

BOOK REVIEWS

The ANC spy Bible: Surviving across enemy lines

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Moe Shaik

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The book titled: *The ANC spy Bible: Surviving across the enemy lines* is a necessary and important addition to the struggle era archives. It is timely as the African National Congress (ANC) struggles to reposition and reinvent itself in society; battles policy ideas; deepened factionalism and the comradeship façade. It is opportune as South Africa navigates the state capture commission, corruption, deepened inequality and the land question.

The book first introduces the life of Moe, his parents, brothers and his childhood in general. It is at this point that Moe details his always intrigued and observant behaviour which later led to his exploration of intelligence work.

The early years

Working as an optometrist, Moe was recruited by his older brother Yunis into an ANC underground unit (MJK). He did not need to be convinced to join the ANC, as this was a natural progression. It was a membership deeply rooted in sacrifice, dedication, loyalty, building a non-racial nation and discipline. As comrades, they were mates and allies, it was therefore their duty to protect each other. It was for this reason, trusting the movements' leadership and following them willingly blind that Moe agreed to be a decoy after smuggling an ANC leader Ebrahim Ismail and the security police knew of his presence and raided for his arrest. Safely crossing Ebrahim into Swaziland was a success, however, Moe was detained under the section 29 of the Internal Security Act. He initially prepared himself for Three days of detention, but the Act allowed unlimited detention without trial. What was to follow were months of physical torture from the security personnel. This would mentally and physically strain comrades to a point of "selling out", with Moe, it was an attempted suicide. His brother, Yunis, was also

captured and received a near death experience of torture witnessed by the “bathroom officer”. The year is 1985 and there was growing resistance against apartheid, there were violent confrontations between protestors and the security forces, the country was spiralling into a civil war and Moe was released. Perhaps the slogans of resistance and shouts of defiance fuelled us, but endurance of detention remained unspoken. To this day, we can never fully fathom the experiences of struggle leaders during the apartheid era.

The Nightingale

The book becomes thrilling as the “bathroom officer” emerges to be a “guardian Angel”. His role is critical and necessary as the country entered into a state of paralysis. Carrying a wad of documents, the bathroom officer visited Moe. This file carried Agents’ reports; analysis by the Security Branch Officers, each page stamped “secret” (p. 78). This proved that the Security Branch was sophisticated in operation, recognised the lack of counter-intelligence and the amateur nature of the ANC. The ANC was significantly infiltrated and that showed in how the security branch easily destroyed underground units, arrested and killed people. This proved to be a valuable file, beckoning the world of secrets. This marked the beginning of Moe’s intelligence operation and the bathroom officer was to be named the Nightingale. This file was detailed to an extent of revealing ANC comrades working for the “other side” (p. 86). I understand this as the betrayal of comradeship and it continues to date in different forms.

Moe learned to understand the workings of the Security Branch, their mind set and their ways of operating. He was drawn to the thrill and knew that this information will wage war against the apartheid system. Moe was a grounded foot soldier serving the ANC, he knew that he cannot act alone regarding the new information and thus requested to see Oliver Tambo (president of the ANC at the time). Tambo was exiled in London and Moe made the necessary arrangements to get there. At this point of the book (p. 103), Jacob Zuma is introduced as the ANC’s head of intelligence. Moe posits that Jacob Zuma was easy-going, charming, disarming and endearing. This is how Zuma later won the hearts and votes of South Africans in 2009. He was said to be a “peoples’ president”, one with great humility and the will to change the socio-economic lives of South Africans. Moe accepts though, that he was difficult to read. I am reminded of the time during #ZumaMustFall #Paybackthemoney #Zupta,

herein, Zuma always maintained his composure and laughed. As head of intelligence, Moe and Zuma were to be “fellow travellers into the secret world of intelligence” (p. 106).

When president Tambo read the file he said “In so far as the reports that concern me, I believe they are as true as the Bible” (pp. 105-106). These files were “gospel truth” thus, this became the Bible project. The highest office of the ANC then tasked Moe with professionalising the breakthrough and cautioned the sensitivity and secrecy of the matter. It was agreed that neutralisation was an imperative part of the intelligence game and was also necessary for the ANC’s success in defeating the apartheid regime. Whatever that was to be done, one thing had to be certain and that is, to protect the Nightingale by all means necessary. Moe was then deployed to Germany for intelligence training, upon his return he knew he had to be in charge and control of his relationship with the Nightingale.

The Security Branch was hard at work and that showed in the penetration of Swaziland, they operated with impunity and became a killing machine. Due to the long communication lines between Moe and Lusaka (where Zuma was based), it was difficult to be effective. Moe details the one point where the ANC through his intelligence work was able to successfully capture the Security Branch agents. This marked a significant milestone for the ANC, particularly its neutralisation of infiltration. It was necessary for the ANC to have political and economic intelligence in order to understand the shifting power. This was important as the ANC prepared itself to take over the country. They did well in shifting the political power, however, the economic shift is yet to happen as South Africa’s economy is still dominated by white people who only constitute 10% of the population.

The limited financial resources of the intelligence unit posed challenges for the Bible project. At this point of the book (Chapter 20), Shabir Schaik is introduced as the money guru and he introduced the Hawala. This earned him respect within the finance structures of the ANC, it was also at this point that he befriended Jacob Zuma. I am tempted to argue that Shabir’s relationship with Zuma has always been a moneytiership (money relationship).

On the Run

It seemed that the ANC had lost its grip, with most of its leaders either in jail or exiled and the Security Branch infiltration, it had to reconfigure

itself. At this point (chapter 22) we learn that O.R Tambo wanted to shift the political centre of the ANC from exile to South Africa, for that he coined and implemented Operation Vula headed by Mac Maharaj. The operation injected new life into the ANC's underground units, brining command, co-ordination, connection and communication (p. 143). Moe asserts that this brought a sense of "professional revolutionary ethic" (p. 144). As Operation Vula was at risk with the security branch, a necessary counter attack proved that Operation Vula was in full swing and the ANC had power to dismantle the regime. As the underground units looked intact, the country edged towards the abyss, the National Party under P.W Botha was under pressure and thus offered to release Nelson Mandela. One would think that the international pressure, sanctions and a civil war looming would stop the Nationalist party and the Security Branch from further killing and arresting people. It seemed that this gave them renewed strength. Chapter Twenty-Four reminds us of a bold and decisive call by O.R Tambo to intensify the struggle on all fronts, this call shifted the balance of power in favour of the ANC. F.W de-Klerk took over in 1989 and as a sign of operating in good faith, negotiated the release of senior political leaders of the ANC. A desperate time indeed calls for a desperate measure, the Nationalist government fuelled black on black violence in the townships, particularly in Natal (were Zuma was deployed to bring peace in the region).

The unbanning of the ANC and other political parties in 1990 was another milestone, many felt that indeed freedom was near, from this point, they felt there was no longer a need to be on the run. The negotiations were to start. This was not the case as the security forces were able to encrypt Vula communications and arrested its leaders (known as the Vula Eight). The media used these communications to paint the ANC as an "enemy of progress" and it was shocking that some within the ranks of the ANC labelled it reckless. This is a good example to show that the ANC always had ideological differences and "the jostling for power within the party led to little attention being paid to the existing underground structures" (p. 163). It seems, the desire for the gravy train long engulfed the ANC, it is sadly too late to self-cleanse. Moe asserts that it was a lonely time for the trialists as the ANC distanced itself from Operation Vula. A time he says, was an opportunity to defend O.R Tambo, after all, Operation Vula was his idea. It was also a time that Moe had to be in hiding as the Security Branch was able to link his involvement. How does the running life continue when

the ANC is unbanned? It was a time Moe refers to as “being on your own”. The ANC had begun eating on its own, it continues to eat and regurgitate many of its comrades today. The decay long started.

From here to eternity:

Negotiations were a confusing time, it was uncertain of whether the Afrikaners can be trusted or even trust the process. Moe reminds here (Chapter 30) that though negotiations were criticised “they were not about surrender of power from one party to another. They were not an option, but a necessity”. The fundamental questions on Amnesty are: Was it an escape route for those ANC members who avoided prosecution? Did the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) achieve its intended objective? Where are we today as the country in terms of reconciliation and forgiveness? Those who received amnesty from the TRC, did so without reflection or remorse for their role in the “dirty war”. The TRC failed to deal with the issues of spies, informers, collaborators and so forth. Chapter 32 covers the Rise of Jacob Zuma. Bringing JZ into the leadership of the ANC and later of the country, was at first considered by many as the smart move, however, at a much later stage, it proved otherwise. When he took over the reigns as the president of the country, he cultivated a relationship with Schabir Shaik which was somewhat economic as opposed to of a relationship being political. At some stage, he allegedly awarded him contracts because of their “*You do me, I do you*” kind of a relationship.

Then came the Mbeki-Zuma battle which I term the last nail to the self-crucifixion of the glorious movement. Moe appears to be soft towards his brothers’ corruption. Coming to his defence on the corruption charges laid against him, Moe clearly attests to this assertion, thereby compromising the impartiality of the narrative. The Mbeki’s “tiki-taka” around the Bulelani Ngcuka’s “spy” allegations at the Hefer Commission of Inquiry, as well as the ANC’s refusal to participate, were deeply unsettling. The politicisation and the factionalisation of the Intelligence, created a dangerous loophole within the ranks of the ANC. It was manipulated by those in power to achieve their own selfish ends (we saw this during Zuma’s reign). The Zuma-Gupta relationship is an example of this manipulation, and while the State Capture commission continues, what has come out is deep corruption. The 2007 Polokwane Conference, marked a crescendo for the entire leadership of the ANC.

Finally, the book uncovers trends of unethical leadership within the ranks

of the ruling party, however, its presentation of the essential realities of the ANC's Democratic rule, is lacking in objectivity and impartiality. Moe left many things unsaid in this book, however it is well written and a necessary contribution to the struggle era.

The teaching of one's country: International experiences in a comparative perspective

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With the resurgence of identity-based populist politics which has intensified over the past decade, the question around the purpose of national history in the school curriculum has once again begun to occupy centre stage. This debate is multifaceted in the sense that on the one side of the spectrum, there are obvious echoes of the 19th century republican nationalist history, evident in Victor Orban's "illiberal turn" towards promoting a "new patriotic education" which legitimises Hungarian nationalism over the past decade (Toomey, 2018). The recent "History Wars" in Great Britain, which has seen politicians and historians on both sides; the left and the right, call for the renewed emphasis on national history, is another example of the popularisation and politicisation of the school curriculum. On the other side of the spectrum, however, there is a discernible shift towards a values-based approach to school History, in which the act of "learning lessons" from the past will produce a socially conscious and morally just generation of active citizens. Both of these interpretations of the purpose of teaching national History at school level, pose urgent intellectual challenges to us all, they provoke reflection on the most essential of historical questions, namely; what is school history for?

A well-organised society, in the words of the late historian Tony Judt, *is the one in which we know the truth about ourselves collectively, not the one in which we tell pleasant lies about ourselves*. Since the emergence