

The Terrorist Album

Reviewing Jacob Dlamini's *The Terrorist Album: Apartheid's Insurgents, Collaborators, and the Security Police and Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle*

by [Peter Dreyer](#) (June 2023)



Funeral of the Anarchist Galli (I funerali del anarchico Galli), Carlo Carrà, 1910-11

Scene 1: 1948

After the defeat of Jan Christiaan Smuts's United Party in the general election of May 1948, the Afrikaner National Party, led by Dr. Daniël François Malan (1874–1959; first apartheid-era prime minister, 1948–54), took office in what was then the Union of South Africa. Many of the members of the new government had for all practical purposes been South African Nazis. During World War II, German propaganda radio broadcasts directed at South Africa in both English and Afrikaans referred to Dr. Malan as South Africa's "National Socialist leader," and fanatical Afrikaner nationalists had done their best to sabotage the war effort.[\[1\]](#)

"A great many top secret military documents that would, if they fell into Nationalist hands, provide them with much of the ammunition they would be most anxious to acquire, were lying ... in Defence Headquarters," Brigadier E. P. Scrubbs Hartshorn writes. "Added to them were ... documents that had been collected in Germany, immediately after the collapse of the Reich, by a special team of researchers from South Africa."

Late one night, in a final act in his capacity as minister of defense, Field Marshal Smuts (1870–1950) personally supervised the removal from Defence Headquarters in Pretoria of these papers, which were loaded onto a plane and flown to Britain. Immediately after he was sworn in, the new National Party minister of defense, Frans Erasmus, rushed to Pretoria, "burst through the door of the office of the Director of Military Intelligence, brusquely demanding of him the keys of all the filing cabinets and of the office and ordering him to leave the building at once ... Regrettably, no account has ever become available of what happened behind those closed doors when the Minister discovered, as soon he did, that the cabinets had been ransacked and the documents he was so anxious to acquire were already in safe custody abroad." This story "appears in no official history—and is not likely to—but the details have

been vouched for by unimpeachable sources.”[\[2\]](#)



The Terrorist Album:
Apartheid's Insurgents,
Collaborators, and the
Security Police

Throughout the roughly half-century of apartheid rule, the British government always had this potential political dynamite at its disposal but never made it public. The Nazi links of prominent Afrikaner Nationalists could have provided means for blackmail, and perhaps they did. The British Secret Intelligence Service, MI6, presumably knows where these interesting documents are. If so, it has kept them confidential as far as I know.

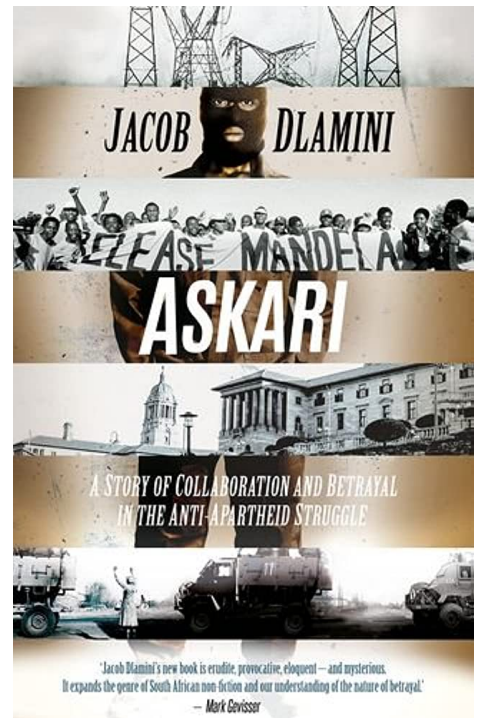
Scene 2: The “Paper Auschwitz”

“For about six months in 1993, the National Intelligence Service [NIS] alone destroyed about 44 tonnes of files, microfilm, audiotapes and computer disks.”[\[3\]](#) An industrial furnace in Pretoria belonging to the steelmaker Iscor was used

to incinerate these records, just before the transition of the South Africa to majority rule. "Into the flames ... went the files of the frightened ones, their craven acceptances of compromise and collaboration ... The pasts of thousands ... were turned to ashes." [4] In October 2018, the historian Jacob Dlamini asked two senior veterans of the Security Police why they had destroyed their records. "The memory purge was so extensive that some commentators have called it a 'paper Auschwitz,'" Dlamini writes. (An unfortunate analogy, since the destruction of an archive, however valuable, cannot decently be compared with the destruction of human lives.) "The brigadier's answer caught me by surprise. 'The greatest form of terrorism,' he said, 'was to destroy our documents.'" Rather, they should have sent those records to "their allies in Israel and Taiwan for safekeeping. 'Today we need these things, because so many guys come and say, 'I was a freedom fighter.' And he wasn't! ... Now we can't prove it." [5]

Mug Shots

Although hundreds of copies of *The Terrorist Album*, of which Jacob Dlamini writes in his 2020 study, were distributed to police stations around South Africa, only three specimens survived the destruction of Security Police and military intelligence files in 1993. The five thousand or more mug shots, or other photos, of purported terrorists assembled in it (*The Terrorist Album* is the formal title on its cover), an unknown number of whom were actually police agents, were employed in the interrogation of prisoners, being used to bamboozle them and "turn" them into collaborators themselves in a process that included bribery, blackmail, torture, and death threats (some of those who refused to collaborate were in fact summarily shot).



Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle

A great many did “turn,” becoming informers and even cops—so-called askaris—themselves, who proceeded to hunt down and arrest or murder their former comrades. Dlamini’s main aim in his gripping narratives in the two books under review is to understand why. What, for example, after nine years of revolutionary activity, including training in the USSR and East Germany, turned Glory Lefoshie Sedibe, a.k.a. Comrade September, a senior member of uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK; the “Spear of the Nation”), the ANC’s military wing, into a ruthless enforcer of the will of the apartheid state for the next eight years. [\[6\]](#)

So what did make revolutionaries “turn” and spill the beans? Of the many case studies, Dlamini analyzes, that of Adrian Leftwich leaps out at me, because he was an upper middle-class white South African, and I knew him personally. Adrian was a leader of the National Union of South African Students and a member of the Liberal Party. I used to visit him at his family

home in Claremont, where we spent hours rehashing that perennial political question, *What is to be done?*[\[7\]](#) I belonged to the Liberal Party too, and I had been very active in its recent, spectacularly unsuccessful campaign to win over white voters in Sea Point, a Cape Town constituency believed to be the most liberal (lowercase) in the country. Disillusioned, I chose to leave South Africa, going into what turned out to be permanent exile, first in Europe and then in the United States.

Disillusioned, likewise, Adrian took a very different path, becoming a member of the African Resistance Movement (ARM), which in October 1961 decided on violent opposition, hoping “to bring the government and its supporters to their senses before it is too late.” The ANC and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) embraced a strategy of violence soon afterward, not so much to bring the government to its senses as to overthrow and destroy it, by means of what came to be called “people’s war.”[\[8\]](#)

In 1964, the police raided Leftwich’s flat in Cape Town and found incriminating ARM materials. They roughed him up brutally, and he quickly succumbed. “He testified in court against his former comrades, including Eddie Daniels [I knew Eddie too, also a Liberal Party member], “who subsequently spent 15 years on Robben Island. Leftwich’s testimony also helped send John Harris to the gallows in 1965. Harris, a schoolteacher and member of the Liberal Party, had planted a bomb that killed a 77-year-old woman.” The judge in the case said of Leftwich, “To refer to him as a rat is hard on rats.”[\[9\]](#)

Free to go, Adrian “left for England, completing a PhD in politics at the University of York and then joining the university’s faculty,” where he had a distinguished academic career. Recalling his experience in the hands of the Security Police, he wrote: “The suddenness, speed and near-comprehensiveness of the disintegration of my will and ability

to resist interrogation in solitary confinement took me totally by surprise ... I just caved in." He was five months in solitary, "but I was undone in the first two months ... Any remaining ability to resist the urge to do anything to get out of there—to crawl, to beg, to trade—dissolved." [10] Let no one who has not been in a like position pass judgment.

Another prisoner, the notable Afrikaans poet Breyten Beytenbach (his poems appear already in a battered school anthology I possess dating from the 1960s), [11] a year into a nine-sentence for terrorism in 1976, wrote reports for the Security Police, naming some fairly innocuous names and telling the Bureau of State Security (BOSS) what it wanted to hear: inter alia, "It is obvious that the South African Communist Party has gobbled up the ANC—the parasite has eaten up the host." [12]

But cases like Leftwich's and Breytenbach's were obviously highly atypical. Asked why they had changed sides, quite a few black askaris said they were simply "tired of the ANC." Some had had the experience of finding themselves betrayed, apparently by their own superiors in the movement. "I have been intrigued by the number of people who, whispering almost, told me how stunned I would be if I were to discover who the 'real' apartheid collaborators were," [13] Dlamini writes. And I recall myself that as long ago as the 1960s, some people suggested that the ANC deliberately sent young cadres into the hands of the security police in order to create martyrs. After Glory Sedibe had drunk himself to death, a friend visited his impoverished widow, Ção, in Maputo, Mozambique. "She is so anti-ANC," he recalled. "She says they sold them out." [14]

Let us remember also that many of these men (and women too) had received extensive military and other training in the DDR (East Germany), Czechoslovakia, and the USSR, where they would have had the opportunity to study the workings of profoundly corrupt fascist states masquerading as "socialist." Vladimir Putin himself later called East Germany "a harshly

totalitarian country ... The entire population was under surveillance.”[\[15\]](#) One would have had to be blind not to realize that the DDR was a society founded on betrayal and collaboration, where reporting on your neighbors to the goons of the Ministry for State Security, or “Stasi,” was common practice. The USSR itself was rotten with corruption too. Masha Gessen, who wrote what is perhaps the best book on Vladimir Putin, explains: “The Soviet bureaucracy had been so unwieldy, incomprehensible, and forbidding that one could function within it only by engaging in corruption, using either money or personal favors as currency.”[\[16\]](#) This was the school in which MK and its “askaris” learned ethics.

Here, for the nonce, are some gleanings from the horse’s mouth:

1. 13: “the main target of the International Department [of the Central Committee of the CPSU in the apartheid era] ... remained the Republic of South Africa, not because the Soviet leaders wished to crown the victorious progress of socialism through the continent with the ‘liberation’ of Southern Africa, not because of apartheid, and not even because of the strategic position of the RSA, but for purely economic reasons ... If a pro-Soviet government came to power in the RSA, or if its economy collapsed, the Soviet Union would virtually gain the monopoly of [the international gold, platinum, and diamond] markets.”
2. 54: “Anywhere in the world, whenever a pro-Soviet clique comes to power, the economy of the country collapses, living standards fall catastrophically ... and a small knot of ‘people’s representatives’ begins to terrorize the populace.”
3. 100: “There is a Russian proverb which says, ‘A fish begins to rot from the head.’ It was impossible to imagine anything more rotten than our head, [Leonid]

Brezhnev [General Secretary of the CPSU, 1964–82].”

4. 206: “Who counts as a national liberation movement, and who does not, is decided in Moscow, and the criterion is the chance of coming to power.”[\[17\]](#)

As the millennial *fin de siècle* slouched into view, the KGB and the South African National Intelligence Service developed an interesting degree of mutual empathy. The Russians evidently thought that the negotiations of the apartheid regime with the ANC were some kind of Machiavellian trick—and, if not, a mistake. Niël Barnard, former head of the apartheid era National Intelligence Service, recalled, “Some of them had quite a racial attitude ... You are on the southern tip of this continent, you tried to build it up. You are going to lose political power—are you sure of what you are doing? ... It will perhaps be a wasteland in ten years’ time.”[\[18\]](#) This may well have reflected what the Chekists realized might soon be the case with the USSR itself.

The coming to power of the ANC was not the end of apartheid, of course, which is a perennial phenomenon, now global, as anyone trying to travel visaless on a passport issued by one of today’s planetary “locations” (Donald Trump called them “shithole countries”) knows all too well. Neither was it the end of the KGB, which metamorphosed into yet another “organ,” with yet another unpleasant acronym. Vladimir Putin has been widely quoted as saying, “There is no such thing as a former KGB man.” The Chekists are still murdering and imprisoning the opponents of the autocrat and spreading their lies, as their Soviet and tsarist predecessors did before them. And though social apartheid may have been officially cast out in the intensely virtue-signaling new South Africa, economic apartheid between the haves and the have-nots has never been more apparent there. South Africa is now reportedly the most unequal society in the world and also has the highest

unemployment rate in the world (almost 36%).

It would not be at all surprising to learn that some of today's prominent ANC leaders were befriended by the young Chekist lieutenant colonel Vladimir Putin in East Germany. But there seems to be no evidence of any such dramatic encounter. If there were, it might go a long way to explaining South Africa's reluctance now to commit to arresting him on the war crimes warrant issued by the International Criminal Court, if he should show up personally at the forthcoming BRICS conference there this August. Not to speak of illuminating the dramatic charge earlier this May by the U.S. ambassador to South Africa, Reuben Brigaty, that weapons and munitions destined for Russia were loaded under cover of night onto the sanctioned Russian ship *Lady L* at the Simon's Town Naval Base outside Cape Town in December 2022, something South Africa's president has denied all knowledge of, "but will set up an investigation, to be chaired by a retired judge, to find out." [19] Meanwhile, Defence and Military Veterans Minister Thandi Modise offers: "We put *fokol* [fuck all] on that ship!" [20] Her parsing of *fokol* remains in question.

Something we do know is that in 1985, at a time when Putin was a KGB operative assigned to the DDR, Vice Admiral Monde Lobese, the current chief of the South African Navy, underwent training in East Germany and the Soviet Union as an MK recruit. And it is hard to believe that Lobese could not have known about a shipment of military matériel to or from Russia at his navy's home base. The retired judge will no doubt seek to clarify that.

Archival evidence—history—sometimes bizarrely seems almost to have a will of its own to survive. Adumbrating the destruction of security police records in Pretoria a few short years later, with East Germany coming apart around their ears, Putin's KGB group in Dresden was ordered in December 1989 to burn its files. "We destroyed everything," Putin remembered. The office had an incinerator for that purpose, but the

quantity of papers was so great that it exploded, and twelve carloads of archives had to be taken to a military barracks to be burnt in a furnace. “When that, too, blew up, they buried them in a hole in a landfill, intending to destroy them with napalm.” The napalm failed to arrive, so they used gasoline.^[21] Apparently, that worked. The most sensitive documents, including papers from the East German Ministry of Defense and Stasi headquarters were, however, flown to Moscow. Perhaps they still lurk in some Russian archive. The truth will out—or so they say.

^[1] Over 334,000 South Africans volunteered for service in World War II and some 9,000 of them were killed in action, including many officially identified as “Native” (i.e., black) or “Coloured.” See also my essay “‘A Damned Nice Thing’: The Battle of Sidi Rezegh and World History,” <https://www.idyssey.online/post/a-damned-nice-thing-the-battle-of-sidi-rezegh-and-world-history>.

^[2] Quotations from E. P. Hartshorn, *Avenge Tobruk* (Cape Town: Purnell & Sons, 1960), 207–10.

^[3] Jacob Dlamini, *Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 117.

^[4] Terry Bell and Dumisa Buhle Ntsebeza, *Unfinished Business: South Africa, Apartheid, and Truth* (London: Verso, 2003), 9.

^[5] Jacob Dlamini, *The Terrorist Album: Apartheid’s Insurgents, Collaborators, and the Security Police* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), xii.

^[6] Dlamini, *Askari*, 178–79.

^[7] This celebrated question derives from Nikolay Chernyshevsky’s 1863 novel *What to Do?* (Что делать?), whose author was himself a prisoner of the tsarist autocracy when he wrote it. Lenin later appropriated the title for his influential pamphlet *What Is to Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement* (1902).

[8] The Congressites were instructed in the concept of “people’s war” by General Vo Nguyen Giap himself when an ANC–SACP delegation that included Joe Slovo and Oliver Tambo waited on him in Hanoi in October 1978. See Anthea Jeffery, *People’s War: New Light on the Struggle for South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2009).

[9] Dlamini, *Askari*, 242.

[10] *Ibid.*, 243–44

[11] *Groot Verseboek*, ed. D. J Opperman (2nd ed., Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1968), 345–53.

[12] Dlamini, *Terrorist Album*, 98.,

[13] Dlamini, *Askari*, 251.

[14] *Ibid.*, 204

[15] Vladimir Putin, *First Person* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 77–78, quoted in Philip Short, *Putin* (New York: Holt, 2022), 110.

[16] Masha Gessen, *The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012), 184. Gessen is required reading, I think, for anyone seeking to understand Putin’s Russia.

[17] Vladimir Kuzichkin, *Inside the KGB: My Life in Soviet Espionage*, trans. Thomas B. Beattie (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990).

[18] Quoted in Irina Filatova and Apollon Davidson, *The Hidden Thread: Russia and South Africa in the Soviet Era*. (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2013), 444.

[19] “It is just a matter of time before we crash and burn, still refusing to believe our own eyes,” Songezo Zibi, leader of the important new RISE Mzansi movement, writes, in his latest excellent summary of South Africa’s catastrophic situation,

www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2023-05-16-sa-has-no-pilot-growing-russia-arms-scandal-shows-sas-leadership-vacuum (accessed May 17, 2023).

[20]

www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-05-23-minister-of-defensive-thandi-modise-repeats-we-put-fokol-on-lady-r-mantra-as-mps-

demand-answers (accessed May 23, 2023).

[\[21\]](#) Short, *Putin*, 118

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