a former MK cadre, explains his decision to resign from the ANC. It came about, he explained, after he was imprisoned several times by the “security hooligans” (1992: 27) in the ANC for speaking about problems cadres faced, including a lack of food and medical attention (*Ibid*). “We⁶⁰ were labeled enemy agents because of our talking too much.” (28) His statement to Mandela was simple: “Tyranny is tyranny.” (*Ibid*) As much as we cannot morally equate the two bodies at war, the liberation movement against the apartheid government, the oppressed against the oppressor, we also cannot also take lightly the acts perpetrated by members of the ANC in exile, deemed by the TRC to be gross human rights violations. Here the question so often asked by Dlamini in *Askari* is again pertinent: what about moral agency? Does the ANC torturer, like the apartheid agent who tortures, still *choose* to do it? And if so, is he morally any different from a torturer for the apartheid government? Mfalapitsa, who was both, is interesting here.

This is what he says in his ANC amnesty application:

I assume that my humanity is something I can't suspend. When I go into war, there is a personal morality that partakes in conflict and death should be just [indistinct]. So I thought when I was going to war, all procedures of war will be maintained, but whenever something happened to another person, I thought what if it could happen to me ... which means I'm partaking in something that doesn't secure my safety. So in that sense [orders to help torture suspected agents] contradicted my objective and demoralised me ... [I would carry out] legitimate orders ... but arresting a person, after arresting him inflicting another pain upon the person [indistinct], for me constituted the problem.⁶¹

Thus, Mfalapitsa insists he morally engaged with his situation and finds he cannot reconcile his orders with his moral agency. How different to this is his state amnesty application, in which he says to Musi then present: “I'm a black man. You're a black

apartheid.blogspot.co.za/2010/09/trc-fraud-excerpts-inside-quatro.html [All accessed 4 May 2016]. These and other sites also use skewed statistics to promulgate a racist agenda, using the myth of ‘white genocide’ as a way to get attention from a global right-wing audience.

⁶⁰ One of the people Mngqibisa mentions as another so-called dissident was Ace — possibly the same man Mfalapitsa admitted to torturing.

⁶¹ Thaledi Ephraim Mfalapitsa (AM3592/96) Proceedings held on 25 July 2000 (Day 5) <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/2000/200725pt.htm> [Accessed: 5 August 2016].

man. And I do appreciate that you are, you are intensely and profoundly aggrieved by what subsequently aspired from my involvement in the struggle of the past and my involvement in the situation in South Africa. But I would like to appeal that you look at this from a broader context and from the point of view of the situation in which I was at that point.” (Dlamini, 2014: 45) Mfalapitsa moves from being morally responsible in the first instance to being a victim of the broader context in the second, in which his humanity seems to be absolutely suspended. Note also his somewhat ironic appeal to racial solidarity — suggesting they *are the same* — when it was that very intimacy along with the family-like bond that constituted his act of betrayal. Of course, in both instances, Mfalapitsa is assuming a set of guises: in the first he is the high-minded comrade who was against it all along, and in the second is the low-minded askari who was trapped by country-sized history and the barrel of De Kock’s and other handlers’ guns. Each description served different ends in his bid for amnesty. Also, in the first instance, although Mfalapitsa mentions his humanity, he does not take responsibility for his actions. Mfalapitsa: “In an objective situation where the structure of the movement was surpassing every other feeling or ... [indistinct] I ought to carry out the order” — meaning, he followed orders. Thus, in both instances, Mfalapitsa relinquishes responsibility, but for two different reasons: the first is because of a cause he fought for morally, the ANC. This is the history he made in the back yard of his mother. This is intimate and close, and he exists here as an individual with humanity. The second is because of country-sized history, where the individual is dissolved along with his humanity. These gradients of truth and lies, moral capacity and responsibility, seem to shade here into ever stranger and more contingent zones.

More broadly, however, we can ask, what did the fact of the askari *do*? Traitors brought about oppressive practices on both sides. What betrayal does, and what it did, was create a perverse parallel between the ANC’s security practises and the state’s. The ANC wants to tell a story of unity, of solidarity, of the struggle of the people: a good narrative with a good ending. The traitor exposes the teeth in that narrative, telling a different, very complex story, where people are not divided neatly along racial lines and no one’s hands are clean. The narratives of askaris, defectors, spies or informants are incredibly dangerous. ANC activist and academic Raymond Suttner

writes that those protesting the corrupt government today wish to “return to the ‘glorious values’ attributed to the ANC ... [but] the assumption in many of the protests and petitions is that there was an ANC of the past to whose traditions we must return.”⁶² To meddle with the ANC’s complex past in exile is to muddle the ANC’s role as a champion of human rights; it reminds one of the prisons in exile; it makes us wonder about spies now, about the suppression of information; it makes narratives crumble; it makes cadres quake.

The power of the unnamed, then, of the suspected but not proven, the wolf in your midst, and the power of the ANC’s answer: Mbokodo, the grindstone, reaches out from the paranoia. This long arm stretches all the way from the German Democratic Republic to Tanzania, Zambia, Ethiopia and South Africa, and on, into the future, now, where it remained hazy, a matter of suspicion for years, before rising again in Luthuli House.

*

Be careful, a friend told me at a bar, after I had spoken to him about my research. While looking into *Askari*, I had stumbled across an online article about Quatro. Once I had read that article, I found it was everywhere and nowhere, this deadly prison, as were the prison’s deadly keepers, Mbokodo. Be careful of what? I asked. Them, he said. You know, they gassed Phyllis Naidoo and stole her computer? She was working on something about the ANC prisons. Be careful of the ANC? I asked. Yes, he said earnestly, then laughed. Are you serious? I asked. No, he said, then paused. I don’t know. Maybe don’t tell too many people about your research. Then he laughed again.

The friend is a well-connected journalist who probably just wanted me to squirm. But he was also only half joking. He told me that the late ANC stalwart Naidoo kept a very tight schedule. She would always wake early at the same time each day, and would work in the morning. One day, he said, she woke up at 11am feeling groggy

⁶² Suttner, Raymond. “Op-ed: In removing Zuma we need to ensure a democratic outcome” in *Daily Maverick* 5 May 2016. <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-05-05-op-ed-in-removing-zuma-we-need-to-ensure-a-democratic-outcome/#.V5YDDJNWneQ> [Accessed: 4 June 2016].

and found her computer was stolen. Apparently it was the ANC that stole the computer because Naidoo was about to expose some of what she knew about the movement in exile, its camps, and possibly about its deputy head of security at that time, Jacob Zuma. How Naidoo and others figured she had been gassed remained unclear. When I asked him how he knows this, he said he heard it from someone in Durban and left it at that.

This is a strange story indeed. It has the feeling of some oft-told rumour that began to stretch and distort, becoming more bizarre as it was passed on. But I was intrigued. I began to look into it, and started down a road filled with flashing hysterical signs pointing to intelligence officers, state surveillance and thuggery. As I uncovered more, I became more paranoid. It's true: I began thinking, there *are* spies. Spies everywhere! This thinking is in no small way brought on by my research into the apartheid security branch, which really was filled with spies and thugs doing the dirtiest of deadly work and making it look like robberies, accidents and the like. But I am certainly not alone in my paranoia as a South African. Ronnie Kasrils, a founding member of MK and former minister of intelligence (2004-2008), said in an article in 2014: "The intelligence service has become a tool for Luthuli House and the president."⁶³ And, in another, "My experience as intelligence minister was that the security and intelligence community were hopelessly politicised. This was made worse by a culture of secrecy, paranoia, conspiracy theory and authoritarianism."⁶⁴

This culture of secrecy and paranoia is easy to follow: look in most places you find politics here and you will find killer or deadly secrets, depending on who is willing to defend them and how. And it is easy to find its roots: as the ANC, you were right to be paranoid. There *were* apartheid spies, everywhere. Is that same paranoia justified now, not in terms of the old government but the new? Naidoo's computer *was* stolen. In his obituary for her, friend and fellow anti-apartheid activist Michael Neocosmos mentioned that Naidoo's flat was robbed twice: "More ominous was the second

⁶³ Quintal, Genevieve. "Intelligence service an ANC tool: Kasrils" in *IOL News Online*. 15 April 2015 <http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/intelligence-service-an-anc-tool-kasrils-1676525#.U4idGeKDrc>. [Accessed: 13 May 2016]

⁶⁴ Kasrils, Ronnie. "The politics of disorder and pressures on the judiciary" in *SA Monitor Online*. 2014. <http://sa-monitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/SAM3-Rule-of-law.pdf> [Accessed: 16 July 2016] (This article is the fourth chapter of the South African Monitor Year-end Report of 2014. The complete report can be read or downloaded from www.sa-monitor.com.)

burglary, during which only computer equipment was taken. She was convinced that the culprit was the ‘public’ rather than the ‘private’ sector, so to speak, as someone in power was unhappy with the fact that she knew about his talking under torture and wanted the evidence removed. Of course, we will never know for sure now, but the paranoia of power is notorious and the break-in was clearly a professional job, not an attempt by the ‘lumpen-proletariat’ to increase its chances of survival. This led her to rethink the previous break-in.”⁶⁵

Another journalist wrote, in an article on a series of mysterious burglaries: “A friend sent me [the journalist] this message: ‘Have you heard that Phyllis Naidoo’s flat has been raided (as well as the Helen Suzman Foundation), the burglars stealing nothing other than the hard drive of her computer?’”⁶⁶ This cryptic titbit was not elaborated upon, but it adds to the fog of rumour related to Naidoo’s work being stolen in strategic ‘raids’ on her flat. The other mysterious burglaries in this article include the supposedly orchestrated raids on the Helen Suzman Foundation on 20 March 2016, in which only specific computers were stolen. Director of the foundation Francis Antonie said the burglars knew their way around the offices: “A woman had a notebook and knew exactly what they wanted. They then ... took documents and the computers, and they left.”⁶⁷ The foundation had just approached the North Gauteng

⁶⁵ Neocosmos, Michael. “Remembering Phyllis Naidoo” in *Daily Maverick Online*. 20 February 2013. <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2013-02-20-remembering-phyllis-naidoo/#.V5HndZNWneQ> [Accessed: 21 June 2016]

⁶⁶ Plaut, Martin. “Updated: South Africa’s mysterious burglaries” in *MarinPlautWordpress* (personal website) 22 March 2016 <https://martinplaut.wordpress.com/2016/03/22/south-africas-mysterious-burglaries/> [Accessed: 12 June 2016] That Plaut does not elaborate on the message he writes about smacks of downright bad journalism; his writing should not be taken at face value.

⁶⁷ Thamm, Marianne. “Documents and computers seized in armed, apartheid military-style robbery at Helen Suzman Foundation offices” in *Daily Maverick Online* 20 March 2016 <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-03-20-documents-and-computers-seized-in-armed-apartheid-military-style-robbery-at-helen-suzman-foundation-offices/#.V5Hmp5NWneQ> [Accessed: 12 June 2016]. In a follow-up story, published 22 March 2016, to the one on the Helen Suzman Foundation break-in, *The Daily Maverick* ran a piece about why only old computers were taken. “The reason the intruders might have had to physically raid the premises to capture the computers is precisely because they were ‘old’ and probably unable to be hacked or accessed by sophisticated modern spying equipment.” It commented that Russia’s federal security service was turning back to typewriters and hand-written reports as unhackable technology. See: Thamm, Marianne. “Steampunk: Helen Suzman Foundation raid’s puzzling detail explained” in *Daily Maverick Online* 22 March 2016 <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-03-22-steampunk-helen-suzman-foundation-raids-puzzling-detail-explained/#.V5IVvJNWneQ> [Accessed: 12 June 2016].

High Court seeking a suspension of Hawks head, Major-General Berning Ntlemeza, a Zuma ally.⁶⁸

The same break-in is mentioned (and called “prosaic skulduggery”⁶⁹) in an article by *Africa Confidential* under the title “Night of the Generals”. General Sipiwe ‘Gebuza’ Nyanda, an MK veteran, was hijacked on 23 March 2016. His Porsche was stolen but found hours later. The article questioned whether this was just a normal hijacking or whether it was politically motivated, as a warning to Nyanda. The general is the spokesman for a group known as senior commanders and commissars of MK, which had just written a memorandum critical of Zuma. The article also suggests that many senior ANC members complained that their phones were bugged, connecting Zuma’s focus on surveillance to his time as deputy head of intelligence during the struggle: “The training and assistance ANC intelligence operatives received from East Germany’s state security ministry ... commonly known as the Stasi, instilled a lasting ethic.”⁷⁰ This ethic is about intelligence gathering through various forms of spying: bugging phones, hacking computers, raiding flats and offices, and it seems it is indeed lasting.

Is this real? Is *my* paranoia justified? Is this country now still as filled with spies for this government as it was for a different government? Different but also terribly the same?

In 2014, the ANC set up Project Veritas on the 11th floor of Luthuli House, which was tasked with investigating ministerial candidates. Each candidate had to fill in a 23-page form that included them disclosing bank accounts, tenders won and various political connections. This screening process was conceived as an attempt by the ANC to rid itself of corrupt characters. But the form also gathered very personal information — such as whether the candidate or any of their family members were seeing or had ever seen a psychologist, whether the candidate had or has lovers,

⁶⁸ Gernetzky, Karl. “Robbery was highly orchestrated, says Helen Suzman Foundation” in *BDLive Online* 21 March 2016. <http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/2016/03/21/robbery-was-highly-orchestrated-says-helen-suzman-foundation> [Accessed: 12 June 2016]. The application has since been successful. In March 2017, Ntlemeza was suspended as head of the Hawks.

⁶⁹ “Night of the Generals” in *Africa Confidential Online* Vol 57 No 7 1 April 2016. http://www.africa-confidential.com/article/id/11606/Night_of_the_generals [Accessed 3 May 2016].

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

whether they had gambling or drug addictions, any surgeries that kept them out of work, or any fights with fellow comrades. One minister described this as deep intelligence screening, and wondered what would happen should it land in enemy hands⁷¹. The *Mail & Guardian* confirmed that Project Veritas was being run by former members of Mbokodo, who, in the article, are referred to as “spooks” or spies.⁷² Author RW Johnson states that far from the ANC’s publicised intended aim, the project was set up to “ensure all ANC MPs were totally loyal to Zuma” (2015: 99), asserting that Zuma had chosen allies in the form of Thabo Kubu, a former National Intelligence Agency officer and influential figure in Mbokobo under Zuma during the 1980s, and other loyal ex-Mbokodo men. Whereas in the past the ANC took drastic, brutal measures to rid itself of apartheid agents, it is now a party perhaps ruled, but certainly watched, by spies taking copious notes and starting files on all potential ministers. The betrayal has re-turned, shot backwards through liberation, and eviscerated it.

This is the result of the askari: the destruction of what the ANC hoped for itself and still dreams itself to be. Its narrative is torn up, screwed up, trod upon. The fatal break in intimacy was not clean; it was gory with torture, shaking with fear. Dlamini’s taint taints absolutely. Our groundwater is poisoned. And we are none of us exempt.

⁷¹ “Inside the ANC MP vetting questionnaire” in *Mail & Guardian Online* 8 March 2014. <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-03-08-inside-the-anc-mp-vetting-questionnaire> [Accessed: 12 July 2016]

⁷² Matuma Letsoalo and Mmanaledi Mataboge “Spooks vet ANC candidates” in *Mail & Guardian Online* 28 March 2014. <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-03-27-spooks-vet-anc-candidates/> [Accessed: 12 July 2016].

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