One Hundred Years of the ANC

van Kessel, Ineke, Southall, Roger, Soudien, Crain, Soske, Jon, Shubin, Vladimir, Saul, John, Nieftagodien, Noor, Netshitenzhe, Joel, Macmillan, Hugh, Lissoni, Arianna, Gunner, Liz, Etherington, Norman, Erlank, Natasha, Booysen, Susan, Bonner, Phil, Barchiesi, Franco, Badsha, Omar, April, Thozama

Published by Wits University Press

Kessel, Ineke, et al.
One Hundred Years of the ANC: Debating liberation histories today.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/50563.

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Chapter Ten

SHISHITA: A CRISIS IN THE ANC IN EXILE IN ZAMBIA, 1980–1981

Hugh Macmillan

There is a danger that the history of the African National Congress (ANC) in exile may be seen as one of perpetual crisis. There were, in fact, only two major crises within the ANC in Zambia during its more than 25 years in the country. The first of these was in 1969 and followed the failure of the Wankie and Sipolilo Campaigns. The second was the so-called Shishita crisis, which began with a foiled Zambian coup plot in October 1980 and spread to the ANC throughout the region.

This chapter seeks to understand what was going on in Zambia at the time and what the ANC, and its intelligence and security department, thought was going on. The chapter concludes with a comparison between the security department’s Shishita Report of 1981, with its tendency towards conspiratorial explanations and its identification of criticism of the leadership with subversion, and the very different, and infinitely more critical, Stuart Report (Commission of Inquiry into Recent Developments in the People’s Republic of Angola) into the Viana mutiny, the first of the two mutinies that occurred within Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) in Angola in 1984. This report rejected conspiratorial explanations and examined that mutiny in historical perspective.

It is not suggested that there was necessarily a progressive evolution of ideas about security, subversion and internal democracy in the three years that separated the reports, but the latter, though temporarily obscured by a second mutiny in Angola, did pave the way for the national consultative conference at Kabwe in Zambia in June 1985, which adopted a code of conduct and provided for the establishment for the first time of internal judicial procedures. The conference also recommended, as the report had done, an overhaul of the department of intelligence and security.

The organisers of the failed Zambian coup had hoped to exploit the popular disillusionment that followed the failure of the liberation of Zimbabwe to produce ‘a peace dividend’ for Zambia. Zimbabwe’s multiparty elections had also raised
questions about democracy in Zambia and about the wisdom of the country’s support for the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (Zapu), in particular, and of liberation movements in general. The discovery of the coup plot was followed by a major ‘clean-up operation,’ or *shishita*, during which the Zambian security forces discovered a large and undeclared cache of weapons on the ANC farm. *Shishita* is a Bemba word that took on the meaning of the English word ‘loiter’ and was used in Zambia to describe campaigns against unregistered aliens, people in possession of unlicensed firearms and stolen goods, or those judged in terms of colonial-era legislation to be ‘loitering with intent.’ The word was adopted by members of the ANC in Zambia and was used to describe the crisis of 1980–81 in Zambia and Angola.

**ANC SECURITY AND ITS WEAKNESSES**

The *Shishita* crisis reached its climax in March 1981, by which time it had spread from Zambia to Angola and to other countries in the region. It involved allegations of mutiny and of car theft and drug smuggling in Zambia and the abuse of dagga (marijuana) in the Angolan camps, as well as the exposure of an allegedly regional South African spy network and of plans for assassinations and a coup within the ANC in Zambia. About 60 people were rounded up by the ANC’s national intelligence and security department (often known as NAT) in Zambia and transferred for interrogation, or forcibly redeployed, to Angola. More people were investigated in Angola and people were taken there from all over the region. This crisis demonstrated the vulnerability of the ANC in exile to political events in host countries, as well as to subversion, or the fear of subversion, by the apartheid regime. It also demonstrated the weakness of the ANC’s security department and the inadequacy of existing disciplinary procedures and safeguards.

The weakness of the intelligence and security department, which had its origins in the 1960s as a branch of MK, had been a long-standing issue, dating back at least as far as the Hani Memorandum of 1969, whose signatories had complained that the department was ‘internally directed,’ ‘had done nothing against the enemy,’ and that the central task of its members ‘was suppressing and persecuting dedicated cadres of MK ...’ According to [then ANC president] Oliver Tambo’s draft report to the National Executive Committee (NEC) in May 1979, the security department was still ‘a fledgling and largely amateur outfit.’ It was undermanned and had ‘failed to act as the eyes and shield of our movement,’ and unless there was an improvement ‘we shall surely perish.’ The department was mainly engaged in the administration of crude
screening techniques – the examination by ‘recording officers’ of autobiographies written, often repetitively, by new recruits.\(^5\)

One of its functions was to screen South Africans who applied for jobs in countries such as Mozambique, whose governments were concerned about infiltration by South African agents. In March 1979, Tambo wrote a furious letter from Mozambique to ANC secretary-general Alfred Nzo, complaining that, after a delay of six months, Solly Smith, the ANC’s chief representative in London, had written to the Mozambican government to say that the ANC in Lusaka had turned down an application for clearance for Martin Legassick, the Marxist historian, who had been recruited by Ruth First to work at the Centre for Southern African Studies in Maputo. Tambo said he thought that this rejection was outrageous and asked:

> Who took the decision at Headquarters? Why is the long delay not explained? Does Legassick know that his application for clearance has been refused? Does the Movement know? Has he done something wrong? Has he been confronted about it? Or has he been found to be a spy?[?]

He had also received an urgent letter from Ben Turok, a member of the ANC and one of the accused in the Treason Trial, who had arrived in Lusaka to work for the University of Zambia in January 1978, to say that the National Working Committee (NWC)\(^6\) had refused him clearance. Turok, who had presented himself to the ANC as a member on his arrival in Lusaka and placed himself at the disposal of the movement, had not been confronted about his wrongdoings. In prophetic words, Tambo wrote:

> … I hate the practice of destroying individual cadres of the Movement because there is something we dislike about their honest and possibly misguided opinions. To subject them to a slow political death, instead of confronting them and correcting them is a dereliction of the duty of leadership. Of course, those who are not prepared to be killed in this manner, will go off and form counter-groups …
> We have today large numbers of young people who were thrown into the struggle, and into the membership of the ANC by the heat of events in South Africa.
> If we show insensitivity to their individual political and personal problems, a political epidemic will sweep through our ranks sooner or later.\(^9\)

This was not, however, Tambo’s only complaint about security. In April 1980, he wrote another letter to Nzo, complaining that students who had been sent back
from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries were languishing in a suburb of Dar es Salaam. He went on to say that ‘[t]here’s much bitterness in the movement, Alf. Some of the students in Kinondoni were brutally assaulted by the security and they are very bitter.’

It does seem surprising that Tambo was so well aware of the shortcomings of the security department but felt unable to do anything about them. An indication of his reluctance to intervene emerges from the investigation by security of Thabo Mbeki in 1979–80 as a result of his involvement with a prize-winning television documentary, *The Battle for South Africa*, which was made by CBS News in 1978. The film had been set up by Johnny Makatini, the ANC representative in the United States, and had the approval of the NEC and the co-operation of Tambo himself. The former Zambian foreign minister, Vernon Mwaanga, told Mbeki’s biographer, Mark Gevisser, that he had asked Tambo about this investigation and he had explained that he could not stop it as to do so would arouse suspicions about his own role. In the end, Alfred Nzo issued a circular to all members of the ANC in Lusaka, saying that the NEC had full confidence in Mbeki. The circular made no reference to the security department, but referred to the ‘gullibility’ and ignorance of the people who had spread the rumour.

This investigation came not long after an episode that should have caused the security department serious embarrassment. This was the exposure in January 1980 of Craig Williamson, deputy director of the International University Exchange Fund (IUEF), as a South African agent. It is possible that the department had its suspicions about Williamson but preferred to observe him and to see what they could learn from his activities, but leading members of the ANC had reassured Scandinavian governments, which had their own suspicions about him. When Jack Simons challenged Tambo about the ANC’s relationship with Williamson, following the publication of the report of a commission of inquiry into the IUEF in August 1980 that was critical of the ANC, he seemed to be unconcerned, saying that he had not read it. He denied that the ANC had been penetrated at a high level or that its activities inside South Africa had been compromised.

THE ZAMBIAN COUP AND THE ANC’S DISARMAMENT

The ANC became involved in the Zambian coup crisis when, on 27 October 1980, the Zambian security forces found a cache of weapons and other military equipment, including a radio communications vehicle, on the ANC’s recently acquired Chongela
Farm outside Lusaka. The government, which had not permitted the ANC to have military camps in the country since the failure of the ANC and Zapu’s Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns into Rhodesia in 1967–68 and had only reluctantly allowed the ANC to acquire the farm two years previously, was furious.

Its anger was indicated in a hard-hitting five-page letter from the minister of defence to Oliver Tambo in the following month. The minister began by restating the government’s policy that no military hardware could be brought into the country by a liberation movement without prior permission. He then pointed to a number of further irregularities in the ANC’s recent activities. Seventy-nine MK members had entered Zambia from Zimbabwe at Victoria Falls in March 1980 without prior permission. (They had been serving with Zapu forces in southern Zimbabwe and the ANC later said that their transfer to Zambia had been arranged between Joshua Nkomo and Kenneth Kaunda.) Many ANC personnel had been found to be in possession of unregistered firearms. Six ANC men had been arrested in September 1980 because their names had not been included in the list of resident personnel that had been given to the ministry of defence. An ANC member who was guarding a storehouse in a Lusaka suburb had shot and killed an unidentified man in July 1980.

Furthermore, the ANC had permission to have an office with a maximum of 22 officials, who could pursue non-military activities such as propaganda and farming, but it had insisted on moving its headquarters from Tanzania to Lusaka ‘despite advice that [the party and its government] had not yet decided to permit ANC (SA) to do so.’ The minister stated, finally, that the ANC should be disarmed, all its weapons should be handed over to the African Liberation Centre, all its personnel in the country should be in possession of temporary passes, which should be renewed every three months, and no personnel should enter the country without prior notification. At a meeting with Zambian military officials at the end of October, ANC delegates claimed that Tambo had informed Kaunda of the transfer of the headquarters and the question of disarmament was referred to the political leadership.

The Zambian authorities may have hesitated to disarm the ANC in October 1980, but they went ahead and did it in January 1981 after an MK security guard shot and killed one policeman and injured another. In an anguished letter to the secretary-general of the United National Independence Party (Unip), dated 2 January 1981, Alfred Nzo linked the recent coup attempt in Zambia and this shooting incident to South African machinations. Unip’s secretary-general reassured Nzo that the incident would not damage the relationship between the two parties, but
said the matter should be left to the security forces, which proceeded to finish the job of disarmament quickly – though it has to be said that the ANC was never totally disarmed as it concealed some weapons. The ANC’s NWC later claimed that the killing of the policeman had been carried out on the instructions of the South African regime in order to ‘lose us the support of the Zambian government and to cause the disarmament of the ANC ...’

MUTINIES AND INDISCIPLINE

The ANC mutinies in 1981, which involved a refusal to obey orders and were not violent, related to the reluctance of 30 or so MK members, who had been withdrawn from Zimbabwe in 1980 and had remained in Zambia, and of about a dozen guards at headquarters, some of whom may have been involved in the shooting of the policemen, to move to Angola. The primary reason for the attempt to remove these men from the country was pressure from the Zambian government and the main reason for their refusal to go was the perception that Angola had become a place of punishment – the ANC’s Siberia. These refusals, together with a spate of vehicle losses because of theft and drunk driving, prompted a panic on the part of the leadership about discipline.

Tambo was briefed on the ‘alarming disciplinary situation’ in Lusaka at a meeting of the NWC on 9 January 1981, the first of a series of meetings on the topic during the month. He held meetings with members of the various MK detachments and reported back to the committee, which had, meanwhile, set up a commission of inquiry into car smuggling and theft and a sub-committee to draw up a document on discipline.

There seems to be no trace in the public archival record of Tambo’s meetings with the members of the MK detachments, but two contemporary reports by the regional commissar, Uriah Mokeba, on meetings he held with MK members, including some of those who had refused to move to Angola, suggest that their complaints were reasonable, expressed moderately and recorded without rancour. One group said they had refused to move because they were not told until they got to the airport where they were going. Others said they would rather go to ‘school’ for further education than to Angola, but their real priority was ‘to go to the front and fight.’

They were clearly disturbed by the pressure being applied to the ANC by the Zambian government and demanded a ‘reshuffle’ of the leadership. They thought the leadership should talk to the government so as ‘not to lose this base.’ Surviving
documents from the regional commissariat suggest that real efforts were made in Lusaka at this time to improve contact with the grassroots, as well as living conditions, recreational facilities and political education. A report by Uriah Mokeba concluded that ‘many of the problems that we have encountered stem from the lack of attention we pay to personal problems of our people, the solution of which is ... central to the efficiency of each and every individual and ... of the entire movement.’

At a general members’ meeting on 25 January, Tambo blamed indiscipline, drunkenness and the abuse of weapons for endangering the ANC’s position in the country. According to Thomas Nkobi, in a much later account of the meeting, one member of the Luthuli Detachment had called on Tambo to disband the NEC. The security department had then intercepted ‘a misplaced report to the enemy’ saying that the membership rejected the leadership (that is the current NEC) and demanded its replacement. Nkobi suggested that “[t]he call for the overthrow of the leadership would result in the capture of the ANC by enemy agents and its final hijack,’ and that this was ‘obviously treason directed against our organisation and people ...’

The identification of criticism of the leadership with treason was to be a recurring theme and was reminiscent of the reaction of some members of the leadership to the Hani Memorandum in 1969.

A series of alarming developments in the early months of 1981 contributed to the general air of crisis. On 29 January, Moses Mabhida, general secretary of the South African Communist Party (SACP), gave the NWC a report on his recent visit to the camps in Angola and called for tough action on dagga smoking and indiscipline. Two days later the ANC received news of the raid by South African forces on three houses used by its members at Matola, on the outskirts of Maputo. Twelve ANC members and one Portuguese citizen were killed in the raid and the dead included some of the leaders of the special operations unit, which had carried out the spectacular attack on Sasol oil storage tanks in the Eastern Transvaal in the previous year. There were warnings that there would be further South African attacks on ANC targets in the front-line states, including Zambia. The coincidence of disarmament and the increased threat of South African attack was bad for morale. From this time onwards, ‘dispersals,’ during which people were instructed to leave their homes and take refuge with Zambian friends, became frequent and helped to create a climate of fear.
SPY SCARE

In the middle of March 1981, the NWC received a report on security. There was a reference in it to the ‘return of Oshkosh and Bekhimpi and other agents and suspects.’ This was the first specific reference in its minutes to the uncovering of a spy ring within the ANC in Zambia. It was the Zambian police, not the ANC’s own security department, that started the sequence of events that led to this discovery.

Thabo Mbeki recalls that the police indicated that they wanted to interview Oshkosh (MK name of Mompati Godfrey Bosigo or Godfrey Bosigo Khumalo), the ANC’s liaison officer at Lusaka’s international airport – the person responsible for clearing ANC members and visitors to Zambia – and Mbeki was chosen to accompany him. He recalls that the police said that they had evidence that Oshkosh had used his privileged position at the airport to assist the alleged drug-smuggling activities of a well-known Zambian politician, which Oshkosh did not deny. They later told Mbeki that they had no wish to embarrass the ANC and would take no further action if Oshkosh was removed from the country.

In a preemptive move, Oshkosh fled to Botswana, travelling with a man known as Piper (MK name, Elliot Mazibuko, real name, Pule Moses Malebane), who had recently returned from training at the Lenin School in Moscow but had reason to fear that he was about to be sent back to Angola. Mbeki believes that both Oshkosh and Piper were South African agents and that they had been instructed by their handlers to leave the country together. They travelled to Botswana on tickets supplied by a third man, Faru (also known in MK as Simon Pharaoh and John Mogale, real name, Matlaku Montshioa), who was working for the youth secretariat in Lusaka – he may also have been working for ANC security. Oshkosh’s name was also frequently linked with that of a fourth man, Bhekimpi ka Gwala (MK name, real name unknown), a transport officer. These four men were central to the alleged spy ring in Lusaka.

Under interrogation, Piper admitted to working for the South Africans and gave the names of other people he claimed were part of the network. According to Mac Maharaj, he ‘collapsed’ and made a confession to his escort on the flight from Lusaka to Luanda. A roundup of so-called ‘suspects and traitors’ began in Lusaka and elsewhere. Garth Strachan, who was then working with Maharaj in the internal reconstruction department, recalls that he flew at this time by Aeroflot to London via Luanda. Joe Slovo asked him to deliver a verbal report on the spy ring to Oliver Tambo in London. He did so and Tambo’s amazed response was: ‘Are you sure?’
Strachan travelled from Lusaka to Luanda with about 20 detainees, who were escorted by armed guards. He recalls that some of them had difficulty in walking unaided, suggesting that they may have been victims of what members of the security department euphemistically described as ‘panel-beating.’

Tambo returned to Lusaka before the end of March and the army commander, Joe Modise, gave the NWC a progress report on ‘suspects and traitors.’ A week later, a joint meeting of this committee and the revolutionary council, which was attended by, among others, Thomas Nkobi, Thabo Mbeki and Mac Maharaj, agreed on the approach they should adopt in explaining the security situation and the roundup of suspects to a general members’ meeting which was to be held on the following day. The speech Nkobi delivered on 4 April 1981 was dramatic:

Comrades, what was at stake was the very existence of the ANC, the very lives of its members particularly its leadership. The enemy has failed to destroy the ANC through bannings, banishments, imprisonment, executions and infiltrations … As a last desperate resort the enemy has now made assassinations its principal method of reply to the growing strength of the ANC. The enemy plan was to strike a mortal blow on 12th March [1981]. It had created a wide network of assassins recruited from among ourselves of course to be re-inforced on that night by its own storm troopers to supervise. It then would have been able to say to the world that the killings were a result of internal squabble[s] and division within the movement … The enemy was poised to strike.

He went on to say that the arrests of Oshkosh, Piper and Faru were the beginning of a counter-offensive, but the infiltration had gone very deep. The leadership was fully aware that the roundup might have split families, partners and the community as a whole, but they did not hesitate to call upon people to inform upon their partners and friends.

Comrades many of us have been affected by this operation one way or the other. Some comrades have husbands picked up, others are either boy-friends or girl-friends. We appeal to these comrades to bear with the movement. If their partners are proved agents then they must thank the movement about the timeous exposure because we believe that none of us would like to be associated with an agent of the system … At this stage we request every one of you as loyal members of the ANC to start retracing your lives together and if there have been suspicious moments … you are obliged to report. If there is incriminating evidence please bring it forward. You would not be betraying your partners but would be acting as loyal revolutionaries exposing traitors.
They complained about an initial lack of co-operation from ‘our own people’ in spite of frequent complaints about ‘the lack of adequate security in the movement.’ They sought to assure the members that no one would be victimised for expressing ‘genuine opinion’ or ‘constructive criticism,’ and that the democratic rights of the members were guaranteed. They also sought to dispel rumours that ‘people are being apprehended for expressing their views during previous meetings’ and to assure the members that ‘not everyone who is missing from Lusaka today is an enemy agent.’ Some were loyal members of the ANC who knew something about what was going on and had gone to assist with further investigations. There were also people who had gone to Angola and who would be sent abroad on scholarships from there.

The regional political commissar divided those who had been removed from Lusaka into four categories: enemy agents who were planning to assassinate leaders, smugglers who were being used by the enemy, people who were removed for indiscipline and defiance and others who were going to help with the investigations.

The crisis in Lusaka in the early months of 1981 was a crisis for the ANC as a whole, but especially for its security department. The head of the department, Sipho Makana, was replaced early in the year by Mzwai Piliso, who had been the head of the department of [military] training and personnel and the senior member of the NEC in Angola. It was probably under his supervision, though it is not certain, that the document entitled ‘Report on Subversive Activities of Police Agents in Our Movement’ and known as the Shishita Report, was produced on 1 July 1981. From internal evidence this appears to have been an update and revision of an earlier report. The department clearly took some pride in this report as it was submitted as a confidential appendix to the ANC’s evidence to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in May 1997. It was seen as providing a justification for the draconian measures the ANC took against alleged agents and traitors at that time, but it lacks the intellectual rigour and coherence of the later Stuart Report and is itself evidence of the weakness of the department, which Piliso had only just taken over.

THE SHISHITA REPORT

The report stated emphatically that the ANC was in danger and that the security department had successfully exposed an extensive spy ring. It has to be borne in mind, however, that the confessions on which much of the report is based were later acknowledged by Mzwai Piliso himself to have been extracted under...
torture, in which he had participated. He had felt that it was necessary to extract information from suspects 'at any cost.' Evidence obtained in this way would not have been admissible in a court of law. At the same time, it has also to be borne in mind that we can only have partial knowledge of issues of security and subversion at this time. It is possible that the ANC itself retains a security archive and that the apartheid state's security archive exists. It is also possible that much of the documentation on both sides has been lost or destroyed. But even if these archives do exist, it may be impossible to get a clear or unequivocal picture of events that must always have seemed to be murky and obscure.

The ANC later acknowledged that at least four people died of injuries received during interrogation in Angola in 1981. They included Joel 'Mahlatini' Gxekwa (MK name of Thamsanqa Ndunge), one of the stars of the newly formed and highly successful Amandla Cultural Ensemble, which had only recently returned from a tour of Scandinavia – he was accused of smoking dagga. His death was highly embarrassing and was blamed on Kenneth Mahamba (MK name of Timothy Kgositsile Seremane), the camp commander, who allegedly confessed to having been recruited as a spy for the South African regime – something his brother, Joe Seremane, a former Robben Island prisoner, has never accepted.

The report included the names of some recruiters and outlined the recruitment methods allegedly used by the South African police, including the entrapment of people accused of minor offences and the enticement of others with promises of salaries, houses and other benefits on completion of what appear to have been long-term 'sleeping' assignments. The majority of the agents identified at this time, including Piper in Zambia and Kenneth Mahamba and Vusi Mayekiso (MK name of Derrick Lobelo or Leballo) in Angola, had allegedly been recruited through the special branch in Mafikeng, which was working within the Bophuthatswana bantustan. Only one of the self-confessed agents, Faru, said that he had been recruited through the special branch at John Vorster Square in Johannesburg and his training lasted only two weeks.

No evidence was provided in the report on the recruitment, training, instructions or espionage activities of Oshkosh and Bhekimpi, two of the most important agents alleged to have been active in Lusaka, though the report did quote Bhekimpi's confessions of theft from the organisation and involvement in the smuggling of cars. The implication of this is that they had not confessed to working for the regime, though they may have admitted to being involved in criminal activities. The
report includes long lists of agents, as many as 40 each in the case of Mayekiso and Mahamba, and of many suspects, who were named by the self-confessed agents. It seems to be improbable that people working for a competent intelligence agency would have known the names of so many other people who were working for it.

There was no clear distinction made between agents and contacts and some of the grounds given for suspicion are unconvincing. Faru, for example, described some of his suspects as ‘critical’ of, or ‘negative’ towards, the ANC, or as associating with members of the Black Consciousness movement at the University of Zambia. The report provided examples of the kinds of information he was alleged to have gathered for his handlers, including evidence about the location of ANC offices and residences and the names of their occupants. As the ANC had to supply this kind of information to the Zambian authorities, and duplicated lists survive, this was not information that would have been difficult for the South African regime to obtain.\(^{41}\)

According to the report, the alleged agents had little training and only vague instructions on intelligence gathering, reporting or subversion. Many of the activities of Faru, Oshkosh and Bhekimpi, for example, which included involvement with the theft and smuggling of cars (not necessarily from the ANC), an airline ticket scam involving the sale of unused portions of tickets to local travel agents, the misuse of petrol and the theft of typewriters, tape cassettes and a gearbox, could be seen as evidence of common criminality. It is impossible to judge on the basis of the evidence in the report whether their main contacts in Botswana, some of whom were acknowledged to be known in that country as members of the ANC, were involved in criminal activities, were working for the South African regime, or were totally innocent. One of them, Godfrey Motswane, owned a bottle store in Gaborone and was associated with the Zambian politician and alleged drug smuggler, Sikota Wina, who had been, and was to be again, a member of the Zambian Cabinet, and is today a respected senior citizen. Motswane was said to be an importer of BMW cars into Zambia and had dealings with Greek garage proprietors, not in itself a crime. Many years later, he appears to have been recognised by the South African Parliament as an ‘eminent person’ with respectable ‘struggle’ credentials.\(^{42}\)

Some of the agents’ allegedly subversive activities appear to have been less than criminal and not wholly subversive. Faru, for example, provided a list of names of ANC members whom he had encouraged to seek United Nations scholarships for further education and named four people who had filled in the forms. Bhekimpi and others were alleged to be planning ‘to desert, study abroad for a university degree and
live well afterwards.’ The report recorded widespread resentment of what was seen as the preferential access of the children of leaders to good educational opportunities. There was also resentment of alleged differences in the standard of living in Lusaka of leaders and rank-and-file members.43

The most disturbing part of the report is its underlying thesis, which is reflected in Nkobi’s comments cited above, that any criticism of the leadership was inspired by enemy agents who sought to discredit leaders on the grounds that they were corrupt, inefficient, ‘money-making,’ or ‘too old to lead.’ While Tambo was said usually to be exempt from this criticism, there were some who argued that ‘he connives at or condones’ the behaviour of the rest of the NEC. Enemy agents had, allegedly, assumed that the series of meetings Tambo held with the various detachments in January 1981 was in preparation for a consultative conference similar to that held by the ANC at Morogoro, Tanzania, in 1969, which ‘would be a golden opportunity for the removal of some leaders and the promotion of some agents into the NEC.’44

One of the agents, Piper, allegedly thought that he and a friend were suitable candidates for election to the NEC and claimed that his own attitude towards the leadership had been shaped by a senior leader, Mark Shope, the former general secretary of the South African Congress of Trade Unions and one of the people responsible for political education in the camps. Albert Dhlomo, then manager of Chongelo Farm, though soon to be removed from that position, was said to entertain young cadres at a bar on the Great North Road, where he was openly critical of Joe Modise and made allegations about corruption among other members of the leadership. There was also a group of allegedly disgruntled members of the Luthuli Detachment, some of them veterans of the Sipolilo Campaign, who were also critical of the leadership. According to the report, ‘these comrades are playing the role of enemy agents or provocateurs despite the fact that they were never formally recruited.’ Some of them had been interviewed and made no secret of their dissatisfaction with the leadership, while denying that they were involved in any kind of conspiracy.45

The least convincing parts of the report relate to a plan to ambush and kill Joe Modise and Keith Mokoape, an MK commander, and a plot to assassinate the leadership. The allegation about the ambush came from Bhekimpi and Faru, who claimed that Sizwe Ndela (MK name of William Mashotana) and another man, known only as Ace, had planned it. The report stated that the exact plan for the ambush had ‘not yet been established from Sizwe and Ace,’ though it is fairly clear from other
sources that they had been detained in Lusaka, transferred to Angola and ill-treated in both places. There was a related suggestion that the Zimbabwe returnees and the headquarters security guards had acquired Okapi knives in order to ‘cut the big stomachs of the leaders’ or to defend themselves against removal to Angola.

There was only one weak source, Thembu Dladla, for the assassination plot, which Nkobi had announced to the general members’ meeting in April. The anonymous authors of the report had to acknowledge that his allegations against the disgruntled members of the Luthuli Detachment were vague and that they had been unable to find any evidence to confirm the date of 12 March for the assassination of the leadership. The veterans had, nevertheless, been removed from Lusaka to Angola. Sparks Pooe and Boyce Bocibo thought that their names must have been ‘fed into Dladla’s mind under pressure,’ an apparent reference to torture.

The authors of the report went on to outline a somewhat improbable scenario involving a plan for the removal of the leadership either ‘democratically’ through a consultative conference, or, failing that, their assassination and subsequent replacement by agents such as Piper and Faru. This new leadership would enter into negotiations with the regime and would accept recently announced preconditions for a settlement, which were said to include the recognition of the independent bantustans, acceptance of a free-enterprise economy and the removal of communists from the ANC. This would bring ‘an end to the liberation struggle in South Africa, if not for all time, at least for the foreseeable future.’

The report concluded with some rather crude class analysis. The majority of agents appeared to have come from ‘an emerging middle class within the African society, and a closely related social stratum, the lumpen proletariat’ – the reference to the middle class was coded language for students who had left South African and joined the ANC following the Soweto uprising in 1976. The report concluded that more emphasis should be placed on deliberate recruitment from inside South Africa and this should draw ‘primarily on the working class and its strongest ally, the peasantry.’

The report asserted, no doubt justifiably, that the regime had established an elaborate secret service network covering the whole of southern and central Africa. Criminal networks involving drug smuggling and car theft had either been created or were tolerated as part of this regional system of espionage, which was controlled from John Vorster Square. Investigations so far had only dealt with a spy ring
based in the Bophuthatswana bantustan, but it should be assumed that each of the bantustans, especially the older ones, would have its own spy ring. It called for an overhaul of the security apparatus and of the political commissariat, to ensure greater ‘professionalism and efficiency.’ It also suggested that the ‘legitimate grievances of the membership, whether real or imagined,’ should be dealt with as they arose and that members should be kept informed of developments in the movement and the struggle, as ‘[r]umours, if left to spread unchecked, create the most favourable climate for the activities of enemy agents.’

THE AFTERMATH

It is impossible from this distance, and on the basis of available evidence, to say how serious the threat to the ANC in Lusaka in 1981 was, or whether the level of infiltration was much worse than the norm. Tambo’s response to the news of the exposure of the spy ring – ‘Are you sure?’ – seems apposite. Most of the movement’s leaders did take it seriously and believed that the movement was in danger, but it was by no means certain that the security department had been able to identify the most important infiltrators. Mac Maharaj recalled that it was well known that there were spies within the organisation in the late 1970s and it was necessary to build firewalls, something that continued to be the case until the end of exile, most elaborately in relation to Operation Vula.

There was always a conflict between the need for security and the need for the leadership, let alone the rank and file, to know what was going on. When the American journalist Joseph Lelyveld put General Johann Coetzee’s claim that he had ‘informers all the way to Moscow’ to Oliver Tambo, he expected a refutation but was surprised by the response: ‘He was right! He was right!’ In evidence to the TRC, a South African security official, HC Nel, claimed that one of the regime’s most successful tactics was ‘disruption by ... indirect means ... getting the enemy to kill itself, to detain itself, and to disrupt itself.’ Reading between the lines of the Shishita Report, it does appear likely that people who were press-ganged by the regime into joining the ANC in exile may well have had a highly disruptive influence, whether or not they were part of an active espionage network.

What was the fate of the people mentioned in the Shishita Report and of the others who were removed from Lusaka to Angola at this time? Among the self-confessed spies mentioned in the report, the majority were executed by firing squad at Quatro Camp near Qibaxe in Angola within the next two or three years. Kenneth Mahamba
and Vusi Mayekiso were executed in Angola in 1981 or 1982. Piper was executed in Angola in 1982 or 1984. Faru was executed in 1984. Another self-confessed agent, Balili Mpila (MK name of Joseph Mokoena), who was employed in the treasury in Lusaka, was executed in 1982. Oshkosh was executed in either 1982 or 1984. The fate of Bhekimpiki ka Gaza is not clear.54 Leading members of the ANC, including Mac Maharaj, later acknowledged in evidence to the TRC that the people who were executed at this time had no legal defence.55

Among those who were accused of plotting ambushes or assassinations, Sizwe Ndela, who was one of the men who returned from Zimbabwe, testified to the TRC that he and others were detained and tortured in Lusaka by the security department in what they called Operation Blanket. He was transferred to Angola and reached Quatro Camp on 8 March 1981. He was then accused of involvement in a spy ring and was confronted with Kenneth Mahamba, whom, he claimed, had been beaten beyond recognition. He was asked to acknowledge him as the leader of the ring or face a similar fate, and he may have made a confession. After two years’ detention with hard labour, he was brought before what he described as ‘a kangaroo court’ in 1983 and was sentenced to a further year’s hard labour. He was released in July 1984 and said that he was then one of only two survivors of a group of seven young men from Mafikeng who had joined the ANC in 1976. The other five, who included Mahamba, Mayekiso and Mpila, had ‘vanished into air.’56

Among the allegedly mutinous headquarters security guards, Sidwell Moroka (MK name of Omry Makgoale), was reintegrated into MK command structures and was, by the beginning of 1984, the chief of staff in Luanda. He was elected in his absence as one of the Committee of Ten to represent the mutineers at Viana, the first of the mutinies in Angola in 1984 and survived four years in the prison at Quatro Camp, re-emerging to be elected to the regional political committee at Morogoro in Tanzania in 1989. Another of the headquarters security guards, James Nkambi (MK name of Mlamli Namba) was also reintegrated into command structures, but was executed after participating in the mutiny at Pango, the second of the two MK mutinies in Angola in 1984.57 The disgruntled members of the Luthuli Detachment, including Boyce Bocibo, Joel Klaas and Wellington Nziba, were among a contingent of people who were allowed to return to Lusaka from Angola in November 1982 after an absence of about 18 months.58 Bocibo made a quick recovery from this experience. Less than two years later, in 1984, he was appointed as the ANC’s chief representative in Lusaka and held the post for at least a year. Other people made an even more rapid return to Lusaka.59
Mac Maharaj, speaking in 1991, saw a negative link between the Shishita crisis and the later, and more serious, mutinies in Angola in 1984. The apparent success in breaking the spy ring in 1981 had made the ANC leadership look first for the enemy agents behind the later mutinies and only later for the genuine grievances. He had no doubt that a spy ring was exposed in 1981, but he acknowledged that ‘those who dug up and dealt with this attempt of the Pipers [sic] hit many innocent people too ... [they] used many methods that are unacceptable but their very success ... closed our minds to the excesses involved.’

Writing in January 1984, on ‘the situation in Lusaka,’ the national commissar, Andrew Masondo, the man whom the Stuart Report a few months later held primarily responsible for the situation in the Angolan camps and whose removal from his post it recommended, recalled that in 1980–81 it had been necessary to take ‘harsh measures’ to deal with ‘grave problems within the organisation.’ He was certain that it was necessary to take steps to avoid a recurrence of such problems, but he was convinced that ‘at this point in time we cannot afford to run the movement by instilling fear.’

There is a marked contrast between the Shishita Report of 1981, with its more or less uncritical promulgation of conspiratorial explanations and its representation of criticism of the leadership and demands for a national consultative conference as subversive, and the devastating critique of the security department and of conditions in the camps offered by the Stuart Report of 1984. The authors of that report included James Stuart himself, a trade unionist who had recently returned from a position as chief representative in Madagascar to the president’s office in Lusaka; Aziz Pahad, who worked for the ANC in London; and Sizakele Sigxashe, head of the department of information and publicity in Lusaka, who later worked in intelligence. They adopted an historical approach and rejected conspiracy theories. They argued forcefully that responsibility for the first of the two mutinies in Angola should not be attributed to the activities of ‘enemy agents’ but had its roots in problems that had evolved over time. These included the use of Angola as a dumping ground for the unwanted and the suspect, including people identified during the earlier Shishita, some of whom had made confessions under pressure which they later retracted, and for ‘returnees,’ people who had been sent back from the front in Zimbabwe and from a detention camp in Mozambique. They also pointed to the neglect of the health and welfare of the soldiers in the camps, the absence of senior commanders, the blocking of lines of communication between the administration and the men (and a few women) in the
camps and the conversion of the security department from its proper role as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the movement into ‘an army within the army,’ a feared disciplinary arm.

Among their many recommendations were demands for the reform of the security department and its return to its proper role, the outlawing of violence and torture, the establishment of a code of conduct and of proper judicial procedures, the release of detainees and the summoning of a national consultative conference. If these recommendations had been implemented immediately, the second of the Angolan mutinies of 1984 might have been avoided. Their gradual implementation from the time of the Kabwe Conference in 1985 did, however, bring about a significant change in the political and legal climate within the ANC.63 In his report on security to the conference Oliver Tambo said:

Some of the comrades manning these organs have made bad, sometimes terrible mistakes. They have over-reacted in some situations and have employed unacceptable methods, thus distorting the image of the Department of Intelligence and Security.64

The Shishita crisis began with a domestic Zambian crisis and spread to the ANC through the Zambian government’s decisions to disarm it and to demand the removal of active MK units from the country, as well as through its discovery of the involvement of some members of the ANC in criminal activity. The ANC was obliged to remove its mutinous members and other suspects to Angola, where its occupation of camps gave it a fairly free hand in dealing with them. There was a marked difference in the culture of exile between Angola and Zambia, as the ANC had no camps in Zambia and almost all its members lived in town. Although the short-term detention of their members by liberation movements, including the ANC, was at times tolerated by the Zambian government, President Kaunda took a strong line against liberation movements that took the law into their own hands and objected very strongly to them killing their own members in his domain. The executions that were carried out by the ANC in Angola, mainly between 1981 and 1984, would not have been permitted in Zambia, nor would long-term detentions. The Pan Africanist Congress, the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola and the Zimbabwe African National Union were all excluded from Zambia because they either killed, or threatened to kill, their own members.65 The ANC was able to do things in Angola, which was, at the time, racked by civil war, that it would not have been permitted to do in Zambia.
Endnotes

1. I am grateful to the Leverulme Trust and to Professor William Beinart and the African Studies Centre, Oxford University, for support of my research on the ANC in exile in Zambia. I am also grateful to Vladimir Shubin and Arianna Lissoni for helpful comments on the draft of this paper.

2. Author's notes of conversation with Patrick and Maria Magapatona, Lusaka, April 1981.


8. The NWC was an executive committee of the National Executive Committee (NEC). It met almost daily in Lusaka, while the NEC met infrequently.

9. Ibid.

10. UFH, ANC Archives, Lusaka 2/82/7, Tambo to Nzo, 5 April 1980.


12. UFH, ANC Archives, Lusaka 2/82/7, Nzo to All Members of the ANC of SA, no date, circa 1 August 1980.


15. UFH, ANC Archives, Lusaka 2/6/36, W Chakulya, Minister of Defence, to president, ANC (copy), no date, November 1980.

16. The ANC's de facto headquarters had been in Lusaka since the late 1960s, but it was only in 1977–8 that it occupied a building in central Lusaka, which was known as 'headquarters' or 'HQ.'

17. The African Liberation Centre was set up in Kamwala, Lusaka, in 1965 to house the offices of liberation movements and was staffed by members of the Zambian army. After its destruction by Rhodesian forces in 1979, the liberation movements moved out and the military liaison officers operated from the Ministry of Defence.

18. UFH, ANC Archives, Lusaka 2/6/36, 'Some Points in Our Response to the Letter,' no date, [November 1980].


20. UNIP Archives, Lusaka, ANC file, RC Kamanga to Secretary-General, UNIP, 6 January 1981.


22. UFH, ANC Archives, Lusaka 120/152, 'Meetings of the Working Committee,' 9, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18 January 1981.

23. UFH, ANC Archives, Lusaka, RPC, 125/218. Uriah Mokeba, 'Indiscipline and Other Problems, Points Raised During the Discussion with Chunga Unit,' 24 February 1981, and 'Chunga Unit,' no date.


27. UFH, ANC Archives, Lusaka 120/152, 'Meetings of the Working Committee,' 29 January 1981.


29. UFH, ANC Archives, Lusaka 120/152, 'Meetings of the Working Committee,' 14 March 1981.

30. Author's interview with 'Thabo Mbeki, Johannesburg, 11 October 2011; for Piper's behaviour in Moscow, see V Shubin, ANC: A View from Moscow (Bellville: Mayibuye Books, 1999), 226–7. Shubin suggests that he may have feared exposure as a spy in Moscow and that he took steps to hasten his departure.


33. UFH, ANC Archives, Lusaka 120/152, 'Meetings of the Working Committee,' 26 March, 3 April 1981.

34. UFH, ANC Archives, Treasurer-General 88/61, NWC, 'Proposed line of approach,' no date [April 1981].

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. UFH, ANC Archives, RPC 2125/218, 'Minutes of the Regional Political Commissariat meeting,' 31 March 1981.


39. UFH, ANC Archives, Treasurer-General, Lusaka 2/27/8 and Lusaka, Treasurer-General, 2/27/8, 'Comments of the chairman' and 'On your security charge.' Pages one and two of the same document have been filed separately. From internal evidence the document is dated 24 November 1982.

40. TRC Report, vol 2, chap 3, para 484.

41. http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=100&t=Umkhonto%20we%20Sizwe, 'List of ANC members who died in exile.' The inconsistencies in the dates arise because the names and dates in this source do not always coincide with the list submitted to the TRC of 'agents executed on orders of tribunals.'

42. Wits, SAHA, Shishita Report, ff 34-5.


44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. 'Affidavit of "William Mashotana" to the TRC,' Mail & Guardian Online: http://mg.co.za/article/1997-07-25-affidavit-of-william-mashotana

47. Ibid, ff 39–42.

48. Ibid, ff 43–47.


50. Ibid, ff 49–51.

51. Operation Vula (Opening the way), was an underground operation initiated in the late 1980s to facilitate the return of exiled leaders into the country. See O'Malley, Shades of Difference, 219–20.


53. TRC Report, vol 2, chap 3, para 484.

54. http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=100&t=Umkhonto%20we%20Sizwe, 'List of ANC members who died in exile.' The inconsistencies in the dates arise because the names and dates in this source do not always coincide with the list submitted to the TRC of 'agents executed on orders of tribunals.'


56. 'Affidavit of "William Mashotana",' Mail & Guardian Online: http://mg.co.za/article/1997-07-25-affidavit-of-william-mashotana


58. UFH, ANC Archives, Lusaka 2/27/8 and Lusaka, Treasurer-General, 2/27/8, 'Comments of the chairman' and 'On your security charge.' Pages one and two of the same document have been filed separately. From internal evidence the document is dated 24 November 1982.

59. UFH, ANC Archives, Treasurer-General, Lusaka 2/75/13, Cyril Ramaphosa to J Ndlovu, 20 November 1992, including list of chief representatives, and personal knowledge.

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62. Other members of the commission were Anthony Mongalo, later administrative secretary in the president’s office, and Mtu Jwili (MK name of Daniel Oliphant).
64. Shubin, ANC: A View From Moscow, 280, quoting ‘Report on intelligence and security.’