

**Demitrios Tsafendas :  
Race, Madness and the Archive**

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# DECLARATION

I, Zuleiga Adams, declare that '*Demitrios Tsafendas: Race Madness and the Archive*,' is my own work; that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Zuleiga Adams  
6 December 2011



## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the memory of my mother,  
Aanieyah Adams (1925 – 2005),  
whose life required much madness to live.



UNIVERSITY *of the*  
WESTERN CAPE

## Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the archival production on the life of Demitrios Tsafendas, the man who assassinated Hendrik Verwoerd on the 6 September 1966. Through an examination of three different archival registers: the colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid, the thesis tracks the parallel construction of race and madness in these archives. This thesis is primarily concerned with the apartheid period in its phase of 'grand' social engineering. The historiography of this period has traditionally focused on the material manifestations of apartheid social policies. As a result we know a lot about how apartheid impacted on people's lives in the social, political and economic domains. The study attempts to demonstrate how Tsafendas' life places on the historical agenda the need to examine how apartheid as a form of racial rationalism shifted the interior psychic geographies of people. Tsafendas' life unsettles the traditional questions posed by South African historiography. These questions have been concerned with how people's destinies were shaped by class, race or gender. Through an examination of the life of Tsafendas, I hope to ask very different questions than those posed by traditional historiography. This thesis asks: what can 'madness' tell us about apartheid? It makes a case for an examination of creative works on Tsafendas and how these works illuminate the relationship between identity, history and the psyche.

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## Acknowledgements

Some time in the year 2000, I came across an article about Demitrios Tsafendas in the newspaper. I cannot recall which newspaper, but the article itself had made a deep impression on me, and I cut it out and pinned it on my notice board in my office in the History Department at UWC. It remained there for the four years that I taught in the Department. Some years later (not many), in an entirely unrelated incident, my brother-in-law, Rashid Hoeksema, gave me Henk Van Woerden's book on Tsafendas as a gift. I did not read it immediately and I made no connection with the article on the notice board in my office. These two occasions did not connect in my mind at the time.

In 2006 I registered for a PhD but did not have any idea about what my subject matter should be. I spent much of the year overcome with a chronic anxiety for want of a subject matter. In that year the History Department at UWC began a new honours historiography module, *History After Apartheid*. The course was run jointly by Leslie Witz, Nicky Rousseau and Premesh Lalu. I asked if I could attend the sessions as an unregistered participant, in order to find some clarity regarding a subject matter. I thought it would be a good idea to revisit some of the traditional questions that preoccupied South African historians, while at the same time trying to think new questions for a history after apartheid. It was some time in August or September of that year (I am not quite sure), during the course of the seminar discussion, a connection was made in my mind between the discussion and Tsafendas. I received this connection in the form of a flash of recognition, rather than a slow dawning. Excitedly, I scribbled the name Tsafendas across the middle of the page in my hardcover notebook. (I have the evidence for those who doubt the truth of my account). Thank you Leslie, Premesh and Nicky for putting me up, so to speak, in *History After Apartheid*, and I am afraid all three of you are now implicated in this madness.

Having a subject matter was all fine, but I now needed to find a supervisor. brave enough to take on Tsafendas. How was I going to navigate this strange topic into a coherent argument that made sense in terms of a PhD project. Andrew Bank volunteered because he was interested and believed in its possibility. That alone is the first condition for success. Andrew was an unconventional supervisor to say the least. In the early days we would all meet as a group at his house, where our individual projects were discussed collectively. This process I found nurturing and supportive as it lessened the loneliness and isolation that is imposed on one when undertaking PhD research. It allowed one to express ideas differently, outside of the disciplinary regime of academic power relations. Andrew was a very involved supervisor, not only in my work, but also my troubles. A student/supervisor relationship lasts over a number of years when it involves a PhD. During that time many things happen over which one has no control - family problems, financial woes, car trouble, dog injuries. He has been unstinting in his generosity, intellectual and emotional. Every piece of work was engaged with in great depth and detail. Andrew is a rigorous researcher and I hope my work reflects some of that quality.

At the Centre for Humanities Research I found a community of intellectual interlocutors. It would not be an untruth if I say that for me it was there (to cite Derrida) 'where things commence and where men and gods command'. Every thought and idea over the last five years in working on this thesis was in conversation with the ideas and thoughts of those present in the numerous colloquia, seminars, symposia, workshops, and public lectures organised by the Centre, and which sustained me in both my failures and successes. Without it, I would be bereft and impoverished intellectually. I was particularly inspired by the work of Heidi Grunebaum, Charles Kabwete, Suren Pillay, Paolo Israel, Vilho Shigwedha, Patricia Hayes, Annachiara Jung Ran Forte, Jade Gibson, Christian Williams, Noleen Murray, Ciraj Rassool, Jill

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A special feeling of gratitude goes out to Lameez Lalkhen, whose openness and warmth makes the weight of a never-ending PhD seem so much lighter.

I also owe a special indebtedness to the Archives and Public Culture Research Initiative at UCT under the leadership of Carolyn Hamilton and John Higgins. Here I benefited enormously from the method of close reading of texts introduced by John Higgins. I would also like to mention the influence and impact of Jon Berndt, whose sudden and unexpected death in September 2010, robbed us of someone whose humility was matched only by the brilliance of his intellect.

At the National Archives in Pretoria I had to make several trips over the last few years. I am deeply thankful for the help and assistance of Zahira Adams, Natalie Skomolo and Gerrit Wagener. Zahirah and Natalie also helped me to negotiate the confusing Bus and Taxi transport system in Pretoria. Madeleine Fullard provided me with accommodation on my first two visits to the archive and also fetched me from the airport. Without her help it would have been impossible to make these research trips. Thank you Madeleine. Heather Van Niekerk and Stephen Langtree also put up with my eccentric ways in their home often at short notice and without any questions. I thank you both for your generosity. Rafiqua Mosaval also went out of her way to put up with me on numerous occasions in Pretoria and Nelspruit, accommodating my complex travelling arrangements.

At African Studies Library at UCT, I am grateful to Sue Ogterop who allowed me unguarded access to Liza Key's Film archives and arranged to have those tapes that could not be viewed on video, converted to DVD format. I also thank Freddie Ogterop, whose work on these film archives is invaluable and essential for research.



Lionel Davis and Markus Solomon 'took' me with them to Robben Island in 1966, when Tsafendas was held there. I was privileged to encounter in them a generation of activists swept up in the madness of 1960s South Africa, just as I was caught up in the madness of 1980s South Africa. The encounter gave me much cause for reflection. Reno Spanoudes gave me insight into what it means to be, and not to be, in a country like South Africa that is obsessed with the fixity of being.

This thesis would not have been possible without a Fellowship from the Ford Foundation. I am particularly grateful to Ms Louise Africa and Tholakele Khumalo from the African American Institute responsible for administering the fellowship program in South Africa. I have found the workshops and training sessions immensely helpful. But most of all, the experience of meeting and being with a group of fellow cohorts from the length and breadth of South Africa, has been most valuable.

It is not always easy when one's life is no longer tethered to a cause (as mine was for most of the 1980s up to mid 1990s) to find a justification for one's existence. When one complicates that further by re-orientating the substance of one's intellectual questioning and endeavours, away from the 'hard questions' to investigate seemingly inconsequential ones, you find yourself in serious trouble. In the early stages of this research I used to whisper about it to people. With time I grew more confident and bolder, slowly revealing the nature of my enquiry. That process was helped along by Donald Parenzee who never doubted the importance of Tsafendas as a worthy subject of investigation and its profound relevance to understanding the human condition. He has become as 'tethered' to it as I have. It has impacted on his life as much as on mine, and everyone who has been through a PhD, understands the toll it takes not only on oneself but on the person living with

you on a day to day basis. He has also given much needed practical support in the last three weeks without which I would not have completed on time.

Finally this thesis has been marked by the imprint, or as Derrida would have it, the impression, of my family, who in turn has been marked, profoundly, by the imprint of apartheid and its madness. To Mariam, Hassiem, Fuad, Kariema, Abieda, Imraan, Faldielah, Nazier, Nazeema, Rashid, Nadeema, Rudi, Shafiek, Zainab and their children I say Shukran.



## Introduction

### Memory, Archives and Madness

When I began working on this thesis, its subject matter always called forth a spontaneous remembrance on the part of any person I happened to be in conversation with. The contexts of these remembrances varied so widely and the recollections were so distinct and detailed that I began to wonder about them. They seemed to come from what I now regard as a submerged recess of memory, whether the person was a political activist, an Islamic intellectual, a casual acquaintance, an old friend, a family member, or a fellow dog walker. At some point I thought I should begin to record all of these stories and do something with them. One of the things that struck me about these stories was the deep presence in people's consciousness of the day that Verwoerd was assassinated. Yet nowhere, in the contemporary excess of post-apartheid memorialisation, was there public acknowledgement of the importance of this event, or of the person responsible for its execution. In the litany of events remembered during the apartheid era, Hendrik Verwoerd's assassination has received scant consideration among scholars. Yet it was one of the most dramatic political events: public, bloody, and violent. A photographer from the *Cape Times* who captured the event on camera, was seized upon immediately by security police; his camera and film was confiscated. That the event has left a deep *impression* on the minds of individual South Africans is without doubt, but the memory of the event has been consigned to a kind of psychic archive.

What is also clear is the rigour of the *repression* of the memory on the part of the apartheid government. The massive staged spectacle of Hendrik Verwoerd's funeral was designed to obliterate the traces of his bloody and violent death. After the summary trial, his assassin Demitrios Tsafendas was locked up in a cell, specially constructed for him on Robben Island. The authorities went to great lengths to prevent any contact whatsoever between

him and other prisoners. From Robben Island he was secreted off to a cell under the stairway that led to the hanging chamber in Pretoria Central Prison. There he could hear the crashing sound of the gallows every time someone was hanged. The labyrinth of corridors and gates leading to this section of Pretoria Central, described by many who had been on death row, and those who visited prisoners there, ensured that he was hidden deep within the recesses of the apartheid state's prison system. The mode of Tsafendas' imprisonment was designed as a form of concealment and with it the memory of Verwoerd's bloody and violent assassination. This concealment of the event becomes a metaphor for a kind of psychic repression, which compels one to think more closely about the relationship between the individual psychic archive (memory impression) and the public memory of events consigned to print in the form of an archive.

Demitrios Tsafendas is largely absent in South African historiography. Not a single scholar in the discipline has considered his life or his actions worthy of detailed historical analysis. Yet there is a substantial body of archival material on Tsafendas, most of which is kept in the National Archives in Pretoria and the South African Police Museum in Pretoria. Madness in South African historiography has been consigned to the archives and to the study of institutions for the insane. Yet South African history, as both J.M. Coetzee and Julie Parle have pointed out, has been a history marked by collective madness.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis is an attempt to address this silence. It argues that the silence is a product of a repression that connects the individual psychic archive and a society's collective forgetting. It is the connection between these two forms of memory and forgetting that Jacques Derrida brings into focus in his seminal study *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1998).<sup>2</sup> Derrida connects the collection of memory imprints, or impressions stored, or recorded by individuals in the unconscious as described by Freud's psychoanalysis, as a

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<sup>1</sup> J.M. Coetzee, 'The Mind of Apartheid: Geoffrey Cronjé (1907- )', *Social Dynamics*, 17(1), pp.1-35, 1991; Julie Parle, *States of Mind: Searching for Mental Health in Natal and Zululand, 1868-1918* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007). See especially her 'Introduction', for a discussion of this point.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

kind of psychic archive, and the memory impressions recorded in print (imprinted) in paper archives. On the one hand, Freud's work on the unconscious, the 'Freudian impression', is a work on archival impressions on the psyche, itself structured like an archive; on the other hand, archives, another kind of 'impression', of ink on paper, represent the repressed, collective memory of society, an imprint that resembles the unconscious in structure. Psychoanalysis therefore, Derrida argues, 'proposes a new theory of the archive'.<sup>3</sup>

Freud's work on the unconscious treats the unconscious as a psychic archive that functions like a prosthetic aid to memory. Freud's work (*The Freudian Signature/Freudian Impression*), opens up a psychoanalytic reading of the concept of the archive and of historiography.<sup>4</sup> Derrida begins his reflections on the archive with a note about the history of the word archive. He traces the concept back to the Latin term 'arkhe', which incorporated two principles or orders: those 'of time and place', those 'of beginnings and the place of the law'. The concept of the archive, he tells us, forgets this history. The word archive can be thought of as a shelter for the memory of this history. Writing as the first impression on paper is the originary forgetting; printing is therefore an archiving machine that institutionalises forgetting. In its Greek genealogy, on the other hand, the word archive derives from 'arkheion', a place of domicile of a senior magistrate, a keeper of the law, a custodian of official documents authorized as its sole interpreter. The magistrate is therefore also the keeper of the *memory* of the law; the archives speak the law, but only because it has been placed under 'house arrest'. The very term 'archive' is thus associated with a process of repression, of consigning documents to an authority which has power over them. It is thus a form of repression. Derrida argues that any theory of the archive must include a theory of 'the law which begins by inscribing itself there and of the right which authorises it'.<sup>5</sup>

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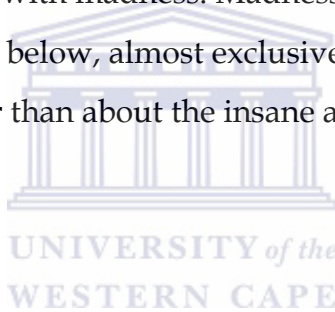
<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 4.

'Let us not begin at the beginning,' says Derrida at the beginning of *Archive Fever*. Rather let us begin 'with the archive of so familiar a word', archive. Likewise, we might consider exploring the archive of the word 'history'. *The Book of Words* tells us that 'history' is derived from the words *historia-* and *histor-* which refer 'to knowing'.<sup>6</sup> The same book tells us that 'to know' means 'to hold in the mind', 'to be clear in the mind', 'to have experience of', 'to understand', 'to recognise'. These words - mind, understand, experience, recognise - come together in the concept 'to remember' which, according to Derrida, writing cannot accomplish. To write is to forget.

How then does history in South Africa 'write' the forgetting of Tsafendas? This thesis argues that South African historiography has consigned Tsafendas to oblivion, partly because of its incapacity to deal with madness. Madness in South African historiography has been written, as I will argue below, almost exclusively in terms of the history of the institutions for the insane rather than about the insane as historical actors in their own right.



### **An ethnography of the archive**

For some scholars, the value of Derrida's contribution lies in its opening out to 'the historical subjective, the realm of emotions, feelings and experiences that clearly affect the ways both individual and social pasts and presents are understood, but whose access lies elsewhere than in the archive'.<sup>7</sup> It is this 'affective register' that interests anthropologist and historian Ann Stoler. She argues that reading 'along the archival grain' can tell us about 'the anxieties' that animate the production of documents. In an article published in the edited collection, *Refiguring the Archive*, she argues for an approach that treats the archive as 'an *ethnographic site*', by examining its processes of production rather than treating it as a thing in itself. Scholars need to pay more serious attention, she says, to the

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<sup>6</sup> Gordon Stowell, ed., *The Book of Words: A Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language*, 3 vols. (London: The Waverley Book Company, [n.d.]).

<sup>7</sup> Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, *Archives, Documentaion, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2007, 2.

'content that lies in the form', 'to prying open the cultures and conventions of documentation' so that a clearer picture emerges around what impelled the creation of the archive and what was/is the logic of its existence.<sup>8</sup>

She develops these insights in more detail in her book-length study on the Dutch colonial archive in the East Indies. Here she explains that she is less interested in how documents 'serve as stories for a colonial history' than in their role 'as active, generative substances with histories, as documents with itineraries of their own'.<sup>9</sup>

Against the sober formulaics of officialese, these archives register the febrile movements of persons off balance - of thoughts and feelings in and out of place. In tone and temperament they convey the rough interior ridges of governance and disruptions to the deceptive clarity of its mandates.<sup>10</sup>

The Dutch colonial archives are, on her reading, sites of anxiety where, rather than reading for the 'absence or ubiquity of knowledge' one looks for the partial and incomplete comprehension that it registers. These archives are '[l]ess documents to the force of reasoned judgment than to both the spasmodic and sustained currents of anxious labour that paper trails could not contain.'<sup>11</sup> Scholars working in or with archives need to 'pause at the hands and habits of those charged with the writing, recording, sorting, and proliferation of documents ... [at] the tone and tenor of a reprimand, a dismissal, or praise.'<sup>12</sup>

Too often, in the eagerness to read against the grain, to mine the archive for hidden truths, and to deconstruct the fixed format of official prose, scholars are blind to the epistemic fissures that these documents belie. Rather than simply evincing evidence of bias, archives could be looked upon as 'condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety'.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Laura Ann Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form' in Carolyn Hamilton et al, *Refiguring the Archive* (London, Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Laura Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, p.20.

In the brutal immediacy of a murder, in the panic of an impending attack, in the anxious rush to fulfill a superior's demand for information (and for proof of one's vigilance), in the concerted effort to avert disaster, words could slip from their safe moorings to reappear unauthorized, inappropriate, and unrehearsed. These are not *outside* the archival field. Nor are they outside the grids of intelligibility in which those documents are lodged, but rather the subjacent co-ordinates of, and counterpoints within them.<sup>14</sup>

In this thesis I attempt to apply Stoler's concepts of 'reading along the archival grain' and of an ethnographic approach to archives to two broad bodies of archival documents relating to Demitrios Tsafendas: what I term the apartheid archive (Part I) and the post-apartheid archive (Part II). Tsafendas' an-archic life imposed a feverish rhythm on the documentary corpus that accumulated as police and politicians exerted themselves in efforts to contain the consequences of a potentially explosive event. The creation of an archive here begins with a high-profile police investigation of a political assassination. Paper trails across Southern Africa, between South Africa, Europe and America (while governments deliberated whether to cooperate with the apartheid regime's police), generated an archive outside of the mundane rhythms of state functioning. This archive was generated by an exceptional event, requiring exceptional measures to obtain information.

The thesis tracks the emergence and construction of this apartheid archive on Demitrios Tsafendas, the man who assassinated Hendrik Verwoerd, Prime Minister of South Africa between 1958 and 1966, and generally regarded as the chief architect of apartheid. It examines the different modes of archival production on Tsafendas, which were the result of the work of different organs of state: the police, the judiciary, and the prison. The police investigation, led by the head of the Security Police, Major-General Hendrik van den Bergh, provided the genesis for the whole documentary corpus on Tsafendas, as it tracked the life of the assassin across different continents over a span of twenty years. Within two days Van den Bergh declared the investigation over. Tsafendas' an-archic life had left a copious paper trail of its own, and it was not that difficult to piece together a picture of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 23-24.



him. But what drove the pulse of the police investigation was to establish if Tsafendas had acted as part of an organized political grouping.

The judicial process, on the other hand, generated an archive that took shape at a slower pace, and was driven by very different imperatives. It contains the trial record and the records of the Proceedings of a Commission of Enquiry.<sup>15</sup> Judge-President Beyers, who presided over Tsafendas' trial, made it clear to Advocate Wilfred Cooper, appointed to defend Tsafendas, that the latter would 'swing' unless he were found to be insane. The thrust of his defense was therefore a case for insanity: an attempt to prove that Tsafendas was unfit to stand trial as a result of being 'mentally disordered'. This summary trial lasted four days and generated some three hundred pages of documents, most of which were taken up by the expert testimonies of psychiatrists.

The assassination and the trial, separated by forty days, were highly dramatic events. While the security police tried to keep a lid on information until they were certain of Tsafendas' motives, newspapers conducted their own investigations to take advantage of this major scoop. The Summary Trial only begins in October 1966. Newspapers at the time carried verbatim reports of the trial proceedings. In Chapter One I track changing representations of Tsafendas between September and October 1966, when the Summary trial begins. It examines what these changing representations tell us about madness, race and identity. It argues that the assassination, in the context of a beleaguered white South Africa, produced anxieties about policing the boundaries of whiteness.

The second set of documents produced by the judicial organ of the apartheid state, the Commission of Enquiry, was the most comprehensive of the apartheid archives on Tsafendas. Stored within twelve A4-size boxes in the National Archives in Pretoria, it

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<sup>15</sup> There is also what I refer to as 'The Trial Archive', which contains all the documents relating to the summary trial of Tsafendas which took place between 17 and 20 October 1966. It includes documents relating to the Security Police investigation. So far I have been unable to trace these documents. I am still waiting for the Department of Justice to get back to me regarding my PAIA application. However, some of this documentation, including the trial record and some documents collected by the security police have been inserted into the Commission of Enquiry folders.

incorporates documents from the police investigation and the summary trial. The making of this archive is explored in detail in Chapter Two. This archive also informed a number of the creative works published on Tsafendas, which are explored in later chapters. These records of the Commission of Enquiry have had a productive afterlife, resurfacing in the form of a post-apartheid secondary archive.

A third set of documents that is housed in the National Archives under the Department of Correctional Services also exists. When I realised that Tsafendas had spent a total of thirty-one years in prison, I enquired about whether there were any records of his imprisonment. I had to apply for a special request under the Provision of Access to Information Act (PAIA) legislation to view these records. I was not allowed to view the originals and only after the names of private individuals and prison staff had been blackened out was I allowed to view a set of photocopies. The prison archive on Tsafendas is a collection of documents that is archived under the Department of Correctional Services in the National Archives in Pretoria. It covers his time in Pretoria Central and Robben Island. It covers administrative aspects of his internment and includes newspaper clippings regarding his treatment in Prison.

This archive is the subject matter of Chapter Three. The focus of this chapter is not so much the administrative details of his incarceration, but the letters that Tsafendas wrote while in prison. Written over a period of twenty-three years while he was kept on death row, these letters give us a unique insight into how Tsafendas made sense of his life experiences. During this time, he was kept in solitary confinement. He was not allowed contact with other prisoners, access to newspapers, the radio or television (when it was introduced in South Africa in 1976). Certain privileges that long-term prisoners had, such as the permission to study, did not apply to him. Initially he was also not allowed to receive visitors or write letters to family or friends.

However, for the duration of his imprisonment he wrote many letters to the prison authorities, requesting permission for certain medical treatments, study privileges,

visitation rights, and books. He appealed to officials to contact his family for financial assistance so that he could buy provisions from the prison stores. At times he was remarkably bold in his requests, using these requests to express his opinions in no uncertain terms, on a number of matters. The subject matter of these opinions ranged from the quality of the clothing provided by the prison stores, to German engineering feats during the Second World War. In addition to expressing his opinions, he requested dictionaries, encyclopedias, study materials, and books of a very specific kind. Most of his requests were not approved of course.

The letters are also a kind of barometer for his fluctuating emotional states. There were times that it was clear that he lapsed into depression. Here his voice seems to falter and he does not even bother to try and find words, abruptly ending with 'I have nothing further to write'. Most important, these letters give us Tsafendas in all his rationality *and* irrationality, which coexisted in equal measure. Toward the mid 1980s, when he had a sense of the changes to come, he signed his letters 'Mimikos Demitrios Tsafandakis Von Willem De Kanhume', embracing the variety of his ancestries with a remarkable clarity of consciousness.

The dearth of historical scholarship on Tsafendas is almost matched by the surfeit of archival sources on him. However, Tsafendas as a character has proved a fertile inspiration for the production of creative and imaginative works. These include a documentary film, four plays and a biographical novel, all of which, but for two of the plays, were produced under post-apartheid conditions, and together, form a kind of secondary archive on Tsafendas. This is not surprising, as literature, theatre and film have always been more adept and comfortable with domains of experience that cannot always be articulated within the rational paradigms of historical knowledge. It is not so much the consciously enunciated domains of knowledge, such as class, race and gender that they privilege. They work with the understanding that emotion is a crucial determinant of subjectivity, by

taking the unconscious seriously, and acknowledging, in the substance of their work, the human need for fantasy.

The records of the Commission of Enquiry have provided the basis of research material for the above works. This thesis explores ways in which these works, as a secondary archive, constitute a form of memorialisation of madness. It asks: how do the works of Henk van Van Woerden, Liza Key, Reno Stapanoudes, Anton Krueger, Anthony Sher and William Tanner undermine the disciplinary effects of the archive? Do they offer an opportunity for a new statement? These questions are explored in Chapters Four to Six, which are interlinked by the question of identity. The recurring theme that runs through these works is the question of identity and race in the colonial and apartheid context of Southern Africa. Tsafendas is enigma and muse for their creative imagination. For Liza Key, it is the multiplicity of selves, 'sailor, communist, Christian, freedom fighter', that intrigues her; for Van Woerden, it is the migrant, who lives in 'a state of inveterate unease'; for Krueger and Spanoudes it is a question of 'having something of everything but not a lot of anything'; for Sher it is the demon inside, the psychic remainder that haunts our sense of a coherent self. These works all explore in one way or another, 'the loss of psychic ground'<sup>16</sup> that results when race and identity do not cohere in a society where race plays a fundamental role in the process of subjectification.<sup>17</sup> Madness is explored as the container for that loss.

What this thesis seeks to explore is how an anomalous character, such as Tsafendas, who cannot simply be understood in terms of subalternity imposed by class, race or gender, challenges historian and archivist. He is neither victim nor beneficiary; neither hero nor villain of the liberation movement. When he died in 1999, Van Woerden tells us how the South African government tried to keep the event as quiet as possible. The memory of the bloody and violent death of Verwoerd was once again repressed. It is this repression that the literary and creative archive on Tsafendas attempted to undo.

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<sup>16</sup> Jaqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 7.

<sup>17</sup> See discussion on pp 212 - 219.

## The Historiography of Madness in South Africa

The subject of madness in South African historical literature has been approached as that of a history of the institutions for the insane. Rather than inquire into the subjectivities associated with madness, scholarly concern has, almost exclusively, concentrated on the ways in which institutions have 'disciplined' the insane, and how the insane have been subjected by discourses of race, class and gender. This scholarship has been situated for the most part within the fields of the social history of medicine, in particular psychiatry, and the history of medicine and empire. Here scholars have made important contributions to our understanding of the relationship between race and madness, particularly during the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century in South African history. This has been identified as a decisive phase in the management of madness and the construction of racial categories and practices. Through an examination of the role of asylums in the colonial period, scholars have paved the way for similar studies to be conducted of the apartheid period though this literature has yet to emerge. While this thesis is not directly concerned with the history of psychiatry in the colonial or apartheid period, these works do throw important light on the construction of madness in South Africa. They also serve to highlight the differences between my approach towards the subjects of race and madness, and the existing literature. In this section I will examine some of the most important works in some detail and suggest some of the contributions that this thesis seeks to make in relation to them.

Robben Island, Valkenberg Psychiatric Hospital in Cape Town, and medical institutions in the Eastern Cape and Natal have been the subject of the most intensive research mainly in the form of unpublished doctoral and masters theses.<sup>18</sup> Most of these works have drawn to

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<sup>18</sup> See Harriet Deacon, 'A History of Medical Institutions on Robben Island, Cape Colony, 1846-1910' (Ph.D. Thesis, Cambridge University, 1995); Sally Swartz, 'Colonialism and the Production of Psychiatric Knowledge in the Cape, 1891-1920' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1996); Felicity Swanson, 'Colonial Madness: The Construction of Gender in the Grahamstown Lunatic Asylum, 1875-1905' (Hons Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1994); Felicity Swanson, "'Of Unsound Mind" : A History of Three Eastern

various degrees upon Michel Foucault's classic study, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in An Age of Reason* for their theoretical paradigm.<sup>19</sup> It is therefore necessary to say something about this work before proceeding to discuss the regional literature that draws upon it.

Foucault traced the beginnings of the confinement of the insane in Europe to the institutionalisation of those who 'are idle' because of sickness, disability, poverty, unemployment, or insanity. This disparate group came to be housed together in places of confinement set up by the state at its own expense. He argues that these places were set up because of an emergence of a new discourse around labour and idleness. In the early industrial period 'work' was regarded as essential for the development of a proper moral character. Work was also viewed as a 'corrective measure', as punishment for 'the reform of the soul'.<sup>20</sup> The seventeenth century, or what he refers to as the 'classical age' or the 'age of reason', created 'enormous houses of confinement' throughout Europe where 'madmen' were assigned the same status as the unemployed, the idle, the criminal, and the indigent. The *Hôpital Général* was established by royal decree in Paris in 1656, not for medical purposes, but as part of the state assuming responsibility for those of its citizens who could not fend for themselves. Besides their responsibility to 'feed and lodge', the institution had to ensure the 'general order' of those confined there. The administration was entrusted to directors whose powers included that of policing, arrest, correction and punishment.<sup>21</sup> This institution ushered in 'the bourgeois order' in the area of state administration, and gradually replaced an older ecclesiastical authority in the 'politics of assistance' in relation to the 'poor', the 'criminal' and the 'insane'. A royal edict of 1676 extended this Parisian model to the whole of France.<sup>22</sup>

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Cape Mental Institutions, 1875-1910' (M.A. Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2001); Julie Parle *States of Mind: Searching for Mental Health in Natal and Zululand, 1868-1918* (Scottsville: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press, 2007).

<sup>19</sup>Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in an Age of Reason* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

In England and German-speaking countries, 'the age of confinement' saw the creation of houses of correction. Workhouses in England made their appearance in this period.<sup>23</sup> The issue that most interested Foucault was what he saw as 'the unity' that existed between the period that brought these institutions into being (the classical age), and the 'heterogeneous elements' confined behind its walls. What informed the 'social sensibility' common to European culture that lay behind the order of confinement? What was the 'articulated perception' that emerged over many years that began to manifest itself in the second half of the eighteenth century, and that lay behind the isolation of people in a certain category, destined for confinement? <sup>24</sup>

Foucault then demonstrates that this confinement, which reached its height in the eighteenth century had nothing to do with medical treatment. It had nothing to do with humanitarian ideals either, in his analysis. He argues instead that the social order of this period was deeply threatened by the large numbers of unemployed and an increase in mendicancy. Confinement was aimed at suppressing begging; its primary objective was to make those who are confined 'work'. It was this 'imperative' to labour that made confinement necessary. Before the establishment of the Hopital General, beggars and the indigent were subject to a regime of banishment and exclusion. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, they were taken in charge, at the expense of the nation but at the cost of their liberty'. <sup>25</sup>

It was this imperative to labour that eventually led to the separation of the insane from the indigent, because the mad could not be made to work. 'They distinguished themselves by their inability to work and to follow the rhythms of collective life'.<sup>26</sup> When the reformers in England and France, Tuke and Pinel liberated the mad from the prisons and asylums, and introduced moral management as a regime of control, it was to discipline the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 41-42.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 54.

frenzy inherent in the mind of those deemed mad. The mind of the mad person was lost in 'an excess of liberty', which external shackles were had failed to restrain. The retreats established by the pioneers of moral management were aimed at channeling the mind into useful tasks that constrained excess by routine, regularity and attention to detail.<sup>27</sup>

Foucault's elaboration of the development of psychiatric regimes of control and the emergence of a culture of separate confinement of the insane has been used as the basis for an examination of the emergence of mental hospitals in South Africa during the nineteenth century in particular. These studies situate the history of South African mental institutions within a continuum that begins with the emergence of the practice of 'moral management' during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in Europe, and then extends to the colonies.

Harriet Deacon was one of the first scholars to draw directly on this Foucauldian model in her research on the history of Robben Island, even though it is situated within the field of the social history of medicine. Most of her work is concerned with a critique of disease as narrowly biomedical in definition. She explores the processes associated with the social construction of disease and the role they played in social control. Her doctoral dissertation was part of a growing sub-field of the social history of medicine in empire.<sup>28</sup> Here scholars are interested in examining the ways in which western medical discourses shaped, and were shaped by, institutions in the colonies. Particular attention is paid to the 'politics of hospital provision' and the impact of social, political and economic factors on 'colonial medical theory and practice'.<sup>29</sup>

Her work on the history of Robben Island's medical institutions in the nineteenth century also draws attention to the role of colonial doctors in shaping ideas about race, poverty and disease, a departure from earlier historical research into the origins of the modern

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 234-236.

<sup>28</sup> See especially Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> Deacon, 'A History of Medical Institutions on Robben Island', 1.



public health system in South Africa which has emphasised the impact of the discovery of minerals and its link to segregation, disease and sanitation. She argues that colonial doctors from the early-mid nineteenth century played an important role in the making of the 'colonial order at the Cape' and in the construction of a 'colonial discourse on blackness, poverty and disease'.<sup>30</sup> Institutions in colonial societies drew on contemporary discourses on deviance, especially in England where workhouses, asylums, prisons, hospitals were crucial in the moral management and moral reform of those considered deviant.<sup>31</sup> She situates the construction of colonial asylums in the Cape Colony within the broader history of the professionalisation of psychiatry and the medicalisation of insanity, but also within the changing history of racial attitudes and racial practices. She concludes that: 'The colonial insane asylum had less to do with state control, than with policing social and racial boundaries.'<sup>32</sup> Racial segregation of institutions on Robben Island is shown to have preceded the segregation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Cape Town. She thus points to the key role of medical discourse in the implementation of segregation policies within institutions, and its consequences for the introduction of racial segregation more broadly in South African society of the late nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> Like Saul Dubow's seminal work on scientific racism,<sup>34</sup> she is interested in the exchange of knowledge about race and the body between the empire and its peripheries. Like Dubow, she argues that the colonies did not merely serve as laboratories for the testing of established scientific and medical theories about racial difference, they both contributed to, and refuted, established theories about health, disease, healing and race.

Sally Swartz's work on the history of Valkenberg takes up largely where Deacon leaves off, around the 1890s. Her doctoral dissertation, based in the discipline of psychology,

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 14 -15. Here her work dovetails with other work on colonial asylums elsewhere in the British Empire (see footnote below).

<sup>33</sup> Harriet Deacon, 'Racial Segregation and Medical Discourse in Nineteenth-Century Cape Town'. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 22, No.2, June 1996, pp 287-308.

<sup>34</sup> Saul Dubow, *Illicit Union: Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press, 1995).

focuses on the history of Valkenberg Mental Hospital and examines its emergence as a site for the production of knowledge on insanity and race. She locates her dissertation within three contexts: the history of psychiatric knowledge and practice; the medical and social history of the Cape; and the history of colonialism and the relationship between institutions in the metropole and those in the colony. Opened in 1891, Valkenberg was the first racially segregated asylum in the Cape, part of a project to reform asylums according to the standards of 'modern asylum practice'.<sup>35</sup> The early history of Valkenberg corresponds closely with the early history of the reform of both asylum practice and lunacy legislation, as well as with the emergence of psychiatry as a new and specialist field of knowledge and practice.<sup>36</sup>

Swartz concentrates on the period between 1891 and 1920, when 'psychiatric knowledge developed a distinct identity from general medical knowledge'. This was also the period in which, under the influence of Dodd, Cape colonial psychiatry began to establish 'its identity and difference from the mother country'. It did so, she argues, through its racial practice and the development of a racialised discourse on insanity.<sup>37</sup> It was in her view psychiatry in particular, rather than general medicine, that made significant contributions to scientific racism.<sup>38</sup> 'The tension of empire here was expressed by, on the one hand, the extension of modern, humane reforms for the (white) insane, and on the other hand, the same reforms (for example the increase in accommodation for the insane), being used to separate the black and white insane. The reforms thus benefited the white insane, while discrimination against black patients actually increased.'<sup>39</sup>

Swartz has also documented how the treatment and institutionalization of the black insane reveals an obsession with fears of racial contamination. She shows how colonial psychiatry disregarded the 'interior mental life' of black patients, where being 'black' explained

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<sup>35</sup> Swartz, 'Colonialism and the Production of Psychiatric Knowledge', 12.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

'insanity'. Colonial psychiatry disregarded the cultural and social diversity of black patients and the range of diagnostic possibilities. 'The native was childlike and primitive, hence the nature of mental illness mirrored the "natural childlike innocence" of the primitive. Those institutionalized were insane in the same terms that they were black.'<sup>40</sup> White patients, on the other hand, were perceived as having a more complex nervous system, the causes of mental illness as having a more varied aetiology.<sup>41</sup> They were regarded as individuals with frail sensitivities. It was therefore necessary to separate patients, not only on the basis of gender and the nature of their illnesses but also according to race. The early history of psychiatry in South Africa thus reveals an obsession with race and the separation of black and white insane.

Foucault's study, however, is not simply a structural one that only focuses on the governmentality of institutions for the insane. He is also concerned with the symbolic universe that madness, as a state of being, inhabited. Scholars who have drawn on *Madness and Civilisation* tend to neglect the ideas in those chapters of his book where he traces the changing symbolism that madness occupies in the European imagination from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance to 'the classical age'. Here he discusses how the cultural and social symbolism attached to the figure of the leper was transferred to the madman. The disappearance of leprosy and leprosariums at the end of the Middle Ages, he argues, did not mean that the cultural and social symbolism attached to the figure of the leper vanished. The meanings and forms of exclusion associated with leprosy was transferred to the figure of the 'madman'. In the religious worldview that was so powerful in the Middle Ages, the leper was both evidence of God's wrath as well God's grace.<sup>42</sup> His illness was punishment for his sins, and thus his existence was witness to the existence of God. His salvation was his exclusion.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Sally Swartz, 'The Black Insane at the Cape, 1891-1920', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21, 3, 1995, 415.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 414.

<sup>42</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

Leprosy was a kind of beckoning of the world beyond – the scourge of the leper was death incarnate: his ravaged face was compared to the death mask of the skeleton. The leper was endowed with biblical mythology: his illness was his burden to carry as evidence of God's existence. With the disappearance of the leper, the madman enters the European imaginary landscape at about the time of the Renaissance in the fifteenth century. Madness invades works of literature, art, and theatre as the reason for all forms of excess: romantic, heroic, the pursuit of knowledge, the intellectual. Medieval society did not treat madness as a disease or illness. The mad were not confined to hospitals or places of confinement. Instead they were banished to the margins of the town's limits, allowed to roam freely in the countryside.

Foucault also shows how death, and the anxiety it provoked, was a constant theme in works of art in the Middle Ages. The world's end, and that of man, haunted the imagination of painters such as Durer, Bosch and others who gave expression to the fears about what constitutes death and its aftermath. This began to change from the middle of the fifteenth century, as the theme of madness began to replace the obsession with death. Madness tamed the fear and terror that death inspired by rendering it comic. The comic grimace of the madman mocked and imitated the grin of the skeleton; it showed that life itself is but a farce, empty and meaningless. Hence death is robbed of its power; it is dispersed throughout every facet of existence. 'Madness is its [death's] vanquished presence.'<sup>44</sup>

Madness becomes the evidence of providential power over life. Whereas before, the end of the world was evidence of man's sins (his madness as opposed to wisdom), now it was madness that 'invokes and makes necessary the world's end'.<sup>45</sup> In the early Renaissance period, a multiplication of meanings invaded the traditional religious symbolism in painting. The crucifixion of Christ, for example, was no longer merely a contemplation of divinity and martyrdom, but of torture, violence and the beastliness within human nature.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 14.

The 'mad beast' is set free from the garden of Eden to 'reveal the dark rage, the sterile madness that lie in men's hearts'.<sup>46</sup>

This, I feel, is a useful starting point for a re-examination of the way in which race and madness can be thought about in South African history. Benefiting from these insights means that serious cognisance must be taken of the diverging and converging worldviews about those considered mad. The problem with focusing only, or overwhelmingly, on the structural emergence of institutions and the discourses associated with them is that insanity is only grappled with from the perspective of a rationalist paradigm. Julie Parle is probably an exception here. Her doctoral research and the published book based on this research, *States of Mind*, takes seriously 'the states of mind' that result when people, in times of immense social upheaval and confusion, are subjected to severe stress.<sup>47</sup> She draws on the writings on the history of psychiatry in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as the work on madness and colonial asylums within the British Empire. Her focus is twofold: on the one hand, a history of the Natal Government Asylum, and the corresponding emergence and establishment of psychiatry as the dominant paradigm to understand and treat mental illness, but on the other, and this is what sets her study apart, the variety of strategies adopted by those in search of solace from the 'anguish' that resulted when 'family members became mentally disturbed'.<sup>48</sup> Her focus, unlike Deacon and Swartz, whose research concentrates on the Cape Colony, is colonial Natal in the period between 1868 and 1918. She explores what she refers to as the 'medical pluralism' that existed in the colony, where Africans, Indians and Europeans all made use of a range of curative and healing paradigms in search of relief from mental distress. She considers the role of 'diviners, psychiatrists, herbalists, priests, quacks, biomedical doctors, spiritual healers, naturopaths, soothsayers, purveyors of mail-order medicines, and more'. What drives her research is an interest in how 'ordinary South Africans from all walks of life -

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>47</sup> Julie Parle, *States of Mind*, 25.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 128.

African, Afrikaner, Indian and colonists from Europe and elsewhere - came to understand mental illness and to decide on its appropriate treatment'.<sup>49</sup>

While she is critical of Foucault's analysis, questioning whether the notion of 'a Great Confinement' is applicable to South Africa, one could argue that her focus on ways of understanding madness and therapies of healing outside a rational western medical discourse, shares something with Foucault's approach in *Madness and Civilization*. Foucault discussed in depth the way in which madness was understood in the Middle Ages, before the advent of psychiatry, and how this understanding changed over time. In his chapter on 'Passion and Delirium' he described importance given to the role of the 'passions' in understanding the development of madness. This role was understood differently in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries respectively. In 1772, for example, Sauvages wrote in his *Nosologie Methodique* that the incapacity to control human passion, such as anger, melancholy or grief, as well as the indulgence of excesses of desire (in eating and drinking for example) were the real causes of madness.<sup>50</sup> These beliefs corresponded to the structure of medical knowledge in this period, but changed during the course of the nineteenth century.

Parle's study is of particular value for the link it draws between individual 'states of mind' and the impact of particular historical events of great social upheaval. She reminds us that it was the First World War, whose horrific butchery drove many men mad, that provided the real impetus for the growth of psychiatry in the twentieth century.<sup>51</sup> Madness, she suggests, emerges in the individual under conditions of great duress produced by historical events of great social and cultural upheaval. It is this theme that receives important consideration in Jonathan Sadowsky's *Imperial Bedlam*,<sup>52</sup> a work which resonates

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>50</sup> Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, 85.

<sup>51</sup> Parle, *States of Mind*, 25. It was the First World War that provided a new direction for Freud's work and for his theories of trauma and the unconscious.

<sup>52</sup> Jonathan Sadowsky, *Imperial Bedlam: Institutions of Colonial Madness in Colonial Southwest Nigeria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

in important ways with Parle's work. Writing on asylums in colonial southwest Nigeria, Sadowsky makes an important contribution to the substantial literature on asylums in colonial Africa. *Imperial Bedlam* concentrates, however, more on the experience of madness in Nigeria's asylums than on the history of these asylums in the narrower sense. It probably shares more affinity with works on colonialism and madness, a field that has grown substantially since the publication of Megan Vaughan's work on the Zomba Lunatic Asylum in Malawi.<sup>53</sup> Like Parle, he is concerned with the medical pluralism of indigenous healing practices. Yoruba understandings of madness, he writes, are not based on a 'closed belief system' but on deep 'empirical practice'. Its response to change and exposure to different practices is therefore pragmatic. As Parle has shown in the case of Kwazulu Natal, the confinement in an asylum was one of many options used by families.<sup>54</sup> While there is a distinction between madness and other forms of ill-health, in Yoruba medical practices, the concept of health embraces both mind and body. It recognizes a wide range of causes of insanity: physical, religious/spiritual (the role of certain deities), bewitchment and possession. Healing practices therefore embrace 'a combination of ritual, consultations with the family members, and herbal medicines'.<sup>55</sup>

He rejects the notion of a neat dichotomy between Yoruba practices and psychiatry:

Asylums were sites of a kind of 'creolisation' of pathology ... where what Vaughn has called 'idioms of Madness' were not so much African, European or universal, but specific to colonial Nigeria. Nigerian asylum inmates were not simply mad according to Yoruba standards or those of western medicine. Rather these cultures - immensely complex and contested in themselves - were in a process of

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<sup>53</sup> Megan Vaughan, 'Idioms of Madness: Zomba Lunatic Asylum, Nyasaland, in the Colonial Period', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 9, 3, April 1983, 218 -38). For the historical literature on other parts of Africa, see F. Leyland Bell, *Mental and Social Disorder in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Case of Sierra Leone, 1781-1990* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991); Lynnette A. Jackson. *Surfacing Up: Psychiatry and Social Order in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1908-1968* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, 'The Madman and the Migrant; Work and Labour in the Historical Consciousness of a South African People', *American Ethnologist*, 14, 1987, 191-209; L. McCulloch, *Colonial Psychiatry and the 'African Mind'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). For India see W. Ernst, *Mad Tales from the Raj: The European Insane in British India, 1880 -1858* (London: Routledge,1991); J.H. Mills, *Madness, Cannabis and Colonialism: The Native-Only Lunatic Asylums of British India, 1857 -1900* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

<sup>54</sup> Sadowsky, *Imperial Bedlam*, 13.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

interaction; the insane in colonial Nigeria were insane according to the polysemic standards of a colonial society with many cultural values in interplay.<sup>56</sup>

While he is skeptical of Fanon's claim that colonialism produces mental pathology, Sadowsky is persuaded by Fanon's contention that the colonial experience 'determines the symptoms and content of the pathology'.<sup>57</sup> His approach is to pay close attention to the articulations of madness, as 'there are fertile ways of listening to them which enrich historical sensibility'.<sup>58</sup> The study of insanity, he argues, gives us insight into 'a wider social history'

... not because the mad are exemplars of a social context (such as colonialism), but precisely from their anomalous status. The mad are people whose perceptions of reality are deemed faulty. Their stories can therefore illuminate perceptions of reality, and when their cases are ambiguous, show ways in which perceptions are challenged.<sup>59</sup>

I find his claim for the forms of rationality or enlightenment in madness suggestive, again in ways that echo Foucault. Tsafendas too is an 'anomalous' figure. He demonstrates both rationality and irrationality; he is deluded many times, but the content of his delusions, like that of Davis Beresford Pratt, who tried to assassinate Verwoerd in April 1960 (and whose story I address in a later chapter), were deeply embedded in their time. Pratt thought of himself as the person who 'received a message to shoot the stinking monster of apartheid [that] was preventing South Africa from taking her place among men'.<sup>60</sup>

Tsafendas believed that Verwoerd was 'against the English way of life' and the Commonwealth with which he identified because 'his mother was English'. He told Dr. Sakinofsky that Verwoerd was in league with the Portuguese government who had kept him in a prison for fourteen years where they tortured him with electric shocks. Asked by Dr Sakinofsky, 'who is he against now?', and why he was so concerned about Verwoerd's meeting with Chief Leboa Jonathan, he replied:

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>60</sup> See Chapter One.



I am against Verwoerd – he is a foreigner – because he is a Nationalist and he hasn't got the people behind him. I see no progress for the African people. There is something spiritual in me ... I thought of Jonathan and Basutoland and other things. That wasn't the only thing ... I thought this thing has gone too far ... they have made an ideology of it – the sexual part of it too – the Immorality Act telling you who you can't marry ...<sup>61</sup>

Tsafendas had lived in Colonial Mozambique, Portugal and South Africa. All three places were ruled by highly repressive regimes. Portugal was ruled by a military dictatorship under Salazar until 1975. That same regime was imposed on the Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. That Portuguese colonial rule was one of the most brutal and violent is well documented in the literature on colonialism and the anti-colonial movements. Tsafendas' delusions or semi-delusions were certainly intelligible when read in their historical contexts.

### **The Politics of Delusions and the Blindness of Insight**

Insight, psychologists tell us, is the precondition for the healing of a damaged psyche. Understanding, the capacity to make sense of our condition, is the path to psychic redemption. For conventional psychiatry, any recourse to magic or religion as a means of explaining our psychic ills and/or as a means to procure relief for our suffering, is not. For Demitrios Tsafendas, all six psychiatrists who testified in court, agreed that the prognosis was poor, because he had no insight into his condition. He persisted with his delusion: there was 'a worm' inside him that needed to be removed. This worm, demon, dragon, snake had 'destroyed his personality'. He refused 'to take holy communion', as it would make the devil inside him 'holy'. This worm was responsible for his killing of Verwoerd. He blamed 'African witchcraft' for implanting the worm inside him.

Had he acted as part of an organized political grouping, Demitrios Tsafendas would have been celebrated at the time and now as a venerated hero of the anti-apartheid struggle. But

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<sup>61</sup> Dr I Sakinofsky, 'Psychiatric Report on Demetrios Tsafendas', 7 September 1966'. K150, Kommissie van Ondersoek na die Omstandighede van die Dood van Sy Edele Dr. H. F. Verwoerd, 1966: Vol. 6, 'Navrae gerig aan verskillende instansies en persone', File 3. Also see Chapter Two.

he acted as a lone man without any clear political agenda. According to the doctors, he acted out of irrational impulses and was driven by insane delusions. Some of these delusions were recounted in court: Verwoerd was a foreigner, whereas he Tsafendas was a South African; his mother was a member of an overseas Royal family, Von Willem ('Ask Prince Philip', he writes to Gordon Winter in 1976, 'he will give you more details and a better description')<sup>62</sup>; the Portuguese government had imprisoned him because he was a conscientious objector. Furthermore, since he was not a Roman Catholic, they tried to change him into one by altering his brain, using a transformed radio, a 'graphanola'. According to Tsafendas, this instrument had already been used in a number of murders in Lisbon that had been 'hushed up', including the killing of the son of a banker. Dr Sakinofsky consulted no fewer than eight Portuguese - English dictionaries and could not find the word there. He concluded that the word is a neologism - a word made up by schizophrenics.<sup>63</sup>

This man, who referred to the killing of the Prime Minister as 'this little matter', the doctors proclaimed, was out of touch with reality. This man - who declared that after 'this little matter' he would not be able to live in Cape Town, because of 'public opinion' - was unable to comprehend the graveness of the situation that he found himself in. In reply to Dr Harold Cooper's question as to why he visited so many different countries, he replied that 'I was thinking of making ends meet by eating different kinds of food.' Demitrios Tsafendas was 'in a world of his own'. His grasp of reality was such that he 'is not in the same world as we are'.<sup>64</sup> Demitrios Tsafendas, the psychiatrists were convinced, was clearly in 'a state of fantasy'.

Both Jacqueline Rose and J.M. Coetzee have drawn attention to the question of the delusions that inform political history. Rose draws our attention to the two sides of the

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<sup>62</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>63</sup> 'The State Versus Demitrios Tsafendas', Cape High Court, testimony of Dr Ivan Sakinofsky. K150, Volume 10: Uitreksels uit getuienis. Also see Chapter One.

<sup>64</sup> K150, 'Uitreksels uit getuienis': Testimonies of Dr Harold Cooper and Dr Abraham Zabow. Also see Chapter One.

meaning of the word 'state' in her *States of Fantasy*.<sup>65</sup> In its political connotation, the word 'state' signifies certainty, authority and control: 'psychic mastery' as she terms it. The second meaning indicates almost the opposite: to be in a 'state of mind' or to be 'in a state' suggests 'a loss of psychic ground', a state of confusion, even madness or chaos.<sup>66</sup>

Ostensibly no two individuals embodied these opposite meanings of the word 'state' as obviously as Hendrik Verwoerd and Demitrios Tsafendas. But both 'states', Rose reminds us, are linked by fantasy. Freud had already made it clear that fantasy plays an important role in the political imaginary. It is through fantasy that group identification is made possible. In fact, fantasy, Rose argues, 'is its precondition, its psychic glue'. Fantasy, she asserts, 'fuels the unconscious dreams of nations'.<sup>67</sup> Verwoerd's fantasy was to mould South African society into pure, impermeable racial identities through a political program of racial rationalism and to establish authoritative mastery over the dangers of racial contamination. Here Breyten Breytenbach's account of the 'states of fantasy' governing the behaviour of the Security Police in *Albino Terrorist* is apposite.<sup>68</sup>

Tsafendas, the doctors tell us, was driven by paranoid fantasies. One of his fantasies was to have an open identity in a state where race classification determined one's destiny. After all, was he not, as he told Gordon Winter in 1976, a 'cosmopolitan man' with 'English, German and Greek blood flowing through his veins'. Another of his fantasies was to advocate, 'let the races mix, then we will all be bastards ... we will see a new race develop'. After all, had science and evolution not shown that the wider a gene pool the healthier the species. Long before Desmond Tutu introduced into South African public discourse the idea of the 'the rainbow nation', Demitrios Tsafendas, the madman and schizophrenic, had declared that in Mozambique, under Portuguese colonial rule, the flag should have all the colours of the rainbow to symbolize all the different races in the

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<sup>65</sup> Jaqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> Breyten Breytenbach, *Albino Terrorist*, 46-51.

country. Depending on which way one looks at it, Tsafendas was either delusional or a man ahead of his times. What is clear is that he was not a candidate for a starring role in the drama of the anti-apartheid struggle, one fought by sane, rational men and women with rational methods toward rational political ends.

As he was found to be insane, Tsafendas could not be tried and could not be held responsible for the death of Hendrik Verwoerd. The apartheid regime, nevertheless, exacted its psychic revenge. Instead of being sent to a mental hospital, which was what the law decreed in cases of insanity, he was placed in the Maximum Security section of Pretoria Central Prison, Section C (for white prisoners), in solitary confinement for a period of 23 years and denied any human contact except with his prison warders. This was also the section in which prisoners condemned to death were held. He was kept close enough to the death row section, perhaps to be reminded what his fate should have been were it not for the civilised mercy of 'a highly civilised country'.<sup>69</sup> The periodic reports on Tsafendas, year after year, simply repeated the following: prognosis poor; persists with his 'delusion [*waangedagte*] of the worm'.

Perhaps historians should heed Rose's argument to place 'fantasy at the heart of our political vocabulary'.<sup>70</sup> J.M. Coetzee takes this even further when he places madness at the heart of apartheid history and politics. In a discussion of the work of Geoffrey Cronje, he examines the personal madness that informed his writings, and which were celebrated by Afrikaner intellectuals, academics and politicians for its cogent elaboration of apartheid policy. Cronje was, along with Verwoerd, part of a generation of Afrikaner intellectuals who had studied in Germany and Holland in the 1930s, returning to South Africa to take up leading positions within academia. Their delusions, Coetzee argues, were forged in the context of massive social change in the urban areas of South Africa. Large-scale urbanization in the cities drove the poor of all races into the same spaces and the spectre of interracial relationships became a norm, losing its phantom quality. The intellectuals of the

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<sup>69</sup> Judge Beyers, Judgement in the Trial of Demitrios Tsafendas cited in *Cape Times*, 21 October 1966, 3.

<sup>70</sup> Rose, *States of Fantasy*, 4.

Afrikaner Nationalist movement, he argues, developed their own fantasies in response. For the historian he poses a set of challenging questions. 'In what ways may historiography have to extend the terms of its discourse in order to take account of the irrational forces in social life?'<sup>71</sup> If one steps outside the terms of the liberal/revisionist debate, which is also a debate about the rational versus irrational bases of apartheid, is it possible to entertain the idea that apartheid was a form of madness, the origins of which lie in the demons that possessed the 'men who invented and installed apartheid?'

If madness has a place in life, it has a place in history too; the indifference of South African historiography to the question of madness, and the tacit consensus in the social sciences that while madness – like what used to be called the illegal bantu – may be conceded to have place in society, this is ontologically a place apart, a non-place that does not entitle madness a part in history, should arouse in us nothing but the deepest mistrust, and cause us to redouble, rather than abate our efforts to call up the demons of the past.<sup>72</sup>

In an examination of the life and work of Geoffrey Cronje, one of the most important intellects in the articulation and development of *thinking* apartheid as idea and practice, he shows how a combination of personal pathology and historical crisis led to a displacement of the pathology onto the body politic. Cronje's writings focused on the dangers of 'blood mixing', to which he dedicated an entire chapter 'Die Bloedvermenging' in his first published book, *'n Tuiste Vir die Nageslag* (1947).<sup>73</sup> For Cronje, coloureds constituted a very particular danger as it was easier to say 'what they are not than what they are'.<sup>74</sup> Since many can pass for white, they marry into the white race introducing 'native characteristics'. He presented a number of solutions, all of which were eventually taken up as policy by Nationalist politicians. Besides the banning of mixed marriages and residential segregation, as far as immigration was concerned, he recommended that 'immigrants be screened for blood purity'.<sup>75</sup> This vision of *Rasse-apartheid* was more fully elaborated in a book of the same title to which he contributed three chapters. Through a

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<sup>71</sup> J.M. Coetzee, 'The Mind of Apartheid', 1.

<sup>72</sup> Coetzee, 'The Mind of Apartheid', 2.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

combination of literary analysis and Freudian theory, Coetzee argues that the metaphors employed by Cronje were symptomatic of an excessive fear of contagion by an anal-obsessive neurotic who was repelled and fascinated at the same time by 'the mixed, the breaking down of boundaries, the dissolution of difference'.<sup>76</sup>

How do we think about the madness of Cronje and Verwoerd in relation to the madness of Tsafendas? Was there not more insanity and delusion [*waangedachte*] in the writings of Verwoerd than in the prison letters of Demitrios Tsafendas which I examine in detail in a later chapter? By what criteria do we judge, or has history judged, Tsafendas as mad and Verwoerd as sane?

This thesis is an attempt to open up these questions by exploring the ways in which different sets of documents and different creative imaginations of authors have attempted to make sense of the madness and sanity of Demitrios Tsafendas. It is neither situated within the social history of medicine and psychiatry, nor is it a study of the history of insanity in South Africa. It presents no detailed history of the institutions within which Tsafendas was confined. What it is concerned with is the connection between politics and madness, and seeks to explore the complex ways in which this connection manifests itself in the life of the individual. Many people were driven mad by apartheid: in some cases, that madness was 'productive'; in other cases, it has been destructive. In still others, the boundaries between the two have been profoundly blurred.

### **Demitrios Tsafendas: a condensed biographic profile.**

In a folder of Volume Three of the Commission of Enquiry documentation in the National Archives in Pretoria there is a document, marked Aanhangsel F, entitled 'The contents of Briefcase belonging to D. Tsafendas. This list consists of ninety-nine items and is three pages long. The items on this list include immigration documents, rent receipts, pay-slips,

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 22.

deportation orders, driving licenses, savings books, hospital and clinic cards from cities that included Pretoria, Athens, Lisbon, Jerusalem, Frankfurt, London, Cape Town, Brussels and many more. The bewildering nature of this assortment of documents and places they emanated from, stands in sharp contrast to the extremely ordered meticulousness of the inventory list compiled by the South African Police. If Tsafendas' biography presented a challenge to the archivist whose task was to bring order to his anarchic existence, for the researcher, reading these documents was a no less mystifying and confounding experience. Throughout this thesis his life story is not revealed in a single biographic stroke, but emerges as scattered traces. In the chapters that follow he appears rather like a burglar in the night, to break open disciplinary boundaries and our sense of academic order. As an anchoring device, I offer here as briefly as is possible, a biographic profile of Tsafendas, the details of which he himself provided in a statement to the police on the 11 and 12 September 1966.<sup>77</sup>

Demitrios Mimikos Tsafandakis (Tsafendas) was born illegitimate to a mother that he never knew. All that is known about Tsafendas' biological mother, Amelia Williams, is that she had a German father and a Swazi mother, and was regarded as a mulatto in colonial Lourenço Marques. His father, Michaelis Tsafandakis was born on the Greek island of Crete in 1885, but the family moved to Alexandria in Egypt. Both Greece and Egypt were part of the Ottoman Empire at the time, and it was not uncommon for its subjects to migrate freely across the Mediterranean. From there, Michaelis emigrated to South Africa, and moved to moving to Lourenço Marques in 1916. He began a liaison with Amelia, who was in his employ as a domestic worker. A year after Tsafendas' birth she disappeared and Michaelis Tsafandakis was left to care alone for the young Tsafendas. In the mean time, as was common custom among Greek immigrants all over the world, a marriage was being arranged for him by his family in Alexandria. His bride to be was

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<sup>77</sup> See 'Demetrio Tsafendakis @Tsafendas States'. K150, Volume 3: Suid Afrikaanse Polisie, Subfile, 1/5, Aanhangsel B; 'Die Geskiedenis van die Persoon Wat die Wyle Dr. Verwoerd die Dodelike Wonde Toegedien het deur Kolonel E. G. McIntyre Opgestel'. K150, Subfile 1/5, Aanhangsel A.

Marika Sakelis from the Greek community in Port Said, Egypt. On the advice of a neighbour (according to Van Woerden), Tsafendas was sent to live with his paternal grandmother in Alexandria, Egypt so as not to burden the young bride with a young child that was not hers. When his grandmother became too frail to look after him, his father fetched him and brought him back to Lourenzo Marcues at age seven. Tsafendas did not adapt well to his new surroundings or new family, and his father decided to send him to a boarding school in Middleburg, Transvaal.

When Michaelis experienced financial difficulties during the Great Depression, Tsafendas was taken out of the boarding school in Middelburg and placed in an Anglican mission school. He lost interest in school and began working while attending night classes at the Portuguese Mission School in Lourenzo Marques. In 1935 he made his first application for permanent residence in South Africa, but his application was turned down. It was about this time that he discovered the identity of his mother (see chapter 4). He then entered SA illegally in 1936, and occupied a number of short-term positions before he was deported back to Mozambique. In 1937, his father, stepmother and their four children applied and were granted permanent residence in SA. Tsafendas applied again unsuccessfully, and again entered SA illegally in 1938. He attended Progress College for three months, training as a welder, and worked for a while for the British Mining Supply Company, doing 'essential war service'. He left for Cape Town in 1941, where he boarded a Greek Merchant Ship, the S.S. Livanos as a mess boy.

When the ship docked in New Brunswick, Canada, he left the ship but was arrested by Canadian authorities. He was then detained, first at Montreal and then Halifax. He then escaped, with two other seamen and crossed the St Croix River into the United States. He was arrested by the U. S. coast guard authorities at Bangor, Maine, and detained for contravening U.S. immigration laws. It was then that he became sick and was admitted to the Boston Psychopathic Hospital. From there he was transferred to the Metropolitan State Hospital in March 1943. In August of the same year he was discharged and placed on the



S.S. Pilory. When this ship returned to Boston, Tsafendas then accepted service on a number of Liberty ships until the end of the war ( See Chapter 4). In February 1945 he was placed on the Greek Maria Nicolao for deportation, but returned to New York on the Robin Locksley in December 1945. In February 1946 he was placed on the Hood Victory, but returned on the same ship. During this period he became ill a number of times and was admitted to the American Army Hospital in England, another hospital in Charleston, South Carolina, and New York's Ellis Island Hospital. When he returned on the Hood Victory, he was admitted to the Grafton State hospital in New York. He remained there until 27 September 1947 he was placed on the S.S. Marine Jumbo and deported to Greece.

In Greece he obtained work as a translator with an American post-war reconstruction project 1949. He obtained a refugee passport and travelled to France, Spain, and Portugal in search of work. In Portugal he was arrested, as his refugee passport was not recognized. He was detained for six months for refusing to do military service. When he was released, he was not allowed to leave the country, but was granted permission to trade as a hawker, selling embroidery and other items to tourists. When he tried to leave Portugal again in 1953 on his refugee passport, he was arrested again and detained for a year at Fort Casias. It was during this period, according to Tsafendas, that he was given electric shock treatment.

After his release he was issued with a Portuguese passport, and travelled to Germany, where he became ill and was hospitalised at the Oxenzoll Krankenhaus for six months (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 4) and from Germany he went to Sweden, Denmark, and back to Germany. He returned to Portugal and stayed there until 1958, resuming his trade as a hawker. He visited the Brussels Trade Fair to sell his embroidery but was unsuccessful 'because of Chinese competition'. When his trade as a hawker failed, he obtained work in Germany where he stayed until 1959, when he left for England. In England he was hospitalized again on the Isle of Wight. The British immigration authorities then deported him to Germany.

According to Tsafendas, he wanted to get back to Southern Africa and decided to go to Egypt via the Balkan States. From Piraeus he went to Alexandria, where the Egyptian authorities arrested him and placed him on a boat to Beirut. From there he visited Palestine and Turkey where he obtained work teaching English. In 1961 he made his way back to Portugal via the Balkan states passing through, Bulgaria, Greece (where he visited his father's relatives in Crete) Italy and back to Portugal.

In 1962 the Portuguese government granted him amnesty to return to Mozambique. He returned to Lourenço Marques on Board the *Principi Perfecto* in October 1963. In November he obtained a permit for temporary sojourn to enter South Africa and travelled from Komatipoort to Pretoria with his stepmother and stepbrother. Back in South Africa after two short spells of employment, he left for Rhodesia in July 1964 to visit his sister. From there he went to Malawi, back to Rhodesia and then to Mozambique. In March 1965 he arrived in Durban by ship. In Durban he was employed in a number of jobs, one of which was a court interpreter. From Durban he travelled to Cape Town via Port Elizabeth.

He arrived in Cape Town in August 1965 and went to stay with the Daniels family in Belville South, on the invitation of Helen Daniels. Between August 1965 and September 1966, he lived in places such as Observatory, Vredehoek, Woodstock, Lansdowne, Green Point and finally Rondebosch. During this period he worked at Table Bay Power Station, City Tramways, and The Marine Diamond Corporation. He began his job as temporary parliamentary messenger in the House of Assembly on 1 August 1966.

## Chapter One:

# Apartheid State Power and Media Reports on the Assassination of Hendrik Verwoerd and Summary Trial of Demitrios Tsafendas

### Introduction

Historians of the apartheid era in South Africa have traditionally concerned themselves with the economic and social consequences of apartheid and racism. Volumes have been written on the material consequences of forced removals, migrant labour, influx control, and industrialisation. Inequalities resulting from apartheid laws have generally been quantified in terms of race, gender and class. The internal psychological dynamics of race have generally been left to the disciplines of psychiatry and psychology as well as the fields of literature and cultural studies. However, laws such as the Immorality Act and the Population Registration Act, passed in 1947 and 1950 respectively, did not simply mean heavy-handed bureaucratic state action from above. Citizens and non-citizens actively wrestled with these laws and remade themselves 'white', 'coloured' or 'black' in efforts to avoid what they perceived as the worst consequences of official classification. The 1960s in South Africa was, among other things, a decade of race-making by the state., its citizens and non-citizens.

The life story of Demitrios Tsafendas opens up the possibility of a different way of thinking about the identities constructed through race in South Africa. Rather than a traditional focus on blackness, this chapter argues that his story is also about the construction of whiteness in South Africa and policing the boundaries of that whiteness. The Verwoerdian period brought into sharp focus the fragile and unstable quality of 'being white': if whiteness became a legislated category, one could of course become 'white', in the same way that immigrants became citizens of a country having met the required legal conditions. Tsafendas' life

raises questions about the relationship between race, nationality and citizenship. What were the implications of 'being white' if one was at the same time, 'Greek', 'Mozambican' and 'Portuguese'?

Tsafendas provided a link between the meanings attached to race, rationality and a 'civilised' society in a country governed by racial rationalism. When Judge-President Beyers pronounced Demitrios Tsafendas insane and a 'meaningless creature' that he could no more bring to trial than he could 'a dog or an inert implement', he was delivering judgement on more than just the actions of a person he called a 'furiosus'.<sup>1</sup> He was pronouncing on how a civilised, rational society treats its madmen, and on what constitutes a rational, civilised and sane society. In a civilised society, to hang a madman would be murder itself.

Yet no society, no matter how 'civilised', could ignore the fact that a man 'with so extraordinary a personal history and so diseased a mind had 'managed to be given the run of the corridors of Parliament'.<sup>2</sup> South Africa was a country known for its extensive network of repressive state apparatus that included one of the most efficient security police forces in the world. How, then, did Demitrios Tsafendas manage to stab its Prime Minister to death in full view of its white parliament?

For the apartheid state, the murder of Verwoerd posed questions about *governmentality*. Tsafendas' whole history defied the rules of the racial rationalism upon which the apartheid state was based. He crisscrossed South African and international borders and mental hospitals. His personal genealogy was the very antithesis of a system where racial laws were tightly designed to

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<sup>1</sup> A 'furiosus' refers (in law) to a madman or lunatic, someone who cannot make contracts because he lacks capacity or will, someone who 'is considered so incapable of exercising a will that the law treats him as absent. See <http://www.law-dictionary> and <http://www.dictionary.babylon.com> Accessed on 24 March 2009. For discussion of the film by this title, see Chapter 5: Film as Testimony: Liza Key's *A Question of Madness: The Furiosus* (1999).

<sup>2</sup> 'Lunatic at large', *Sunday Times* Editorial, 23 October 1966, 16.

eliminate frontier zones between white and black. His very presence in South Africa emphasised the faultlines of an immigration regime aimed at keeping out 'half-castes and communists', as he was referred to in official documentation.

Media reports of the assassination of Verwoerd and the Summary Trial of Tsafendas must be located in the context of a period that was dominated by reports about people being arrested for contravening the Immorality Act as well as the Population Registration Act. There were many stories of families with children who did not 'fit' the official classification of their parents, forcing them to choose between separation and emigration. The popular press was full of stories of reputations destroyed by arrests for legally defined acts of immorality. The other issue dominating the press at the time was Rhodesia and its white minority regime's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI). A beleaguered white Rhodesia, the beginnings of liberation wars against Portuguese colonialism and for Namibian Independence, and Verwoerdian South Africa constructing laager-tight racial identities suggested the presence of a fragile and insecure whiteness in southern Africa.

Tsafendas, more than anyone else, embodied that fragility, not only through his actions, but also because of who he was. A man who could be Greek, Portuguese, Mozambican or Arabic, was difficult to pin down in the Verwoerdian racial lexicon. In another country it would have been a question of what nationality he was. In South Africa the question was translated into one of race: was he white, black or coloured? This question was important, because for him to become South African, to acquire South African citizenship, he first had to be placed in one of the categories which identified people in the Population Registration Act. His racial identity was deemed uncertain and then the focus shifted to the question: *what* was he? Was he a madman, a drifter, a schizophrenic, a

communist, a psychopath, or as the Judge would have it, *'n niksbeduidende skepsel wat 'n nuttelose lewe gelei het'* [a meaningless creature leading a useless life]?<sup>3</sup>

This chapter provides the background for the analysis of the colonial archive and the post-colonial archive in Chapters 2 to 6 of the thesis. It begins by examining the way in which power was exercised by the apartheid state, drawing in particular on the theoretical model set out by Michel Foucault and the writings of Deborah Posel about the operations of racial rationalism. It then provides a detailed reading of newspaper coverage of the days following the assassination of Verwoerd in September 1966 and then of the four-day Summary Trial of Demitrios Tsafendas between 17 and 20 October 1966. I focus in particular on the white English and Afrikaans mainstream press. I refer to it as the 'white press', not simply because it was written for a white readership, but also because it assumed whiteness as self-evident. It addressed readers in a way that took for granted the idea that the world was a 'white world' and that being white was, as Dyer puts it, 'the natural, inevitable, ordinary way of being human'.<sup>4</sup> My interest is in both representations of Verwoerd and in representations of Tsafendas, including the questions around his alleged 'Greek' identity. In the final section of the chapter I compare newspaper reports on the attempted assassination of Verwoerd by David Pratt in April 1960, with that of the actual assassination of Verwoerd by Demitrios Tsafendas in September 1966, which led to renewed assertions regarding the meanings of race, madness and civilised government.

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<sup>3</sup> J.P. Beyers, 'The State versus Demitrio Tsafendas', K 150, Kommissie van Ondersoek na die Omstandighede van die Dood van sy Edele Dr H. F. Verwoerd, 1966, Vol. 10, Leer 2, Hofverslag: Uitreksels uit Getuienis: Judge President Summation, 12-13. Pages 1- 11 of the summary are in English, while pages 12- 14 were delivered in Afrikaans.

<sup>4</sup> R. Dyer cited in Melissa Steyn, 'White Talk: White South Africans and the Strategic Management of Diasporic Whiteness' (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2003), 12.

## The Apartheid State and Technologies of Power

How was it possible for the apartheid state to lay claim to civilised government, relying on the role of experts (psychiatrists and lawyers), while at the same time commanding all the resources of sovereign power at its disposal to enforce a regime of racialised rationalism? This question requires a discussion of the operation of power *within* the apartheid state through an examination of its disciplinary technologies.

For the most part, historical scholarship on apartheid focused on the visible material expression of the exercise of power. The power possessed by an authoritarian state apparatus has typically been analysed in terms of its vertical manifestation – in the way in which it shaped the *structural* conditions of *groups* of people. The liberal/revisionist race/class debate was conducted on the basis of what Deborah Posel has described as an ‘instrumentalist’ view of the state.<sup>5</sup> This tendency, writes Posel, viewed the state, not as ‘an actor in its own right’, but as an agent for furthering the interests of one class or another. She suggests that the vigour and force with which the Nationalist government took control and shaped ‘every facet of life in South Africa’ contributed to a focus on its instrumentality.<sup>6</sup>

In more recent years scholars have begun to draw on the work of the philosopher Michel Foucault, specifically his writings on power and knowledge. The latter has proved useful in studies of the colonial period in South African history. Alex Butchart, for example, draws on the power/knowledge nexus to historicise the relationship between violence and state power in South Africa.<sup>7</sup> Foucault’s

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<sup>5</sup> Deborah Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948 -1961: Conflict and Compromise* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1991), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Posel, *The Making of Apartheid*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Alex Butchart et al, ‘Violence, Power and Mental Health Policy in Twentieth Century South Africa’ in Don Foster, Melvyn Freeman and Yogan Pillay, eds., *Mental Health. Policy Issues for South Africa* (Cape

distinction between sovereign and disciplinary power, as well as his notion of governmentality, has proved highly productive in contributing to a fresh approach to the study of the apartheid state.<sup>8</sup>

Foucault associates sovereign power with that exercised by coercive state apparatuses, generally repressive in character. This kind of power is historically linked to an absolute form of rule (such as that which existed in Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries). Under sovereign rule, crime and punishment were not so much about justice as about power. A criminal act meant a personal act of rebellion against the sovereign. The law represented the personal wishes of the sovereign; hence to break it was to injure the body of the sovereign.<sup>9</sup> 'Sovereign power' depended for its effectiveness on visibility before the populace. Whereas investigations and legal processes were secret, punishment was always conducted in public. Punishment involved an element of spectacle that included the infliction of violence and pain to the body. The most spectacular example of this was the public execution. A hierarchy of the amount and duration of pain and torture exacted on the body of the condemned depended on the seriousness of the crime. The seriousness of a crime was not measured by its violence, but the distance of the crime from the body of the sovereign.<sup>10</sup>

The crime of regicide exacted the most violence on the body of the condemned.<sup>11</sup> The 'people' must not only 'see', but also experience and rehearse the ritual of power embodied in the public execution. The latter was not merely an event, but

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Town: Multimedia Publications, 1997), 236-7. See also Butchart, *Anatomy of Power: European Constructions of the African Body* (London: Zed Books, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> See Posel, 'Modernity and Measurement: Further Thoughts on the Apartheid State' (University of the Witwatersrand Institute for Advanced Social Research Seminar Paper, August 1996); D. Posel, 'What's in a Name? Racial Categorisations under Apartheid and their Afterlife' (Paper presented at 'The Burden of Race? Whiteness and Blackness in Modern South Africa' Conference organised by History Workshop & Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research, July 2001).

<sup>9</sup> M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London, Penguin Books, 1977), 47.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-52.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.



a display of violence in which death was dragged out to simulate the ultimate destination of the condemned: hell. What was on display was the contrast between the puny citizen (with a body of bones and blood) and the massive power of the sovereign (represented by military might), emphasising the futility of rebellion.<sup>12</sup>

With the transformation of European society from a feudal to an industrial society, sovereign power, Foucault argues, was gradually replaced by 'disciplinary' forms of power. This change came about at the end of the eighteenth century. Disciplinary power no longer depends on 'highly visible displays of the state's capacity to command obedience'.<sup>13</sup> It operates throughout society by means of capillary-like networks that extend horizontally rather than vertically. These networks spread from a central authority to reach the individual as the object and subject of disciplinary technologies of state power. Rather than depending exclusively on direct coercive measures, power assumes a discursive character as it works its way into the very thinking processes of the individual, reaching into every domain of the individual's private life. The individual citizen becomes his or her own policeman and that of everyone else. Individuals become 'their own overseers exercising power over and against themselves'.<sup>14</sup>

Drawing on Foucault's distinction between sovereign and disciplinary power, Alex Butchart argues that the South African state exhibited both forms of power during the twentieth century. The early colonial period (from about 1670 to the late nineteenth century) was characterised by the exercise of sovereign power: violence – against indigenous people, against slaves, on the frontier – was the dominant modality for the visible display of official authority. Butchart further argues that South Africa's transition to industrial modernity in the early decades

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>13</sup> Butchart et al, 'Violence, Power and Mental Health Policy', 238.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 238.

of the twentieth century was characterised by periods of both forms of sovereign and disciplinary power. With industrialisation and the increasing presence of large numbers of black people in towns and cities the policing of racial boundaries could no longer be achieved by coercive methods alone. The dependence of white businesses and households on cheap black labour meant that it was not possible to keep Africans out of the intimate spaces of white lives. This was the period that also saw the emergence of the 'black peril': fears that white women would be the target of the 'uncontrolled passions of the recently detribalised urban native'. This period saw the emergence of a new approach in the exercise of power that 'worked less upon the body than into and through it by way of analysing the body's inner dynamics and transforming its previously irrelevant urges and desires into malleable objects of a management strategy directed to the manufacture of docile bodies'.<sup>15</sup>

The pre-apartheid period was thus characterised by a slow but steady growth of disciplinary power which extended the use of science and rationality to a solution of the 'black peril'. For Butchart, this period in South African history is coterminous with the rise of the human sciences, in particular anthropology, ethnology, psychology and sociology.<sup>16</sup> This shift to the use of disciplinary technologies focused largely on the understanding of 'the African mind'.<sup>17</sup> In Butchart's view, the 1960s, however, represented a definitive return in South Africa to a society in the grip of sovereign power. Violence on the part of both the state and its opposition were normalised as legitimate. The year 1960 represented 'a great rupture', a move away from a dependence on disciplinary power and the inauguration of 'overt political violence' on the part of the state:

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>16</sup> Butchart, 'Violence, Power and Mental Health Policy', 240. Saul Dubow in his *Illicit Union: Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) has also documented the rise of an institutional and public intellectual and scientific culture in early modern South Africa. He traces the origins and development of disciplines such as zoology, marine biology, physical anthropology, anatomy, palaeontology and archaeology.

<sup>17</sup> Butchart, 'Violence, Power and Mental Health Policy', 238-9.

This, then, marked the beginning of a time of bombs, guns, bulldozers and brutal tortures, a time for which violence was only nominally a crime in violation of the law, any criminal justice pretensions to the contrary constantly contradicted by daily displays of state violence beating down on African bodies, and those very bodies fighting back with the self same weapons of sovereign power. The apartheid state thus operated through conventional and counter-insurgency warfare, forced removals, assassinations, disappearances, detention and torture...<sup>18</sup>

While Butchart presents a compelling argument for the understanding of some aspects of the apartheid state, his analysis neglects a focus on what Foucault refers to as the 'dispositif' – the apparatus developed by the state in order to govern what is no longer 'the people' but a 'population'. An understanding of the way in which the apartheid state developed and extended the tentacles of disciplinary power is as important to an analysis of the apartheid state, as understanding its use of coercive power. It will also throw some light on the contradiction between the treatment of Tsafendas by the judicial process on the one hand, and his treatment in prison on the other hand. I argue that the apartheid state deployed both forms of power effectively and efficiently: publicly it displayed its adherence to the judicial economy of bourgeois justice; secretly it deployed all the barbarism that characterised the punitive economy of the *ancien régime*.

### **The Apartheid State and Governmentality**

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault describes how, in the shift from sovereign to disciplinary power, the nature of punishment undergoes a change. The execution of punishment became separated from the judicial process and takes on a hidden character. The aim of punishment is no longer pain, but the 'idea' of pain. Punishment takes on a representative, or what he refers to as 'an ideational'

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 238.

quality, the object of which is to inscribe power in the detailed governance of everyday aspects of the penal system. It is the linking of punishment to the effects of a crime rather than the crime itself that rendered punishment into 'a school rather than a festival'.<sup>19</sup> The power of the state apparatus is inscribed in the resources it commands to govern. Governmentality has to do with the way that the institutions and resources of the state are used to manage as rationally as possible (little is left to chance) the population under its rule.

It is this 'governmentality' of the apartheid state that interests Deborah Posel. Taking issue with the overly instrumentalist analysis of both liberal and revisionist historians of South Africa, she argues for an engagement with the apartheid state as an entity in itself, and not merely as a factor in the efficiency of capital.<sup>20</sup> The National Party initiated a major reorganisation of the structures of government, a reorganisation that was not simply about repression. It was about effectivity, rationality, order and control. According to Posel, measurement in the form of statistical knowledge was an important element in this rationality. In this respect it was following a post-war trend in the world at large where the welfare state with its large centralised bureaucracies was emerging. Centralised planning was a key component of modernist influence upon what Posel terms 'statecraft'. If the state was going to govern along these lines, it needed to know its population. For the apartheid state it was important to 'know' the black population, so that it could plan efficiently for its removal where necessary, allocate labour resources in precise proportion to the needs of agriculture and industry, and effect a corresponding distribution of resources in terms of housing and education. The state apparatus that developed to effect a racial reordering of South African society operated with no less efficiency than the organs of state in the most 'modern' of democracies.

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<sup>19</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 111.

<sup>20</sup> Posel, *The Making of the Apartheid State*, 3-5; D. Posel, 'Modernity and Measurement', 4.

It was Verwoerd, as Minister in charge of Bantu Administration, who effectively developed and crafted within his sphere of influence the major ideas that were to influence the operationality of the state. It was not that he or the National Party came with a ready-made blueprint for how apartheid was going to work. Rather, Posel argues, that to implement apartheid as policy meant a reorganisation of the state. And it was the re-organisation of the old Native Affairs Department into a more efficient and modernised Bantu Administration by Verwoerd that was the precursor for the reorganisation of bureaucratic apparatus of the apartheid state as a whole.<sup>21</sup>

Verwoerd opposed those South African Bureau of Racial Affairs (SABRA) officials who argued that whites must choose between total segregation and integration.<sup>22</sup> SABRA also supported the economic development of the reserves so that they would be able to support the whole black population of South Africa. White South Africa, in the interests of maintaining racial purity, had to sacrifice the access to cheap black labour. Verwoerd, however, much more pragmatic in his approach, recognised the impossibility of total segregation because of the dependence of the white economy on cheap black labour.<sup>23</sup> For him it was a question of *managing* the contact zones between black and white to ensure that such contact only took place because of economic necessity. For this to happen the state needed information: accurate statistics that counted the number of black people in the country; the rate of its reproduction; that could predict the labour needs of different sectors of the economy, and estimate the precise labour needs for each town, city or region.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Posel, 'Modernity and Measurement', 14.

<sup>22</sup> J. Lazaar, 'Verwoerd versus the "Visionaries": The South African Bureau of Racial Affairs (Sabra) and Apartheid, 1948-1961' in P. Bonner et al, *Apartheid's Genesis: 1935-1962* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1993), 362-91.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 368.

<sup>24</sup> Posel, 'Modernity and Measurement', 15.

It was in setting up the bureaucracy of the Bantu Affairs Department that Verwoerd sought solutions to these problems. As Posel argues, apartheid was about imposing control and order over the massive and uncontrolled movement of black people into white urban areas. Verwoerd proposed a fairly 'modernist' and extremely technicist solution to 'the urban native problem': 'Your [Bantu Affairs officials] first problem is uncontrolled influx, from which the other uncontrolled conditions arise, and to solve that problem requires that you know your labour needs.'<sup>25</sup>

Posel examines nothing less than apartheid public administration in the making. What becomes clear is that the apartheid government effectively professionalised racialised public administration in South Africa. According to Posel, the apartheid system was a 'hankering for order' that was engendered by the rapid social change that was overtaking the country in the 1940s.<sup>26</sup> Industrialisation in wartime South Africa had led to a massive increase in urbanisation. For white South Africans emerging from the ravages of the Second World War, the trauma of war and all the specific terror that this particular war implied was projected on to the 'swart gevaar'. The components of this 'swart gevaar' were seen to be the breakdown of tribal discipline; loose native women forming itinerant unions; permeable racial boundaries on the margins of society; the social threat of the overwhelming numbers of black over white in the cities; and growing shanty towns giving visual expression to the 'black menace'.<sup>27</sup>

Control over society would be re-established through its reorganisation on the basis of race. One of the first pieces of legislation that the National Party passed was the Prohibition of Mixed Marriage Act (No. 55) of 1949 prohibiting marriage

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<sup>25</sup> Cited in Posel, 'Modernity and Measurement', 16.

<sup>26</sup> Posel, 'What's in a Name?', 2.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 3.

between whites and blacks. This was followed in 1950 by the Immorality Act, which banned sexual relations between blacks and whites. These two pieces of legislation would take care of the problem of biology: stemming the immediate problem of racial interbreeding. But apartheid was also a spatial solution to the problems of racial control of the population.

The Group Areas Act and the Population Registration Act, also passed in 1950, imposed a new atlas on the physical landscape. Social contact between different races would, it was hoped, be reduced to bare necessity. These two measures also re-organised the basis upon which the state organised its allocation resources. Posel put it this way:

Apartheid's ideologues imagined a society in which every race knew and observed its proper place - economically, politically and socially. Race was to be the critical and overriding fault-line: the fundamental organising principle for the allocation of all resources and opportunities, the basis for all spatial demarcation, planning and development, the boundary for all social interaction, as well as the primary category in terms of which this social and moral order was described and defended. Clearly then, the political project which ensued was inseparable from the imagining of race and racial difference, and the rationality implicated in it.<sup>28</sup>

The Separate Amenities Act, passed in 1953, provided for the separation of all public amenities including beaches, cinemas, theatres, public toilets, buses, trains and hospitals. Where there were not enough facilities for the different race groups, separate entrances in hospitals, or separate seating arrangements in buses were introduced. Together with the laws of 'grand apartheid', these measures enshrined in so-called 'petty apartheid' did not have 'petty' consequences. They produced new modes of knowing the self and its others. Individuals who did not 'fit' into the categories of the new order were forced into a frontier zone between black and white. Racial mapping had implications for the mapping of other social anomalies: the mad, the sick, the poor, the

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<sup>28</sup> Posel, 'What's in a Name?', 3.

unemployed, the criminal, and the sexually aberrant. It constantly placed the state's resources under duress, leading to an ongoing fashioning of new technologies of governance. The apartheid state drew extensively on the institution of the Commissions of Enquiry to produce new knowledge by expert professionals that confirmed their own status as truth producing and the state as truth seeking.

### **Reports of the assassination in the White English Press: September 1966**

During the first week after the assassination of Hendrik Verwoerd, media reports across South Africa's political spectrum focused on the death, mourning and funeral of South Africa's Prime Minister. Eulogies poured in, extolling the late Prime Minister's statesmanship and moral character. While many disagreed with his political views and policies, few denied that he was a man of 'great intellect and moral stature'. On the day of his funeral, Saturday 10th September 1966, many newspapers dedicated entire centrespreads to the funeral ceremony and procession. Photographs of the funeral, the grieving widow, dignitaries, the procession and his burial in Heroes' Acre in Pretoria, graced the front pages of all the major newspapers. White South Africa, it seemed, was a nation united in mourning.

By Tuesday 13 September a new Prime Minister had already been chosen by the National Party's caucus. Media focus now shifted to the new incumbent, Balthazar John Vorster. Within days of Verwoerd's death, media reports had begun speculating on a possible successor. After the choice of a successor was announced, media attention began to shift from Verwoerd and the politics of succession, to the man who had been responsible for his death. Once Verwoerd



was safely buried, and the country had a new leader at its helm, the South African press was ready to confront the 'mad Greek'.

Impressions of Tsafendas began to emerge as obscure details about his life were made public. *The Argus* published two photographs of Tsafendas together with a picture of a knife identical to that used in the killing of Verwoerd.<sup>29</sup> *The Cape Times* reported on his 'strange and untidy behaviour';<sup>30</sup> that he had been 'popular and very funny' during his schooldays;<sup>31</sup> that he taught English in Turkey;<sup>32</sup> that an erstwhile foreman in Frankfurt had described him as 'jolly and friendly';<sup>33</sup> that he had once been involved in a brawl in a canteen in Johannesburg;<sup>34</sup> that he was on another occasion refused entry into Israel;<sup>35</sup> and that he was 'a drifter, an outcast' and 'in turmoil all his life'.<sup>36</sup>

The day after Verwoerd's funeral the *Sunday Times* published the most detailed information on Tsafendas to date. One of its sources of information was an affidavit which Tsafendas, according to journalists M. Levin and S. Belfort, had commissioned a firm of attorneys to draw up in preparation for legal action against the United States government. Under the headline "Tsafendas in Sworn Affidavit tells of "20 years of suffering"", the newspaper published the full text of the affidavit. In his affidavit Tsafendas had claimed damages worth 100,000 dollars from the U. S. Government for failing to send him back to South Africa in 1947, and instead deporting him to Greece. The result of his deportation was an enforced 20-year existence of wandering from one country to another, homeless and penniless.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *The Argus*, 8 September 1966, 19.

<sup>30</sup> *The Cape Times*, 7 September 1966, 1.

<sup>31</sup> *The Cape Times*, 8 September 1966, 2.

<sup>32</sup> *The Cape Times*, 8 September 1966, 1.

<sup>33</sup> *The Cape Times*, 8 September 1966, 14.

<sup>34</sup> *The Cape Times*, 9 September 1966, 15.

<sup>35</sup> *The Cape Times*, 9 September 1966, 1.

<sup>36</sup> *The Cape Times*, 12 September 1966, 1.

<sup>37</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 11 September 1966, 7.

Readers were also informed that 'the assassin' was a 'man with a chip on his shoulder' and had spent time in a mental hospital in the U.S. In two different articles he was described at once as 'a violent sort of person' and then as someone who 'never displayed violent tendencies'. During his stay in Durban he 'appeared to have no men friends or women friends'.<sup>38</sup> On the following page a report of an interview with Anastasios Michaletos in Lourenco Marques told readers of how as a young boy Tsafendas 'looked like a Coloured' and 'had frizzy hair and a sallow skin', and of how he 'was shunned by the white community' and 'was not a Greek', but 'a coloured born out of wedlock to an African woman befriended by Tsafendas' father, Miguel Tsafandakis.' As a child of 13 or 14 he 'did not go to school and did not work', but 'whiled away his time in the company of Africans.'<sup>39</sup>

Amidst reports of Tsafendas' Greek origins, fears of reprisals against South Africans of Greek descent increased markedly. This led to a number of public statements by various individuals and organisations, as well as a senior police official on the allegations about the Greek identity of Tsafendas. A delegation of members of the South African Greek community gave the Minister of Justice, Mr B.J. Vorster an assurance that Tsafendas 'was not of Greek origin and was in no way connected to the Greek community, [and] that the Greek community has conducted a full investigation and has found that Tsafendas is completely unknown to the community and its members.' These statements were echoed by the Consul for Greece in Cape Town, Mr. A. Kalios, who gave assurances that 'Tsafendas was not a Greek subject and was not registered with any of the Greek consulates in the country.' Another consular official suggested instead that 'Tsafendas was in fact a Portuguese citizen who is reported to have held four

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<sup>38</sup> 'Assassin - man with a chip on his shoulder', *Sunday Times*, 11 September 1966, 7. 'Mental patient, says U.S. report', *Sunday Times*, 11 September, 7.

<sup>39</sup> 'Shunned when a boy as a coloured', *Sunday Times*, 11 September 1966, 8.

Portuguese passports, was born in Lourenco Marques and spent some time in Portugal. He is not of Greek origin at all.' This was followed by a statement by a spokesman for the Hellenic Community in Cape Town:

We are greatly perturbed by the fact that the assassin seems to have a Greek name. Actually the name is the only indication that he might be of Greek descent, as he is completely unknown to the community and its members. He is also unknown to the Greek priest and has never attended any religious service or social function.<sup>40</sup>

The Greek language newspaper *Africanis* did not report on the assassination, but carried an article on the front page of its 13 September issue commenting on 'Press reports [that] Dimitri Tsafendas, the alleged assassin, was reputed to have a Greek name'.

The Chairman of our Community Advocate P.A. Paizes, accompanied by the Honourable Secretary General, Mr G. Kirkins, flew to Cape Town and obtained an interview with the Minister of Justice, Advocate B. J. Vorster and Lieutenant-General Keevy who is in charge of the investigations. As a result of this interview, General Keevy issued a statement to the effect that the people of South Africa were warned not to take reprisals against any section of the community and that Tsafendas was not, and had never been, a member of the Greek Community of South Africa. This statement was broadcast on Thursday evening and subsequently publicised in the Afrikaans and English newspapers, which also reported that Tsafendas was a Portuguese national born in Lourenco Marques.<sup>41</sup>

Once the last remaining doubts about Tsafendas' 'Greekness' had been eliminated, his 'abnormalities' began to take centre stage. The *Sunday Times* informed its readers that Tsafendas had been 'puzzled' by the Biblical prophecy that predicted the death of Josias, a king in the Old Testament.<sup>42</sup> The article described the prophecy in detail as recorded in the Old Testament, but readers were not given any more information about what it was that had 'puzzled' Tsafendas. What was newsworthy was that 'the killer' was 'disturbed' by the

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<sup>40</sup> 'Vorster gives Greeks Assurance', *Sunday Times*, 11 September 1966, 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Africanis*, 13 September 1966, 1.

<sup>42</sup> 'Biblical doom prophecy puzzled killer', *Sunday Times*, 11 September 1966, 6.

death of a 'king' foretold by a prophetess. Readers were left with the impression that Tsafendas might have been motivated by some form of religious zeal.

These abnormalities were now racialised. It was now reported that he was not 'really' Greek, but was instead of 'Turkish' extraction. Readers learnt that his father was, 'in fact, "Egyptian"'. Tsafendas, therefore, by implication, could not be 'white'.

Tsafendas' peculiarities indicated very clearly that he was not motivated by noble ideals. The headlines chosen for the articles seem to suggest a man with petty psychological issues: a man with a chip on his shoulder, a 'whiner' who constantly complained of a lack of money, a man incapable of maintaining a regular abode or employment, a maladjusted individual. These were hardly the makings of a political martyr, just in case the 'non-white' non-citizens thought of celebrating him as a hero. It was only when his Summary Trial began on 17 October that 'the assassin' would become the main subject of front-page headlines.

### **The Afrikaans Press**

The Afrikaans press reported the murder of Verwoerd in much more emotive tones, in a language evocative of a sense of personal loss to Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans. Verwoerd's death was cast in terms of endearment ('*met deernis*' in Afrikaans) with widespread use of familial metaphors. Hendrik Schoeman, leader of the House of Assembly, spoke of the loss of '*een van Suid-Afrika se grootste seuns*' [one of South Africa's greatest sons].<sup>43</sup> *Die Dagbreek en Sondagnuus* published their first edition on the day after Verwoerd's funeral. The front page contained an emotionally charged report under the heading, '250,000 Betoon Laaste Eer' [250,000 Pay Last Respects]. It was accompanied by a centre-

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<sup>43</sup> 'Die Bloed Moet Ons Besiel', *Die Burger*, 8 September 1966, 1.

spread photograph of Verwoerd's coffin and his wife, flanked by her son and her son-in-law. Smaller subheadings on the front page focused on the nation-wide grief for Verwoerd.<sup>44</sup>

*Die Beeld*, a Sunday weekly, featured a photograph of Betsie Verwoerd at the funeral. On the same page the paper was already speculating on who the next prime minister might be, with photographs of the two strongest contenders, Vorster and Schoeman, in the top right-hand corner.<sup>45</sup> This was unusual, since most newspapers, English and Afrikaans, dedicated the front page to funeral scenes. On the next two pages photographs of the funeral focused less on the emotional sombreness than 'eventful' scenes, such as people fainting and children getting lost. Subsequent pages carried articles of a more personal and intimate nature about Verwoerd, including his relationship with his employees on his farm Stokkiesdraai,<sup>46</sup> his role as leader and hero of the Afrikaner people, and the bravery of Mrs. Betsie Verwoerd in facing the tragedy of her husband's death.<sup>47</sup>

Reports on Tsafendas between the funeral and the Summary Trial are few and sketchy in nature. What did emerge very clearly was that Tsafendas had a history of being 'sielsiek' and was incarcerated five times in 'n inrigting vir sielsiekes'.<sup>48</sup> On his return to Mozambique he was diagnosed as 'geestelik versteurd' (mentally disturbed).<sup>49</sup> On page five there is a strange, but certainly not accidental, juxtaposition of a photograph of Tsafendas (smiling and well-dressed with a tie) and an advertisement for the multivitamin, Sanatogen, at the time a

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<sup>44</sup> 'SA Verenig in Smart' and 'Duisende Bantoes het ook hulde gebring', *Dagbreek en Sondagnuus*, 11 September 1966.

<sup>45</sup> 'Die Laaste Eer', *Beeld*, 11 September 1966, 1.

<sup>46</sup> 'Op Stokkiesdraai het dit stil geword', *Beeld*, 11 September 1966, 11.

<sup>47</sup> 'Verwoerd: die held wat nie gehuiwer het nie' and 'Die Dapperheid van 'n Vrou', *Beeld*, 11 September 1966, 16-17.

<sup>48</sup> 'Sielsiek' literally means a sickness of the soul or the soul possessed. In modern usage it refers to the psychologically ill.

<sup>49</sup> 'Hy was op staat se swartlys', *Beeld*, 11 September 1966, 4.

well-known 'nerve tonic' with the caption: '*Die nuwe weg tot blakende gesondheid*'.<sup>50</sup>

But like other Afrikaans newspapers, coverage of Verwoerd's death and funeral in the *Beeld* was highly personalised and emotional. '*So is hy vermoor*' were the headlines on the day after the assassination. The use of '*hy*' personalised Verwoerd to readers, assuming '*hy*' [he] was intimately known and dear to them and not just a prime minister. In the subheading '*SA rou oor sy leier*', the word '*rou*'<sup>51</sup> conjures up more than just mourning or sorrow, but speaks of a grief that penetrates the bodily flesh.<sup>52</sup> In its September 8 issue, *Die Burger* ran an article entitled, '*Dié Bloed Moet Ons Besiel*'. Hendrik Schoeman, leader of the House of Assembly, and a close friend of Verwoerd, paid tribute to the latter:

*Hierdie bloedkollie langs sy bank moet hier bly om as besieling te dien vir ons en dié wat na ons kom. Dit is die lewens-bloed van een van Suid Afrika se grootste seuns. Dit is bloed wat hy gestort het in diens van sy volk en sy dierbare land Suid-Afrika... Onwillekeurig het die woord van die digter by my opgekom:*

*'Stil broers daar gaan 'n man verby,  
Hy groet, en dis vir laas.  
Daar's maar een soos hy.'*<sup>53</sup>

[These bloodstains alongside his bench must be preserved to serve as a reminder to us and those who come after us. It is the life-blood of one of South Africa's greatest sons. It is blood that he shed in the service of his beloved country South Africa ... Unconsciously the words of the poet came to my mind: ...]

These bloody and bodily metaphors suggest that Verwoerd's murder was regarded as a tearing of the very body politic of Afrikanerdom. The adjectives used to describe the manner of Verwoerd's death ('*verraderlik, afskuwelik*' [treacherous, horrible]) made it clear that his death was not simply felt as the death of a statesman or a leader, but as an intimate loss to a specific family and

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<sup>50</sup> *Beeld*, 11 September 1966, 5.

<sup>51</sup> 'Rou' has two meanings: raw (as in flesh) and 'to grieve'.

<sup>52</sup> 'So is Hy Vermoor: SA Rou oor sy leier' *Die Burger* 7 September 1966, 1.

<sup>53</sup> 'Dié Bloed Moet Ons Besiel', *Die Burger*, 8 September 1966, 15.

'volk' (Afrikaners). We were to be reminded of this loss by preserving the bloodstains on his seat; we are to be constantly reminded -traumatised and possessed - (dié bloed moet ons besiel) – by the memory of what happened here.

The tributes from the National Party leadership in the Orange Free State and Natal made clear the investments in the role that Verwoerd had played. His achievements were portrayed in religious metaphors. His role in leading South Africa out of the Commonwealth and onto the path of a republic was described as 'leading a people out of the darkness and into the light'.<sup>54</sup> Verwoerd was constantly praised for his intelligence and clarity of ideas and purpose. Tribute after tribute spoke at length of a sharp and penetrating intelligence. For many, Verwoerd clarified the confusion bedevilling the National Party ideology and policy in the first years after coming to power in 1948.

#### **Media Reports on the Summary Trial: 17 - 20 October 1966**

The Summary Trial began on Monday 17 October and ended on Thursday 20 October. Between mid-September and the date of the Summary Trial there was virtually no reporting in the major national and regional newspapers about Tsafendas. During its four-day sitting, the media reported in full and virtually verbatim on the court proceedings. It was through the judicial process and mostly the testimony of members of the psychiatric profession that Demitrios Tsafendas began to emerge as someone who elicited pity and compassion. The testimony of expert psychiatric opinion transformed an untidy, gluttonous assassin into a deeply disturbed individual. The image of the knife-wielding madman gave way to a much more empathetic portrayal. On Friday 21 October, the day after Tsafendas was declared insane and unfit to stand trial, the *Cape*

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<sup>54</sup> *Die Burger*, 7 September 1966, 13.

*Times* published a small article at the bottom of its front page entitled 'Face of a Man in Another World'.

I shall never forget that face with those tragic uncomprehending eyes and the impassive expression of a man of whom one of the psychiatrists has said from the witness box: "His grasp of reality is such that he is not in the same world as we are."<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps it was because of this humanisation of Tsafendas that many Afrikaans newspapers did not report on the Summary Trial. The *Beeld* did comment on the final judgement. On 23 October it ran several articles bemoaning the fact that Tsafendas would effectively be kept free of charge by the state and estimated the financial cost to the state of the upkeep of Tsafendas.<sup>56</sup> In its editorial entitled 'Tsafendas', it argued that despite the feelings of the vast majority of people, what is more important are legal principles accepted internationally that the South African justice system is bound to uphold.<sup>57</sup>

According to the *Beeld*, most of the 28 witnesses summoned by the defence team to give evidence were doctors or psychiatrists.<sup>58</sup> Most of the regular daily and weekly white newspapers reported in detail on the content of expert testimony by psychiatrists. The first witness for the defence was psychiatrist Dr. Harold Cooper, who testified that Tsafendas was a schizophrenic and that the murder of Verwoerd was 'a product of a diseased mind'. He also stated that Tsafendas was 'unable to grasp fully the serious consequences of the situation he now found himself and was out of touch with reality' His replies to questions indicated that he suffered from a 'pathological thought disorder' and rambled incoherently.<sup>59</sup>

Dr. Isaac Sakinovsky, Acting Head of the Department of Psychiatry at Groote Schuur Hospital, testified that Tsafendas' 'reason was impaired in that there was

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<sup>55</sup> 'Face of a Man in Another World', *Cape Times*, 21 October 1966, 1.

<sup>56</sup> 'Tsafendas Kos die Staat Duisende Rande: Kenners hy kan nog lank leef', *Beeld*, 23 October 1966, 9.

<sup>57</sup> *Beeld*, 23 October 1966, 12.

<sup>58</sup> *Cape Times*, 17 October 1966, 3.

<sup>59</sup> 'Tsafendas: Mind was Diseased', *Cape Times*, 18 October 1966, 5.



a manifest defect of logical processes with repeated non sequiturs'. During interviews with Tsafendas, the latter voiced a number of 'delusional ideas'. He claimed, amongst other things, that he had been imprisoned by the Portuguese government for being a conscientious objector and that his mother was English, but also a member of 'an overseas royal family'. He concluded that Tsafendas 'was not of sound mind, that his thought processes are grossly impaired and deluded, and he is therefore not in a position to evaluate correctly the consequences of his deed.'<sup>60</sup>

Dr. Zabow, a specialist psychiatrist who 'had treated many schizophrenics' described Tsafendas as suffering from a 'thought disorder that led him unable to follow through a question and answer session, as well as a lack of contact with reality'. He described in detail aspects of Tsafendas' behaviour during interviews. He concluded that Tsafendas was 'unable to care for himself and was a danger to himself and to others. He should be kept in a suitable institution where he could be adequately controlled and should receive treatment.'<sup>61</sup>

Dr. James McGregor, head of the Department of Neurology at Groote Schuur Hospital, testified that Tsafendas was 'suffering from schizophrenia of the paranoid type', and was certifiable in terms of the Mental Disorders Act. According to McGregor, Tsafendas 'showed considerable disturbance of thinking. His thinking was muddled and disjointed ... His delusion about the worm had disorganised his real personality and his relationship with the real world.'<sup>62</sup>

Despite the overwhelming evidence that Tsafendas was not legally responsible for his actions, the judicial process did not result, as in Pratt's case, in Tsafendas being sent to a mental institution for treatment. Implicated were questions of race

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<sup>60</sup> 'Tsafendas ate like a dog', *Cape Times* 19 October 1966, 9.

<sup>61</sup> 'Tsafendas: Not wrong for me to kill the Prime Minister' *Cape Times*, 20 October 1966, 8.

<sup>62</sup> 'Tsafendas: Not wrong for me to kill the Prime Minister', *Cape Times*, 20 October 1966, 9.

and power. Unlike Pratt, who had made the first attempt on Verwoerd's life, Tsafendas had succeeded. Tsafendas stabbed Verwoerd not only in full view of the white nation's elected representatives, but he accomplished his deed during the course of the everyday routine of parliamentary life. Tsafendas had committed the modern equivalent of 'regicide': the sovereignty of state power was, if only momentarily, profoundly undermined. Instead of being sent to a 'suitable institution where he could be adequately controlled and should receive treatment',<sup>63</sup> he was kept in a cell next to death row for a period of twenty years in Pretoria Central Prison. Numerous accounts allege that while here he was severely ill-treated by wardens. Pratt, who was also declared insane and unfit for trial, was sent to a mental institution where he eventually committed suicide.



### **A Comparative Case Study: David Pratt's Attack on Verwoerd (1960)**

It is instructive at this point to compare the circumstances of the two attacks on Verwoerd's life. What follows is a brief summary of the circumstances surrounding the first assassination attempt on Verwoerd. David Pratt shot Verwoerd on 9 April 1960 at the Rand Show in Milner Park. The occasion was the celebration of 50 years of the Union of South Africa. This event occurred 19 days after the Sharpeville Massacre of 21 March 1960. The aftershocks of the events at Sharpeville still dominated world and South African press reports. News reports of Verwoerd's condition after the attack and of the 'assailant', as the *Cape Times* referred to Pratt, shared space on the front pages of newspapers with reports on the inquiry into the Sharpeville massacre, the trial of Robert Sobukwe, the police sealing off townships on the Rand, and dawn raids on a number of shack settlements.

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<sup>63</sup> 'Tsafendas: Not wrong for me to kill the Prime Minister', *Cape Times*, 20 October 1966, 8.

It was still unclear whether Pratt's unsuccessful attempt on Verwoerd's life was connected to the ongoing political situation. Pratt's detention was shrouded in mystery as his expected appearance in court failed to take place and his lawyers were unaware of his whereabouts. Pratt was in fact detained under the emergency regulations. The *Cape Times* reported 'we have it on sound authority' that the attack on Verwoerd was 'the act of an irresponsible individual, not an organized plot'.<sup>64</sup> On the front page, it published a statement by the Deputy Commissioner of Police in the Western Cape, Colonel Terblanche, that 'the attack on the Prime Minister was not an organised one: it was purely an isolated attack by an individual'.<sup>65</sup> Nothing further was reported on Pratt until September when his trial was due to begin.

There is no doubt that the attack on Verwoerd heightened the sense of crisis that prevailed in the wake of events at Sharpeville. The South African government was already faced with international condemnation for the Sharpeville massacre. Internally, a State of Emergency was declared, leading to the arrests and detention of thousands of people and the banning of organisations. Both before and after the attack on Verwoerd, newspapers were filled with reports on events relating to the apartheid state's attempts to crush what one journalist referred to as 'a popular insurrection'. The inquiry into the Sharpeville massacre began on Monday 11 April, two days after the shooting at Milner Park.

What is instructive in Pratt's case is the self-delusion that characterised both liberal and nationalist politicians in their response to the assassination attempt. Both publicly condemned the attack on Verwoerd as alien and out of spirit with the conduct of politics in South Africa. The Governor-General, Mr Swart expressed it as follows: '[T]he attack on our Prime Minister ... that is not our way

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<sup>64</sup> 'Dr Verwoerd', *Cape Times*, 11 April 1960, 10.

<sup>65</sup> 'Isolated attack, says police chief', *Cape Times*, 11 April 1960, 1.

of life in South Africa ... The way of the assassin is not our way, the method of physical violence against one's opponent is not our method.'<sup>66</sup> On the very same page, two articles related to the violence of the apartheid state against its citizens (or those regarded as non-citizens) were printed. They informed readers of the inquiry into the Sharpeville killings and the police raiding '10 Native townships to the south west of Johannesburg'.<sup>67</sup> Echoing Swart's sentiments, the Leader of the Assembly and Minister of Lands, Mr. Sauer, moved an unopposed motion in the House of the Assembly expressing horror at the attack on the Prime Minister. 'What happened here on Saturday is something so strange to our public life in South Africa that I think all South Africans will hang their heads in shame.'<sup>68</sup>

The Leader of the Opposition, Sir de Villiers Graaff, supported the motion emphasising that the assassination attempt was 'a dastardly affair quite out of keeping with the South African political scene'.<sup>69</sup> This self-delusion extended to the notion that South Africa was a country that conformed to the highest principles of civilised political practice. This contradiction between the perception of an existing civilised bourgeois exercise of power and the actual autocratic exercise of power is graphically encapsulated by the statements of Louw, the Minister of External Affairs, in a press conference to foreign newsmen. Louw was not responding to the assassination attempt, but to his government's policies with regard to 'the native population'.

If you were to tour the African continent, you would find that in respect of the essential needs of the native population - housing, schools and other facilities - five to six times more is done in South Africa and is spent per capita of the Native population than in any other territory on the continent. Now they are burning down the schools and houses provided for them.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> 'Amity may be born of Union's Distress', *The Star*, 12 April 1960, 1.

<sup>67</sup> 'Official Inquiry Starts: Policemen describe Sharpeville events' and '10 townships on "raid list" today', *The Star*, 12 April 1960, 1.

<sup>68</sup> 'Attack on Verwoerd shocks the Assembly', *The Star*, 11 April 1960, 1.

<sup>69</sup> 'Attack on Verwoerd shocks the Assembly', *The Star*, 11 April 1960, 1.

<sup>70</sup> 'Apartheid or White man must hand over to Black', *The Star*, 12 April 1960, 11.

When asked whether his government would continue to 'keep the black man down by brutality' when faced with 'popular insurrection', Louw replied, 'You are now presupposing that action taken by the police in connection with gangsters and intimidators represents the government's policy toward the black man. That is not so.'<sup>71</sup>

Louw's utterances point to one of the central contradictions inherent in the apartheid state: the methods of a dictatorial police state were used against one section of the population to defend a bourgeois constitutional order for another section. What it reveals is the existence of a bifurcated exercise of power – the methods of civilised bourgeois democracy when dealing with 'white citizens' and the methods of the *ancien régime* when dealing with the 'native population'. The assassination attempt was found to be 'strange' and alien to the South African way of life because David Pratt was a white man, and a wealthy, well-to-do farmer and businessman from Magaliesburg at that. He was a respectable citizen by all accounts, a regular churchgoer who took an interest in the lot of elderly people.

Assassination as a form of violence was seen to belong to an order of illegality that was associated with another social class and another race. Not the 'tolerated illegalities' of the poorer classes of the *ancien régime* that, according to Foucault, the nascent bourgeoisie of eighteenth century Europe found so objectionable.<sup>72</sup> The surprise expressed that the 'assailant was a white man' was an indication that the point-blank shooting of the Prime Minister in the face was assumed to have more to do with the violence of those who burn down schools and houses – the violence of the poorer classes – whose popular insurrection against the

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<sup>71</sup> 'Sharpeville era over', *The Star*, 12 April 1960, 11.

<sup>72</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 85.

apartheid state was reduced to the level of criminality associated with the urban proletariat of modern capitalism.

When this violence spilled over the boundaries of class and race, it entered the domain of madness. David Pratt's madness was to recognise the contradiction, brought into such sharp focus by the Sharpeville events, between two orders of rule within the apartheid state. It was not until September 1960, when his trial was scheduled, that the public gained a clearer picture of the motives behind the attack. Then it became known that Pratt had a history of epilepsy that led to violent seizures, rendering him mentally unstable and, according to the psychiatric experts, prone to delusional fantasies. An inquiry into his mental condition concluded that he was insane and unfit to stand trial. He was declared a patient of the Governor-General and committed to an asylum.

Unlike Tsafendas who did not articulate any political motive, David Pratt was very clear about his political motives. Dr. L.A. Hurst, Professor of Psychological Medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand, testified that Pratt had told him that the day before his assassination attempt that he had had 'a feeling' when he saw about one hundred detainees loaded into a prison van. This 'feeling' continued the next day and became particularly intense, leading him to think that 'someone in this country must do something about it, and it better bloody well be me, feeling as I do about it.' After he listened to Verwoerd's speech, he thought that, 'I shall not kill this man, but lay him up for a month or more to give him time to think things over.'<sup>73</sup> Pratt had interrupted the court proceedings himself, saying, 'I was shooting at the epitome of apartheid, rather than Dr. Verwoerd.' Later in the day, he requested permission to make a statement, which was granted by the presiding judge. In his statement Pratt explained how the events of 9 April came about. In the past, especially after a severe epileptic fit or

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<sup>73</sup> 'Those 10 seconds were like an hour – Pratt', *The Star*, 13 September 1960, 3.

'grand mal', he had had feelings of euphoria accompanied by an intense need to do something about the situation in South Africa. Describing one such period he said,

During that period at sunset I received my first message that it was necessary for me to go out and give a message to South Africa. Well, how could I go out and give a message? Could I grab people by the lapels of their coats? So I took no notice. A day passed. The message came again. The second day passed. The third day passed. The message was still there.<sup>74</sup>

Describing another episode, he continued,

The first stage of euphoria suddenly occurred when I was driving my car from Magaliesberg to Krugersdorp. It is difficult to describe. It was as though a light was turned on. I was quite out of breath ... later they began in much the same way. The message was infinitely stronger ... I had the same sense of mission - to give South Africa a particular message. I still took no action ... I thought something has got to be done, although I was still without a forum or any means of conveying it. Then the means of conveying it was shown to me. It was then that I tried to form a coalition. I was not successful.

After separation from his wife his depressions grew deeper and deeper along with his sense of guilt over 'everything that was going wrong in South Africa'. 'I thought I should have given my message. The troubles I had felt would follow, did follow.' After returning to South Africa from a visit to Europe, he 'was horrified at the disintegration that had taken place while I was away'.

I came up to my farm in the Transvaal and if you will cast your minds back to March, things were acute to a fantastic degree throughout South Africa ... Then the emergency regulations were passed. I thought what is there left to stop the bottle bursting. On Thursday I passed a van loaded with detainees. The impression upon me became still more intense, coupled with a feeling of guilt of not carrying out what I wanted to do. I certainly had no fixed intention of shooting the Prime Minister. I just felt I had to take my revolver ...

I felt it was necessary to shoot the stinking monster of apartheid that was gripping South Africa and preventing South Africa from taking her

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<sup>74</sup> "“Why I shot him”", *The Star*, 13 September 1960, 1.

rightful place among men ... Then I got the thought that if I hit the Prime Minister in the right spot I would give him time to reconsider ... I went out. I could have shot to kill him. I did not. By the time I was taken away I started feeling an immense feeling of relief ... All I was conscious of was that there was relief from tension. When I went to the cell I had the best night's sleep I'd had in years.<sup>75</sup>

The judge ordered that Pratt be sent to Weskoppies Mental Hospital for a two week observation period and that a report must be prepared by the head physician of the institution. On the 26 September the court found David Pratt insane and committed him to a Pretoria Jail.

For the judiciary the significance of the legal process in the preliminary inquiry into both Tsafendas' and Pratt's mental conditions was that it confirmed South Africa's place among the civilised nations of the world. In Pratt's case this was borne out by 'the high standards of South Africa's administration of justice'.<sup>76</sup> In the case of Tsafendas, the judge-president summed it up as follows: 'This is a civilised - and if I might proudly say - a highly civilised country and when a man is charged on a capital crime, this country sees to it that at the expense of the State he is represented.'<sup>77</sup> Speaking of the defence counsel, Beyers added, 'I think I need to say no more than that by their conduct, they have graced the profession to which they belong and that they have acted in accordance with the highest traditions of the legal profession in this country.' A civilised country, according to Beyers, is governed by the rule of law based on rational principles. Rational government, as opposed to one ruled by 'primitive emotion', is based on the scientific application of principles that have been honed over the centuries. 'The inquiry before the court rests upon the simple civilised human principle that a court of law does not try a madman ... The principle is centuries old, that mad men are not tried.' Whether a man was sane or insane at the time he committed the crime was irrelevant. The important question was, 'if after the commission of

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<sup>75</sup> "Why I shot him", *The Star*, 13 September 1960, 3.

<sup>76</sup> 'Pratt Declared Insane', *The Star*, 26 September 1960, 3.

<sup>77</sup> 'Defence team a grace to profession', *Cape Times*, 21 October 1966, 3.



a crime, a man's mind becomes disordered, then that man cannot be tried in a court of law'. Even the nature of the crime he committed becomes irrelevant. This according to Beyers, was 'ancient law', which in South Africa, a modern civilised democracy, 'has been codified in Section 28 of the Mental Disorders Act of 1916'.<sup>78</sup>

The law, however, can only decide on criminal responsibility. Decisions on insanity are the domain of the psychiatric profession. As a result of this disciplinary division, confusion sometimes arose, leading to loopholes in the law being exploited. In the case of Tsafendas, should he be cured, he could still stand trial. However, he could still claim insanity at the time of the crime. Tsafendas' case became a catalyst for calls to revisit aspects of the Mental Disorders Act. On the same day that Beyers concluded judgement, the Minister of Justice, Mr. Pelsler announced that a Commission of Inquiry would be appointed to 'thoroughly investigate the effectiveness of the existing legal rules applicable to cases of this type'. The announcement was welcomed by academics in the legal profession at both the Universities of Cape Town and Stellenbosch. Professor W. de Vos, Dean of the UCT Law Faculty, said,

The law relating to the effect of insanity on criminal responsibility was largely based on the Macnaghten Rules. These were formulated at a time when very little was known about mental aberrations. It is time we reassessed the situation. The law should be based on scientific analysis of what the psychiatrists tell us. I am not sure that the law as it now stands is wide enough to deal with all the cases, nor that it takes sufficient cognisance of all types of mental aberration...<sup>79</sup>

Dr. J.C. de Wet, senior member of the Law Faculty at the University of Stellenbosch and lecturer in criminal law, commented,

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<sup>78</sup> 'Verwoerd's killer found insane: hanging would be murder says Beyers', *Cape Times*, 21 October 1966, 5.

<sup>79</sup> 'Mad killer can still stand trial if cured', *Cape Times*, 21 October 1966, 1.

Under the [Mental Disorders] Act you have certain categories of insanity which might not be exhaustive. Even if a man is certified insane, it does not necessarily mean that he is not criminally responsible. On the other hand, a man might not be criminally responsible even if he is certified as being sane. The Mental Disorders Act just deals with insanity, not criminal responsibility...The difficulty arises in translating what the psychiatrist has to say to the jury or judge. Insanity is a medical concept. Criminal responsibility is a legal concept. Finding a suitable formula would be most difficult ...<sup>80</sup>

This situation clearly pointed to an inefficient economy of justice. There was also the problem of what to do with Tsafendas. Where would he be held? Whose responsibility was he? Was he the responsibility of the medical or the penal system?

South Africa did not have institutions specifically set aside for the criminally insane. David Pratt had been sent to The Fort, a maximum-security mental institution in Bloemfontein. The law needed some fine-tuning that could only be accomplished by a co-operation between the legal and psychiatric professions. The Commission that was eventually appointed on the 5 December 1960 was chaired by Justice Rumpf, the man who presided over the inquiry into the mental condition of David Pratt. The Rumpf Commission completed its report on the 21 June 1961. Amongst its recommendations was that: 1) A hospital-prison be established by legislation for 'psychopaths where psychopaths who are a danger to the public may be detained for long periods and where they may be treated'; 2) A medical practitioner, psychologist or psychiatrist should be compelled to inform the magistrate if, in his opinion, a mentally disordered person is dangerous; 3) A maximum-security hospital be established for such dangerous patients, to be termed 'State President's patients'; and 4) A Commission of

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<sup>80</sup> 'Tsafendas insane'. *Cape Times*, 21 October 1966, 3.

Inquiry be appointed to investigate the reorganisation of the administrative control of mental hospitals.<sup>81</sup>

In the wake of the outcome of the court inquiry into Tsafendas' mental state, Justice van Wyk called for a register to be kept of 'dangerous mental cases'. The register would list all patients treated at mental hospitals in the country and considered 'potentially harmful'. Such a register would be 'a confidential central register to which the Security Police would have access'.<sup>82</sup> He further recommended that a record be kept of 'known alcoholics or people suffering from drug addiction or similar mental disorders'. 'Such people could be prevented from holding driver's licences, and this could have an effect in cutting the rate of road accidents.' Van Wyk's recommendations were received with dismay and shock by the psychiatric profession. An unnamed psychiatrist, who gave evidence in the summary trial of Tsafendas, was interviewed by the *Sunday Times*.

We have already expressed our unanimous disagreement with the establishment of such a register, which would violate every ethical principle upon which our profession is based ... It is virtually impossible to determine what patient is potentially dangerous ... The matter could be stretched to the degree where two-thirds of our population could be placed on such a register. It would create a position in which any person who required mental treatment would hesitate to come forward for fear of being placed on the register. It would negate the very existence of psychiatry.<sup>83</sup>

A second psychiatrist, also not named, was quoted as follows: 'I am certain that the medical profession as a whole will oppose it with every means at its disposal. It goes contrary to every ethical principle upon which we stand.'<sup>84</sup> The suggestion that psychiatrists should pass on the most intimate secrets of their

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<sup>81</sup> The Rumpf Commission gave birth to another commission that began deliberations in 1970 and completed its report in 1972. It was chaired by Justice J.T. van Wyk who also headed the Commission of Inquiry into the circumstances leading to the death of Dr. Verwoerd.

<sup>82</sup> 'Judge says: Register dangerous mental cases' *Sunday Times*, 6 November 1966, 17.

<sup>83</sup> 'Judge says: Register dangerous mental cases' *Sunday Times*, 6 November 1966, 17.

<sup>84</sup> 'Judge says: Register dangerous mental cases' *Sunday Times*, 6 November 1966, 17.

patients' lives to the Security Police was described as 'something that would not be accepted by psychiatric practitioners in any free society'. A patient was motivated to come for treatment on the basis that 'he can reveal to us things he can say to no one else', a 'leading Pretoria psychiatrist' argued. Another 'leading' psychiatrist based in Johannesburg argued that a register such as that proposed by van Wyk 'would put psychiatry in South Africa back 20 years'.<sup>85</sup> The very basis of the power relationship between doctor and patient – confidentiality – was being threatened.

The proposal for a register was thus seen as a serious threat to a cooperative relationship between the two professions, which were both singled out for exceptional conduct by Judge Beyers when he delivered judgement in Tsafendas' Summary Trial. It points to a moment of conflict between two different modes of exercising power in the apartheid state. What was clearly needed was a more effective legal mapping of madness, one which required closer disciplinary co-operation between law and psychiatry. This co-operation would take the form of a well established mode of investigation used by the South African and the apartheid state: the commission of inquiry.<sup>86</sup> The two commissions tasked with revisiting the Mental Disorders Act of 1916 would rely on both professions rework a law that was crafted under a very different economy of power. The assassination of Verwoerd produced no less than three commissions of inquiry. A crisis of legitimation for the apartheid state was displaced as a problem of governing the insane, which was interpreted in practice as a question of knowing.

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<sup>85</sup> 'No backing for "listing"'. *Sunday Times*, 6 November 1966, 24.

<sup>86</sup> Adam Ashforth speaks of a 'grand tradition' of Commissions of Inquiry in twentieth-century South Africa, to investigate the 'native question'. Ashforth argues that commissions of inquiry should be seen as 'schemes of legitimation' rather than as instruments of policy. They represent techniques of governance that, as Posel puts it, 'are fashioned by ways of knowing'. Their authority derives from their modes of inquiry (objective and scientific) and hence represents the 'truth the state speaks about itself'. See Adam Ashforth, 'On The Native Question: A Reading of the Grand Tradition of Commissions of Inquiry Into the "Native Question" in Twentieth Century South Africa' (Ph.D.Thesis, University of Oxford, 1987), Chapter One.

It is to the workings of the Commission of Inquiry into the Circumstances Surrounding the Death of the Hon. Dr. Hendrik French Verwoerd with which we are concerned in Chapter 2. This chapter has sought to establish a context for understanding the Commission. It has done so, firstly, by examining the nature of apartheid state power; secondly, by analysing white media representations of race and madness, of Tsafendas and Verwoerd; and, thirdly, by reflecting on the differences between the media reports on Tsafendas and those on the earlier attempted assassination by David Pratt.



## Chapter Two

### The Commission of Enquiry into the Circumstances of the Death of the Late Dr. The Honourable H.F. Verwoerd

#### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the archive of the Commission of Enquiry that was set up to investigate 'all aspects relating to the death of The Late Dr the Honourable Hendrik Verwoerd'.<sup>1</sup> It explores how an investigation into the assassination of a high profile political figure shapes the facticity, organization, and the 'evidentiary paradigm' of the information in the archive. The chapter tries to address the following questions: What impelled the creation of this archive? How does it structure historical memory? How does it create its subject? What is the relationship between a 'primary' archive constructed under apartheid conditions and state imperatives, and the emergence of a 'secondary' archive on Tsafendas under post-apartheid conditions? What light does this process shed on the role of a bureaucratic state apparatus in the making of archives? Heeding Ann Stoler's advice on the Dutch colonial archive, of 'reading along the archival grain'<sup>2</sup>, I decided to follow in the tracks of enquiry of the Commission. For Stoler 'reading along the grain' means understanding the logic of existence of an archive, the traces of affect and the emotional economy within which it operates. Her plea for an ethnography of the archive is a call to treat the archive as more than simply an impersonal monolith of paper that hides treasures to be discovered by the historian.

The 'Commission of Enquiry into the Circumstances of the Death of the Late Dr. The Honourable Hendrik French Verwoerd' was proclaimed into existence by the State President on the 22 September 1966. Justice J.T. Van Wyk, a Judge of Appeal of the

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<sup>1</sup> The Commission of Enquiry into the Circumstances of the Death of the Late Dr. The Honourable Hendrik French Verwoerd. See *Government Notice*, No. 1435, 23 September 1966. Hereafter referred to as 'The Commission'.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form', in C. Hamilton et al, *Refiguring the Archive*. (Cape Town : David Philip Publishers, 2002), 92.

Appellate division of the Supreme Court was appointed Chairman and only member. The Commission's terms of reference were:

To enquire into and submit a report on all aspects relating to the death of the late Dr. the Honourable Hendrik French Verwoerd which the said Commission deems to be in the public interest.<sup>3</sup>

This Commission began its work the 26 September 1966, just over two weeks after the assassination, and concluded its report by the end of November 1966. The Commission commenced work before the beginning of the Summary Trial in the Cape High Court, presided over by Cape Judge-President Beyers on 17 October 1966. Its proceedings continued during and after the Trial's conclusion on 20 October 1966. It sent letters to all government departments and parastatals, requested all information of their dealings, if any, with Tsafendas. One hundred and five people testified before the Commission, including Tsafendas. The Commission received copies of all the documents of the police investigation and their dealings with overseas secret services, secret communications between the South African embassies and foreign governments, and copies of all records relating to Tsafendas' stay in various countries and hospitals. The National Archives in Pretoria houses twelve boxes of the accumulated documentation of the Commission. These documents are an amalgamation of the Commission's own investigation, the police investigation, transcripts of the trial, and its final *Report*.

The Commission was not investigating murder or madness - that was the domain of the lawyers, judges and psychiatrists involved in the summary trial. Its report did however note the connection between 'assassinations and mentally disordered persons'.<sup>4</sup> Its domain was the bureaucratic apparatus of the apartheid state, whose tentacles Demitrios Tsafendas had managed to elude, albeit unintentionally, through the unmitigated bizarreness of his existence. The Commission set out to find *who*, because of 'a neglect of duty', made this subversion of the apartheid bureaucracy possible. Its mode of enquiry took the form of a detailed forensic audit of the

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<sup>3</sup> See *Government Notice*, No. 1435, 23 September 1966.

<sup>4</sup> *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Circumstances of the Death of the Late Dr. The Honourable Hendrik French Verwoerd*, Pretoria, December 1966. R.P. 16/1967, 28. Hereafter referred to as 'Report of the Commission'.

movements of files and folders between different government departments and officials. In the process Tsafendas' history, scattered across the geography of fifteen different countries and carried aboard thirteen different ships, was extracted 'along the grain' of the archive of the apartheid bureaucracy. His madness was subverted to the demands of reason, robbed of its volition, and relegated, to a marginal role. Here we find no dialogue between reason and unreason, but to cite Foucault, 'a monologue of reason about madness'.<sup>5</sup>

The documents of the Commission have had an extensive afterlife, and the biography of Tsafendas is inextricably linked to the biography of this archive.<sup>6</sup> More than half of the Commission's Report consisted of a reconstruction of Tsafendas life history. This reconstruction drew on the detailed police reports, information received by the Departments of Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, reports by foreign agencies and embassies as well as the judicial process. All of these in their turn led to the resuscitation of dead files, long ago consigned to cockroach-infested basement storage locations. The work of the Commission has played an important role in structuring historical memory of Tsafendas and has provided the substrate for the production of a secondary post-apartheid archive on Tsafendas. This chapter attempts to 'exhume' the different layers of its construction of Tsafendas' history. I propose a reading of the events unfolding around the assassination as a reading for the traces of this archive, in which the story of the 'event' becomes deeply entangled with the story of the creation of the archive.

### **The day of the event: 6 September 1966**

The activation of the documentary life Demitrios Tsafendas begins with his arrest at the scene of the stabbing. Immediately after the assassination, Tsafendas was taken to Caledon Square police station, where, at the request of the CID, he was examined

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<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), xii.

<sup>6</sup> Here I draw on Carolyn Hamilton's notion of the biography of an archive. See C. Hamilton, 'The Public Life of an Archive: Archival Biography as Methodology'. Paper presented at Archives and Public Culture Research Workshop, University of Cape Town, October 2009.



by the District Surgeon, Dr Ralph Kossew. In the scuffle that ensued as various members of parliament and security personnel struggled to separate Tsafendas from Verwoerd, Tsafendas was assaulted and his nose was broken. The injuries were serious enough for Dr Kossew to recommend hospital treatment. Later on the same day Tsafendas was taken to Groote Schuur Hospital (where the body of Verwoerd was also taken for forensic analysis) for medical treatment and psychiatric examination.

In his report of the incident, the district surgeon noted that Tsafendas had recognized him as the same doctor who examined him on the 17 of June with regard to his eligibility for a war veteran's pension. On returning to his office on 6 September, Dr Kossew checked his files and found the report of his previous examination of Tsafendas. He then phoned Major Roussouw of the Security police who requested a copy of the report. Dr Kossew saw Tsafendas again on two occasions: on 16 September to 'remove his sutures', and on 19 September, at the request of Major Roussouw, to examine him as 'he was not feeling well'. Dr Kossew, in the careful and conscientious manner of a dutiful public servant, faithfully recorded his every interaction with Tsafendas, in a letter addressed to the Commission, upon the latter's request for information. He also attached copies of all his medical reports on Tsafendas. Dr Kossew was careful to note, 'apart from questions relating to his medical history and objective symptoms, no other conversations took place between Tsafendas and myself.'<sup>7</sup>

Dr Kossew was acutely aware that the primary task of the Commission was to probe deeply into the actions of any civil servants or professionals whose possible neglect of duty could have aided and abetted the death of the Prime Minister. The Commission's terms of reference and a questionnaire indicating the scope of its enquiry was widely circulated and in the press and radio. In a letter to the Secretary

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<sup>7</sup> Letter by the District Surgeon, Dr R. Kossew, to 'The Secretary of the Commission of Enquiry into the Death of the Late Dr The Honourable H.F. Verwoerd', 1 October, 1966. K150 : Kommissie van Ondersoek na die Omstandighede van die Dood van Wyle Sy Edele Dr. H. F. Verwoerd, Vol 6, 'Navrae gerig aan verskillende instansies en persone', File 3. National Archives, Pretoria.

for Public Health, as well as to the Director of Hospital Services, amongst other questions, the Commission posed the following questions:

Wat is die pligte van 'n geneesheer indien hy vind dat 'n pasient sertifiseerbaar is?

Is hy verplig om enige stappe te doen ten einde so 'n persoon verder te laat ondersoek?

Word die name van pasiente wat as potensieel gevaarlik beskou word aan die veiligheidspolisie of enige ander instansie verstrekk? <sup>8</sup>

It was Dr Kossew who, when he saw Tsafendas on the 17th of June, in a routine examination in the course of his daily duties as District Surgeon, diagnosed Tsafendas as a schizophrenic. Later in the evening at around 7 o'clock, Tsafendas, at the request of the CID, was interviewed by Dr Ivan Sakinofsky, Acting Head of the Department of Psychiatry at Groot-Schuur Hospital, and the first of eight psychiatrists that would examine him until the beginning of his trial in October. Dr Sakinofsky produced a three page psychiatric report on his examination of Tsafendas the next day. Accompanying him was his registrar who took "notes in longhand". In his report, he suggested that Tsafendas 'be detained in a closed mental hospital for a period of observation' and that 'I would like myself to assess his mental state over a period of time and at successive interviews.' He also recommended that Tsafendas' medical reports from the Grafton State Hospital in New York and the Ochsenzoll Krankenhaus in Hamburg, be obtained through the Portuguese government.<sup>9</sup> Dr Sakinofsky took the initiative himself and wrote to the Medical Director of the Ochsenzoll Krankenhaus on 19 September requesting 'urgently the relevant clinical documents.' In his letter, Dr Sakinofsky states that it is 'extremely likely' that he would appear as a medical witness, hence the urgency.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Letter to 'Die Direkteur van Hospitaal Dienste' and 'Die Sekretaris van Gesondheid'. K150, Vol. 1, Staatsdepartemente, File 1.

<sup>9</sup> Dr I Sakinofsky, 'Psychiatric Report on Demetrios Tsafendas', 7 September 1966. K150, Vol. 6, 'Navrae gerig aan verskillende instansies en persone', File 3.

<sup>10</sup> Letter by Dr. I. Sakinofsky to 'Herr Medical Director, Ochsenzoll Krankenhaus', 19 September 1966. K150, Vol. 4, Subfile 1/8: Buitelandse Sake.

On 3 October, Dr Sakinofsky sent copies of his psychiatric report, a transcript of the interview with Tsafendas, and the report of his 'Examination of Mental State of the alleged assassin' to the Commission. In the covering letter, he included 'additional data' of Tsafendas' treatment in eight different mental hospitals in the U.S. He does not explain how he obtained the information, but notes that this information had been made available to the South African Government by United States authorities.<sup>11</sup> He had obviously not received a response from the Ochsenzoll Krankenhaus, as he does not mention it in his 'additional data.' That he was responding to an official request for information from the Commission is clear from the tone of precision of the covering letter and the pointed exactness of its layout.

Unlike Dr Kossew's handwritten letter on a faintly legible, and outdated 'Union of South Africa' letterhead, Dr Sakinofsky's letter is presented with the crisp and clear stamp of his academic credentials and the authority of his institutional location. The letterhead of the University of Cape Town, Department of Psychiatry is the most prominent text on the first page of the letter. The difference between the two letters is the difference between an ordinary doctor, dealing with a large number of patients in the course of his daily duties as District Surgeon (and perhaps slightly anxious of repercussions), and the senior medical expert, eager to be involved in what promises to be a very important clinical case.

On the same date of Dr. Sakinofsky's letter to the Commission, the medical report of Tsafendas internment in the Ochsenzoll Krankenhaus between February and June 1955 eventually arrives at the South African Embassy in Cologne by express delivery. The covering letter, signed by a Dr Trost, refers to a telephone conversation regarding Dr Sakinofsky's letter to the Krankenhaus in connection with Tsafendas' medical history. Dr Trost further notes,

The medical Director of the General Hospital Ochsenzoll in Hamburg, where Tsafendas was from February to June 1955 has prepared the documents.... As agreed during our telephone conversation, you will

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<sup>11</sup> Letter by Dr. I. Sakinofsky to the Secretary of the Commission of Enquiry, 3 October 1966. K150, Vol. 1: Staatsdepartemente, File 1.

forward the documents to Dr Sakinofsky and also make duplicates of these documents available to the Public Prosecutor General in Cape Town.<sup>12</sup>

Four documents were attached to the letter, including a copy of Dr Sakinofsky's letter, Tsafendas' medical history as recorded while he was there, and a copy of the final medical opinion after his release. It is in this form that the documents were inserted in the folders of the Commission under a file cover 'Buitelandse Sake'. It is perhaps interesting to note that Henk van Woerden chose as opening scene for his *Een Mond Vol Glas* the arrival of Tsafendas at the main gate of the Ochsenzoll Krankenhaus, on 11 February 1955, after having swallowed 20 sleeping tablets. The medical investigation was one layer of exhumation of the life of Tsafendas, and Dr Sakinofsky was merely the first psychiatrist to activate the exhumation. The police investigation, discussed below, constituted another dense layer of reconstruction.

### **The Preliminary Investigation into Verwoerd's murder**

When Verwoerd was assassinated and Tsafendas arrested, the head of the Security Police, Major-General Van den Bergh, who was also Deputy Commissioner of Police, and the Head of the Speurdiens (Detective Branch), Brigadier G.J. Joubert, flew to Cape Town to lead the investigation. The security police interviewed anyone and everyone who had had physical contact with Tsafendas: his relatives, land-ladies, employers and fellow employees across the length and breath of Southern Africa (Mozambique, Rhodesia, Zambia, Malawi and South Africa). Journalists, lawyers, doctors, immigration and consular officials voluntarily handed over records related to their dealings with Tsafendas to the security police. Telecommunication between South Africa and Portugal, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, Germany, France, the United States, United Kingdom and Canada produced more documents about Tsafendas. Their task was a political not a juridical one. It was not Tsafendas guilt that was in question. He had stabbed Verwoerd in full public view, and the whole of the all-white parliament was a witness to the murder. What they needed to establish

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<sup>12</sup> 'Letter to Mr. Mulder, Embassy of the Republic of South Africa', Bonn, 3 October 1966. K150, Vol. 6, 'Navrae gerig aan verskillende instansies en persone', File 3.

was whether he acted alone or if his actions were part of an organised political conspiracy.

By 8 September General Van den Bergh announced that the preliminary investigation was completed and the matter was in the hands of the Attorney-General of Cape Town, advocate W. M. van den Berg. The latter, it was announced, would make his decision on whether Tsafendas would be tried immediately without a preliminary investigation (*summier verhoor sonder voorondersoek*), after studying the documentation from the Security Police.<sup>13</sup> Demitrios Tsafendas had led a complex life, and if the security police was prepared for a conventional political motive and plot, they were disappointed. They could find no connections to any political organizations and no discernible political motive. There were no 'terrorists' or communists lurking behind Verwoerd's murder. All that was revealed was that a man, a very odd one indeed, reputedly of Greek origin, employed as a temporary parliamentary messenger, bought a set of knives on the morning of the 6th of September and at the first opportunity that presented itself, and without much fuss, went up to the Prime Minister and stabbed him to death. It took General Van den Berg, a man seasoned in matters of state security, and who also interrogated Tsafendas personally, merely two days to realise that they were dealing with someone who was simply mad - nothing else.

When the news of the assassination reached him in Pretoria, General van den Bergh had instructed his subordinates to find out if the security police had any files on Tsafendas. At the same time he contacted his counterparts in Portuguese-ruled Mozambique, the PIDE, for any information they might have on Tsafendas. While Major D.J. Roussouw began his interrogation of Tsafendas in Caledon Square in Cape Town, Lt. Colonel Van Wyk was dispatched to Rhodesia and Mozambique to gather all possible information about Tsafendas. There, British South African Police and the PIDE, Portuguese security police had already begun their own investigations.

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<sup>13</sup> See 'Tsafendas in die Hof; Geen Borgtog', *Die Burger*, 9 September 1966, 1.

When he arrived in Lourenço Marques on the 12 September, Lt. Col. Van Wyk was met by Sub-Inspector A. Vaz, who informed him that he had been instructed by police headquarters in Lisbon to provide all possible assistance to the South African authorities. This had to be done discreetly, as the Portuguese Government did not want to be seen to assist the South African Government publicly.<sup>14</sup> In Beira, Colonel Van Wyk was not only provided with an office to conduct interviews, but individuals who knew Tsafendas were ordered by the District Commander of Police, Captain Rui Távora, to report to Lt. Col. van Wyk. The Special Branch of the British South Africa Police in Salisbury, Umtali and Marandellas had already prepared their own security reports on the 9, 10 and 13 September respectively.<sup>15</sup> By the time Lt. Colonel Van Wyk arrived there, he was presented with thoroughly researched accounts of Tsafendas' activities in Rhodesia.

The information security police obtained from their counterparts in Southern Africa was supplemented by information secretly received by the Department of Foreign Affairs through its embassies in Washington, London, Lisbon and Bonn. By 3 October the security police was able to produce a comprehensive account of Tsafendas' history. A document entitled, 'Die Geskiedenis van Die Persoon wat Wyle Dr Verwoerd Die Dodelike Wonde Toegedien het'<sup>16</sup> was compiled by Colonel E.G. McIntyre. This document was based on the investigative fieldwork of Colonel van Wyk and a number of other security police personnel, the interrogation of Tsafendas by Major Rossouw, which resulted in an eleven-page signed statement by Tsafendas, and a number of 'Geheime dokumente van betroubare kontakte in ander lande'. The Commission's own reconstruction of Tsafendas' History in Chapter 11 of its Report, draws heavily on this document.

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<sup>14</sup> 'Bedrywighede: Dimitrio Tsafendas: Mosambiek en Rhodesia'. Suid-Afrikaanse Polisie. 20 September 1966. K150, Vol. 3, S.A. Polisie, File 3, Subfile 1/5,

<sup>15</sup> 'Memorandum: Dimitrio Tsafendas', Special Branch Headquarters, Salisbury, 9 September 1966; 'Security Report: Assassination Dr. Verwoerd' Special Branch, Umtali, 10 September, 1966; 'Security Report: Assassination Dr. Verwoerd' Special Branch Marandellas 13 September, 1966. K150, Vol. 3, S.A. Polisie, File 3, Subfile 1/5.

<sup>16</sup> 'Die Geskiedenis van Die Persoon wat Wyle Dr Verwoerd Die Dodelike Wonde Toegedien het'. K150. Vol. 3, SA Polisie, File 3, Subfile 1/5, Aanhangsel A.

What emerged was a life story that wove a complex web of legal and illegal immigration, deportation, internment and escape from mental hospitals, and a mind-boggling history of living and working in fifteen different countries. As details of this history entered the public domain, and it became increasingly clear that Tsafendas was 'glo versteurd'<sup>17</sup>, the focus of public and official concern shifted from the why to the how. Someone with such a history was obviously mad. His history explained his madness and his madness explained his history. More important questions arose. How did this madman gain access to the country's leader? How did he manage to obtain employment in Parliament? How did he gain entry into South Africa? South Africa's immigration policy was expressly designed to exclude potential immigrants of mixed racial background, as well anybody who had a history of mental deficiencies. Shedding light on these questions was the brief of the Commission of Enquiry set up to investigate 'the Circumstances of the Death of the late Dr The Honourable Hendrik French Verwoerd'.

### **The Commission and its Scope of Enquiry: Annexure B**

The Commission was not concerned with the question of Demitrios Tsafendas' guilt or innocence. However, it had to take cognisance of the proceedings of the trial and had to ensure that its work did not pre-empt the judicial process. At the same time, it also relied heavily on that process to execute its own mandate. In a letter to the Attorney General the Secretary to the Commission wrote:

Sy Edele Regter van Wyk is gretig om niks te doen wat moontlik die strafbehoor sal benadeel nie". Vir hierdie rede sal dit waardeer word as u die Kommissie van n' lys van moontlike getuies kan voorsien, sodat sodanige getuies nie voor die afloop van die straf proses deur die Kommissie aangehoor word nie.

Dit sal egter waardeer word as u alle inligting in u besit beskikbaar sal stel wat na u mening op hierdie stadium vertroulik tot die beskikking van die Kommissie gestel kan word, asook 'n kort uiteensetting van die verblyf en werkplekke ensovoorts van die beskuldigde, met 'n aanduiding van die omvang en resultate van ondersoek wat reeds gedoen is by wyse van

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<sup>17</sup> 'Tsafendas glo versteurd', Die Burger, 9 September 1966, 15. 'Versteurd' directly translated means 'disturbed', but in its psychological use means 'insane'. It is a more polite term than the Afrikaans word for mad, 'mal'.

onderhoude met wekgewers, huisbase, huisgenote, medewerkers, vriende ensovoorts en 'n aanduiding van deur wie sodanige ondersoeke gedoen is.<sup>18</sup>

To carry out its mandate, the Commission had to translate questions about the 'how' into the 'who'. Tsafendas, declared 'mentally disordered' and unfit for trial, was not responsible for his deed, and was now a 'State-Presidents Patient'. Although it accepted 'without any reservation' the finding of the High Court in Cape Town,<sup>19</sup> it did not make its task necessarily easier. As bizarre as Tsafendas history appeared, even more bizarre were some facts that emerged from the preliminary investigations. Between 1935 and 1963, Demitrios Tsafendas made no less than nine applications for permanent residence in South Africa. His application had been refused on all nine occasions. He had been placed on the stop list of the Department of the Interior since 11 September 1959. Yet, he entered the country with a temporary permit in November 1963. In January 1964, he was also granted permanent residence. Even more bizarre was the mystery of why a deportation order for the removal of Tsafendas, signed by the Minister of the Interior on 9th August 1966, was still not served by the 6th September 1966. It was lying on the desk of an official in the Department of the Interior on the day that Demitrios Tsafendas assassinated the Prime Minister.

The Commission organised its enquiry around a set of questions that narrowed the circumstances of Verwoerd's murder considerably. The assassination of the apartheid regime's most accomplished and gifted leader was rendered as a problem of whether there was 'any neglect of duty on the part of any person which facilitated the commission of the deed or without which the deed probably would not have been committed'.<sup>20</sup> The scope of this question was further subdivided into a set of discrete, pointed questions, concentrating at an increasing level of detail. Below is an example of one of these sets of questions:

5. (a) Who is responsible for this person's entry into South Africa?

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<sup>18</sup> Letter to Attorney General, Cape Town, 26 September 1966 from Secretary of Commission. K150, Volume 1, Staatsdepartemente, File 1.

<sup>19</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, Annexure B, 30.



- (b) On what grounds and on what conditions was he admitted?
  - (c) What facts were known to the official or officials concerned who authorized his entry?
  - (d) To whom did they convey any such information?
  - (e) Was there any neglect of duty in this connection?
- 5bis
- (a) Who granted permission for temporary sojourn in this country?
  - (b) What was known to the officials concerned?
  - (c) What investigations were made?
  - (d) What should have been made?
  - (e) Was there any neglect of duty in this regard?
- 5ter
- (a) Did any department or official at any time receive any knowledge which would have made withdrawal of permission for permanent residence desirable?
  - (b) To whom was such knowledge conveyed?
  - (c) What steps were taken as a result?
  - (d) Was there any negligence in this regard? <sup>21</sup>

It was an enquiry into the failure of the rationality of power as it operated at the lower levels of state administration. Verwoerd's assassination was not a result of the breach of state security at the highest levels, but 'a neglect of duty' at the very basic, almost ordinary, everyday level of functionality of government administration.

Adam Ashforth has argued that Commissions of Inquiry institute a very particular discourse in which the state speaks of social reality in terms of 'questions' which are rendered as 'problems requiring solution'.<sup>22</sup> The problem is a domain of knowledge production, in which experts, he argues, subject social reality to the same logic used to analyse natural phenomena. Social problems can be solved in the same way as problems in the natural world, provided the laws that govern it are unmasked in the same way that scientists unravel the laws of nature. 'To name a problem and to seek causes from which to reason solutions, is to authorize a very particular way in which a problem may be spoken of'.<sup>23</sup> Every problem has 'a proper name, a rational cause and a reasonable solution', provided the facts are uncovered. This involves,

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<sup>21</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, Annexure B, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Adam Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 5.

<sup>23</sup> Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse*, 5.

according to Ashforth, the power of the state 'in the making of questions, a power imbricated in language and organised in institutions.'<sup>24</sup>

Ashforth's work is about how the Commission of Inquiry became a key institution utilised by the South African state since the beginning of the twentieth century to 'resolve questions of power and knowledge arising from the native question'.<sup>25</sup> Most of the crucial issues of 'state and society', he argues, were conceptualised under the broad problem comprising 'the native question'. For Ashforth, Commissions of Inquiry 'represent the state speaking the truth about itself',<sup>26</sup> and the discourse that is embodied in the highly ritualised proceedings of the commission of inquiry is that the state is set up as the neutral domain between different public interests that guarantees objectivity and fairness. Ann Stoler, putting it slightly differently, describes colonial commissions as 'stories States tell themselves'. For Stoler, 'the history-making work of the archive is nowhere more evident than in the commission of inquiry.'<sup>27</sup>

These arguments are echoed by Premesh Lalu who has argued that the colonial archive is a 'mode of evidence' rather than a source of truth for event, consciousness or agency. He asks: How did colonial discourse, structuring as it did the 'the field of intelligibility' (what can be said in what terms), emerge as the foundation source – the raw material so to speak, or as he would have, it the 'primary source' for the practice of history. <sup>28</sup> To answer this question, he argues, we need to 'attend to the very constitution of evidence', and to what he refers to as the 'social process of the subjection of agency' <sup>29</sup>. By this he means agency is mediated by the very practice through which it emerges – one of these being 'the procedures of evidence making and the protocols of history'.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Ann Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance' 95.

<sup>28</sup> Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa: Postapartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009), 37.

<sup>29</sup> Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa*, 38.

<sup>30</sup> Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa*, 38.

The colonial archive, through its very specific organization of evidence, organises our reading through, for example, inventing a vocabulary to speak about the colonized. This he calls the 'grammar of domination'.<sup>31</sup> In general, Lalu argues that the colonial archive cannot be utilised to retrieve an authentic subaltern consciousness or agency by 'reading against the grain' because it is implicated in producing the colonised subject, as 'a subordinate proposition in discourse'.<sup>32</sup> Thinking about the colonial archive as a 'mode of evidence', draws attention to its technologies of reading, its narrative strategies as well as 'its evidentiary strategies' (surveillance, cartography, intelligence gathering).

### **The Commission of Enquiry as a 'Mode of Evidence'**

I attempt to apply the above insights to the apartheid archive, in particular, the massive amount of documentation that the Commission accumulated. The Commission drew on the security police documents, the trial record and the one hundred and five interviews it conducted on its own. Its first task was to track 'the history of the person who inflicted the fatal wounds on the late Dr. Verwoerd'.<sup>33</sup> The traces of this history were dispersed in fifteen different countries, thirteen different ships and twelve different hospitals in located in four different countries. In the twenty-odd years that he lived outside of Southern Africa, Tsafendas had had as many occupations as countries that he entered. Back in South Africa in 1963, he constantly travelled between Pretoria, Cape Town, Durban, Lourenço Marques, Beira, Durban, and even Blantyre. He changed employment eleven times, and wrote letters to embassies, and government departments. The paper trail that Tsafendas left in his wake sometimes suggested that he was everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

What would be the Commission's 'evidentiary strategy'? How was it going to find the connections between the disparate strands of this history, lodged within files and folders of government departments that had undergone changes in names and filing

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<sup>31</sup> Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa*, 38

<sup>32</sup> Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa*, 62

<sup>33</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, Annexure B, 30.

systems, in a bureaucratic culture of obsessive record-keeping? The Commission's investigation took the form of a detailed historical audit of files and folders related to Tsafendas, located in the different government departments regulating the entry and exit of people into South Africa. This was not an easy task for a number of reasons. Firstly, Tsafendas used different variants of the spelling of his first name and surname depending on his circumstances. Officials who were mostly Afrikaans-speaking sometimes transliterated his name from Tsafendas to Stafendas.<sup>34</sup>

Secondly, Tsafendas' application to enter South Africa took place over a period of almost thirty years. During that time, South Africa went through a number of political changes, resulting in corresponding changes in the administration of immigration. These ranged from name changes, incorporation into other departments or becoming separate departments. This resulted in files and folders being shifted and shunted, as well as renamed according to different filing systems. Thirdly, immigration to South Africa was not a simple affair. Depending on one's race classification (the categories of which also underwent name changes, for example the change from Asian to Indian, once Chinese immigrants were classified white) one's application would be handled by a different authority.

Its evidentiary strategy was to trace the biography of files, G.8226 and B.7771, which become constituted as subjects in the story of Verwoerd's assassination.

### **The Permit for Temporary Sojourn**

On 2 November 1963, the passport control officer in Lourenço Marques, Mr. J. J. Van den Bergh, issued Tsafendas with a permit for temporary sojourn. He explained how this had occurred despite the fact that Tsafendas name appeared on the 'Stop List' of the Department of the Interior:

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<sup>34</sup> Some of the folders in the National Archives still contain the spelling 'Stafendas'. In the records of the Correctional Services Department; he is often referred to as 'Stafendas' instead of Tsafendas. 'Stafendas' also appears on the covers of the files of the Commission's documentation in the National Archives.

...I wish to point out that the Stop Lists" in this office are as a rule checked thoroughly before Temporary Permits or Visas (where necessary) are issued to persons entering the Republic on a visit. In the case of Tsafendas, it is extremely difficult to recall the exact circumstances under which this man was granted admission into the Republic. According to the particulars on the D.I.10, it was a Saturday morning and this office issued 64 actual permits, which indicates that this office must have been under great pressure.

In regard to the checking of the 'Stop Lists' the only explanation I can think of is the possibility that I looked up the name under the index letter 'S', as a result of the sound association in the pronunciation of his surname. Working under such pressure I might not have taken the passport or D.I.10 form with me to the lists. (I may mention here that this was in fact the case when I checked the records after the first reports of the event - I looked up the name *Stafendas*.)...<sup>35</sup>

He explained further that if he had not checked the 'Stop List', the factors that may have contributed to this was as follows:

He tendered a Portuguese passport which had been issued to him the same morning by the local authorities... Since it is known that the Portuguese authorities meticulously check an applicant's circumstances and background before a passport is issued, this could have been a decisive factor, which ... might under pressure of work, have contributed towards not justifying an extremely intensive checking of records...<sup>36</sup>

The Commission concluded that none of the reasons given by Mr. van der Berg could be accepted as valid 'excuses' and it amounted to a 'a clear case of neglect of duty'.<sup>37</sup> When Tsafendas arrived in Lourenzo Marques from Portugal, he had appealed to his family in Pretoria for help in returning to South Africa. A relative telephoned his stepmother, Marika Tsafendakis, who then travelled to Lourenzo Marques. In a statement to the police, she said that since his father had died, she felt it was her duty to help him.<sup>38</sup> It is not clear exactly how this help was given, but once he was granted the temporary permit on the 2 November 1963, she and her son, Victor, who had arrived from Pretoria to take his mother home, took Tsafendas with

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<sup>35</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, 18-19; J.J. Van den Berg, 'Insake: Toelating tot die Republiek, Demitrio Tsafendas', 20 September 1966. K50 Vol. 4, File 1/7.

<sup>36</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, 19.

<sup>37</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, 19.

<sup>38</sup> 'Verslag Insake besoek aan Familielede van Demitrio Tsafendas', Pretoria 21 October, 1966. K 150, Volume 10: Uitreksels uit getuienis.

them on the 4 November 1963. They all crossed the border at Komatipoort into South Africa together.

In a secret missive to the Secretary of the Interior, Mr. I.D. Du Plessis, Consul-General in Lourenzo Marques, notes that the passport control section of the Consulate is in general under pressure due to a heavy workload. Saturdays was always a busy day for the passport control office as it was only open to the public between 08h00 and 11h00. On this occasion, Friday the 1 November was a public holiday in Mozambique, and their office was closed. Saturday 2 November, the day that Tsafendas was issued with a temporary permit, was therefore *exceptionally* busy.<sup>39</sup> It is possible that Marika advised him to apply first for a temporary permit under these conditions, rather than permanent residence, and then also assisted him in the application process. As a member of an immigrant family, she must have had considerable experience in how to subvert minor obstacles in the immigration process. Greek families in South Africa, like other immigrant families, would have had considerable experience in assisting family members from their country of origin to settle in South Africa. Crossing the border in the company of his stepmother and step-brother would have assisted in a much smoother passage into South Africa. On his form of application Tsafendas simply lied, stating that he was of 'pure white' origin, had never been to South Africa before and had never been arrested.

It was Mr. van den Bergh who eventually bore the full brunt of responsibility for letting Tsafendas into the country. According to his son, Gavin van den Berg, who was interviewed by Liza Key for her film, *A Question of Madness* (see Chapter 5), his father lost his job, and was unable to obtain proper employment for a number of years. That Mr. van den Bergh simply made an innocent mistake was inconceivable by those in charge of state security. The security police viewed this 'neglect of duty' in a far more serious light than the Commission. He was subjected to the full might

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<sup>39</sup> 'Uitreikking van Vreemdelinge Tydelike Permit aan Demitrio Tsafendas'. Secret Communication from Secretary of Foreign Affairs to Secretary of Internal Affairs, 21 September 1966. K150, Volume 4, File 1/8 Buitelandse Sake.

of the secret sovereign violence of the apartheid state.<sup>40</sup> The irony was that Mr van den Bergh was punished for a mistake that was commonly made, and in fact was also made by the very apparatus tasked with investigating Tsafendas, The South African Police (SAP). Volume Three of the Commissions documentation, which contains all the records of the police investigation, the same spelling mistake appears on many of the folders, Stafendas, - in some cases Stefendas.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Permit for Permanent Residence**

This section of the Commission's Report is the most detailed and laborious account of the biographies of files G.8226 and B.771, which contained all the damning information on Tsafendas. The Report begins its story in 1931, when Tsafendas' father, Michaelatos(Greek), or Miquel(Portuguese) Tsafendakis (also spelt Tsafandakis) first applied to the Office of the Commissioner for Immigration and Asiatic Affairs to send his four minor children (including Demitrios) to school in the Transvaal. A file G.8226 was opened under Tsafendakis. This office fell under the Department of the Interior, which kept a G series of files for application by white immigrants for permanent residence. In 1935 at age 17, Tsafendas applied on his own to enter the union 'for the purposes of taking up permanent residence'. This application was refused and a file B.3700 was entered under the name Demitrio Tsafendas.<sup>42</sup>

In 1937, Maria Tsafandakis applied successfully for permanent residence for herself and her four minor children (not including Demitrios). Documentation related to this application was filed under G. 8226 (Tsafendakis) and B.7771 (Tsafandakis). The former file number was also used to file documents related to Demitrios Tsafandakis, and contained documents related to all his unsuccessful applications in 1935, 1938, 1941, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1950 and 1959.

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<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 5. In the film footage of *A Question of Madness*, Gavin van den Bergh's testimony of his father's treatment at the hands of the security police was not inserted in the final version of the film, but it is available in the rushes.

<sup>41</sup> See for example, 'Verdere ondervraging van Demetrio Stafendas vanaf 2.45 op 19/9/66 deur Maj. Rossouw', Aansoek C, Vol 3 K150; and 'Leer WD/10/10/4102 oor Stafendas'. Aansoek E, Vol.3, K150 on the cover of file .

<sup>42</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry.

Before 1953 the Department of the Interior created separate series for the different kinds of applications that ranged from visas, permanent residence, naturalisation and change of name. This meant that if a person made or was involved in more than one of these applications as in the case of Tsafendas and his stepmother, their names would appear in more than one series. After 1953, a new filing system was introduced whereby a new series was identified by year. When Tsafendas made his application in 1963, a new file was created, 35226/63 that incorporated B. 3700.

In 1961, the Department of Immigration and Indian Affairs came into being as a separate department, as a result of the amalgamation of the offices of the Commissioner for Immigration and Asiatic Affairs and the Directorate of Immigration. Prior to the amalgamation, both offices were independent entities under the Department of the Interior. The new Department took over the functions of applications for permanent residence. The passport control section, previously an integral part of the Commissioner for Immigration and Asiatic Affairs, remained with the department of the Interior. The files related to this section remained with the Department of the Interior. This meant that the files related to Tsafendas' history of unsuccessful applications and the reasons why (G.8226 and B.7771) was with the Department of the Interior.

When Tsafendas made his final application for permanent residence on 15 November 1963 to the Department of Immigration, the officials dealing with the application did consult with officials from the Department of the Interior. Apparently, it was customary for immigration officials to request by telephone from the Department of the Interior to inquire if there was a file, and to ask for the number in order that a request could be made in writing. According to the Department of the Interior, this was not done. According to the Department of Immigration, it was noted. At some point in this process, procedures were not followed in the case of Tsafendas, and the Commission was unable to establish exactly who and which department was responsible for 'a neglect of duty'.



Tsafendas obtained permission for permanent residence because of a lack of cross-referencing.

When Tsafendas filled out the official application form for permanent residence, he was careful to hide the fact that he had applied before unsuccessfully, and that he had been deported previously. This led officials from the immigration department handling his application to assume that his was a new application. In his application, he also declared that he had never been found guilty of any criminal offence or trespassing of any laws, and that he had never been deported from any country.<sup>43</sup> This time all his documents were in order: proof of employment and income, addresses of next of kin, a medical report stating that he was ‘not mentally or physically defective in any way’ and the required X-Ray report stating that he was not “afflicted with tuberculosis” or with an infectious, loathsome, or contagious disease”.<sup>44</sup> The one document requested that he did not submit was his birth certificate, which would have indicated clearly his racial descent. Regulations, however, stipulated that a sworn affidavit would be acceptable in place of the original birth certificate. The only document that still had to be obtained was a police report from Lourenzo Marques. In a second interview on the 18 January 1964, Tsafendas was asked about his addresses in Lourenzo Marques, so that a security report could be obtained. He informed the official that he had not lived in Lourenzo Marques since 1935, and it was deemed unnecessary to obtain a police report.<sup>45</sup>

That Tsafendas blatantly lied on his form was clear to all by now. The Commission conducted a thorough investigation of the Immigration Department’s procedures. A letter to the Secretary for Immigration requested copies of all documents related to regulations and procedures governing the departments’ work. The letter also contained four pages of detailed questions related to the processing of Tsafendas

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<sup>43</sup> ‘Memorandum Oor die Aansoek om Blywende Vestiging Kragtens die Wet op Vreemdelinge deur Demetrio Tsafendas’, K150, Volume 4, File 1/7:Departement van Immigrasie.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Memorandum Oor die Aansoek om Blywende Vestiging Kragtens die Wet op Vreemdelinge deur Demetrio Tsafendas’, Bylae A, D, E. K150, Volume 4, File 1/7:Departement van Immigrasie.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Memorandum Oor die Aansoek om Blywende Vestiging Kragtens die Wet op Vreemdelinge deur Demetrio Tsafendas’, K150, Volume 4, File 1/7:, Immigrasie.

application for permanent residence.<sup>46</sup> The reply by the Secretary for Immigration consisted of ten pages of detailed answers and a number of attachments.<sup>47</sup> Between the 26 September 1966 and 1 November 1966, no less than ten letters went back and forth between the Secretary of the Commission and the Secretary for Immigration, all dealing with questions and answers related to procedures and practices followed in general, and in the case of Tsafendas, whether they were adhered to or not. The officials in the Department of Immigration responsible for the processing of applications for permanent residence were placed under severe pressure during the Commission's investigation.

### **The Removal Order**

In September 1965, the Report tells us, Tsafendas applied to the Department of Interior for reclassification as 'a Coloured'. The application was handled by the Regional Representative of the Cape Town office of the Department of the Interior, Population Register Section. This office did have a file on Demitrios Tsafendakis, which contained a letter dated June 18 1942, dealing with Tsafendas' application in 1942 for an exit permit for the United Kingdom. In this letter the Commissioner for Immigration and Asiatic Affairs, wrote to the Chief Immigration Officer in Cape Town that the application was refused and added,

...for your confidential information...Tsafandakis entered the union illegally after his application for permanent residence had been rejected. He is a half-caste and engaged actively in Communist propaganda. The only reason why he was not required to return to Lourenço Marques, where he was born, after he had been convicted for entering the union illegally, was that he was engaged in work of national importance. The police authorities have now advised me that Tsafandakis was discharged from his employment on account of irregular attendance and loafing. The High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, who was consulted, has requested that facilities should not be granted for Tsafandakis to proceed to England, in present circumstances. As he has now been discharged from his employment, he should be ordered to return to Lourenço Marques forthwith.

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<sup>46</sup> Letter from Secretary of Commission to Secretary for Immigration, 29 September 1966. K150, File 1/7 Departement van Immigrasie.

<sup>47</sup> Letter from Secretary for Immigration to Secretary of Commission, 3 October 1966. K150, File 1/7 Departement van Immigrasie.

Please advise me of developments (G.8226)<sup>48</sup>

According to the Commission's Report a connection was made between the name Tsafendas and Tsafendakis, as Tsafendas himself mentioned that he had been in South Africa between 1927 and 1930, as well as from 1936 to 1942. Because of the contents of this letter, the Regional Representative wrote to the Population Registrar in Pretoria, recommending that he be deported. This letter, according to the Commission's report, did not mention the letter of 18 June 1942, because it was assumed that the information contained therein would be at the head office in Pretoria. A new case file for Demitrios Tsafendas, 98070/65 was then opened. Between the 14th of December to the 17th of January, File no 98070/65 then travelled "backwards and forwards between the Population Registration Division, The Passport Control section and the Population Registry".<sup>49</sup> A request was apparently made to see the old case files by a Mr. Bosenberg on 21 January, but no evidence exists that "he ever saw such a file or files".<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, between this date and 1 July 1966,

...nothing whatsoever was done in the matter. Since all movements of the file were not, as required, recorded on the cover, it is not possible to determine where file 98070/65 was during this period. In a departmental investigation, it was, however established that from 27 April 1966 to 15th June 1966. The file was lying on the desk of Mr. W. G. Mitchell (temporary clerk- pensioned departmental officer) in the Passport Control section...<sup>51</sup>

The Report then continues its tracking movement from:

On The 1st of July, the file was with Mr. Van Litzendorgh. It is not possible to determine with any certainty when it was sent to him, but in the file there is a note indicating that on 21st January he asked the registry to see Tsafendas' original or old case-files. On the same day, Mrs. A.D. De Beer of the registry informed Miss Du Plessis that there was no race file, but there was a file 35226/63 of the department of the Interior. She had therefore not traced files B.7771 (the Tsafandakis file) and G.8226 (the Tsafendakis file).<sup>52</sup>

Eventually file 98070/65, after some further handling, eventually reached the Secretary for the Interior on the 4th of August, and

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<sup>48</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, 4.

<sup>49</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, 22.

<sup>50</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, 23.

<sup>51</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, 23.

<sup>52</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, 23.

On the 8th of August, 1966, the Secretary for the Interior submitted a memorandum, to which was attached a removal order to the Minister of the Interior, and on the 9th August 1966, 1966, the Minister signed the necessary warrant. On the 1st of September, a letter to the Police requesting them to serve the order on Tsafendas had already been typed, but on the 6th September, 1966, the day of Dr. Verwoerd's death, it had not been sent off.<sup>53</sup>

This section of the report, while very precise about the movements of the file, remains surprisingly vague about who exactly is responsible for all the delays and the failure to trace G.8226 and B.7771. It did single out Mr. Mitchell for special treatment:

...It is impossible to identify all culprits. Mr. Mitchell was undoubtedly one. ...Mr. Mitchell's explanation is that ...he kept the file with the intention of following up the matter, but because he did not regard it as urgent, as well as pressure of work, he did not however do so. It appears, however, that Mr. Mitchell did no overtime during the period 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1966, to 28<sup>th</sup> September, 1966. His explanation is no excuse.

Mrs. De Beer, however is absolved as she did not realise that the "Tsafendakis" or the "Tsafandakis" files also refer to "Tsafendas". In addition, the Report continues,

If a cross-reference to files G. 8226 or B. 7771 had been made on file 35226/63., or if the aliases Tsafendakis or Tsafandakis had been noted file 35226/63, or on the index cards, she would have traced all the files, and everyone would have realized that the matter was indeed urgent.

### **The House of Assembly**

With regard to the House of Assembly, the Commission was concerned with the question of who was responsible for the appointment of Tsafendas as a messenger in Parliament. The focus of the enquiry was the appointment procedures and if there was any neglect of duty on the part to any individual. The wheels of the apartheid bureaucracy had their own rhythm, demanded by procedural rules that included excessive cross-referencing, and checking procedures. For the sake of pure operationality, these procedures had to be disregarded if anything was to be accomplished. Here we are reminded of Foucault's warning against treating power simply as a repressive phenomenon At the lower levels of apartheid state administration, power produced disobedience and a reliance on customary practice.

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<sup>53</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, 23.

This is in essence what Mr. Burger, Senior Messenger in the House of Assembly, who interviewed and appointed Tsafendas for the post of temporary parliamentary messenger, testified to. One of the requirements of employment as a temporary messenger is that the person must be “ a White and a South African citizen” . Mr. Burger was questioned in detail about how this was established when interviewing Tsafendas. Below, I reproduce an extract of Mr. Burger’s testimony before the Commission:

**The Chairman:**

Good, we shall now proceed to the specific case of Tsafendas. How did you establish in his case that he was a White and that he was a South African? -

**Mr. Burger:**

Sir, I accepted-I asked him: ‘Are you a White South African? Then he said: ‘Yes’ Then I said: ‘Where is your identity card?’ Then he said: ‘Sir I haven’t my identity card with me, but here is the proof’, but I had then already seen his unemployment card. When he gave it I saw ... the Interior date stamp which says it is your number - your identity number...and had the necessary W which we accept as White, and he also acknowledged that he was a South African citizen.

**Mr. Terreblanche:**

You simply accept that he is a South African citizen because he said so? - No the proof is your identity number, and on the employment card it also says that a White person is...

**The Chairman:**

Yes , but we are now talking about a South African citizen - not a White! - I accepted it. I accepted that he was now a South African citizen because there was his identity number, My Lord, and-

Were you not aware that aliens may also have identity members?- No, My Lord, my knowledge did not go so far...I must admit I fell short there.

The man had a foreign name, not so- Yes Sir.

Did you ask him where he was born?- Yes

What did he say?- Lourenço Marques.

Well then why did you accept that he was a South African citizen? Did you not ask whether he was naturalized or anything? - Sir, no. I asked him: ‘Are you a South African citizen? Then he said ‘Yes’, and I accepted that...

I cannot understand why you accept that a person born abroad, if he says he is a South African citizen, why you accept that he is one? Why did you accept it? -Sir If I slipped up there, I admit it, but in good faith I took it that he was a South African citizen, because he said so, and also he showed me his number, so I failed there, Sir

**The Chairman:**

But did it not strike you that here was a man who was healthy, he was already 52 years of age, and he was so broke that he was hungry? – My Lord, if you see the supply that goes through the House of Assembly- as it is, from the supply which I have to take people he was one of the best on our record.<sup>54</sup>

Asked what he meant by “he was one of the best”, Mr. Burger replied,

‘he was strong and healthy” and “My Lord. You see the supply from which I have to get my people is actually and I have complained to my chiefs) that I have to scour the streets, because nobody wants to do the humble work, under the humble name of a messenger, for a short time, and that is where I have to get my workers, because for a young man there are no prospects...<sup>55</sup>

Mr. Burger was also questioned in detail about the record of employment entered on Tsafendas’ unemployment card, and whether he had noticed the frequency of short spells of employment:

**Mr. Terblanche:**

Now, you saw for example that, on this thing [unemployment card] that he had worked for City Engineering, and that he had worked there from the 9th of December ’63 to the 3rd of February ’64. That is only about two months? – Yes

And you saw that he worked for the City Council of Cape Town, from the 13th of September ’65 to the 25th of October ’65. That is not even – a little over a month? – Yes

Then you saw that he had worked for Marine Diamond Corporation from the 3rd of February, ’66 to the 30th of March ’66- Again only two months ?- Yes.

In other words this indicated that he was certainly not a good worker? – Correct.

Did you ask him what kind of work he had done at these places? – Yes, Sir, but although one asks them, they just say they worked there...I did not really worry about very...I am looking for someone who is healthy, who is willing, who will work as long as he is working, and then have to be discharged. That is how I put it to them.

Yes, but Mr. Burger, I submit to you that if you get such a record, you must know that he is not a willing worker. – Sir , from the supply and the men I use every session, there are many worse.<sup>56</sup>

Mr. Burger also testified that when assessing the suitability of an applicant it was not matters of state security that was uppermost in his mind but whether the person was likely to commit theft:

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<sup>54</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, 25.

<sup>55</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, 25.

<sup>56</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, 25.

**Chairman:**

What do you watch out for? That is what I should like to know! – My Lord, do you mean when I talk to a person or in his work?

Yes! – Mostly for theft, My Lord.

Is that your approach, whether he looks like a thief? – Yes, and you know when a person is a good liar, one can't really judge, because you do not need the man for anything important.

**Chairman:**

Now did it ever strike you that a messenger is placed in a very favourable position to commit sabotage or murder in the House of Assembly? Or did it never strike you? – No my Lord, up to the 6th – never! I will put it this way, I could never have expected it.

Now, looking back, do you realise in what a favourable position a messenger is actually to do such a thing? – Yes in my weakness, I admit it.

Did anyone ever warn you to be careful because a messenger might do such a thing? – My Lord, in the words you have used, no, My Lord, but I must add again, in the sense of theft yes, because they are members of parliament and so on, whose offices and their possessions are always open – and we were more on the lookout for theft...<sup>57</sup>

The Commission's report concluded that neither Mr. Burger nor his two assistants could be held responsible for the appointment of Tsafendas, as nothing in his behaviour indicated that he was mentally disordered or might become dangerous. They had conducted their duties according to existing 'custom' and had not been under any instructions to the contrary. They were good, decent people who did their duty as they saw fit and knew it...They simply lacked the knowledge, ability and insight to make a proper selection".<sup>58</sup>

The Report concludes this section by making the following recommendations:

It is probable that a large number of assassinations, if not the majority are committed by mentally disordered persons...It follows therefore, that all persons with whom the Prime Minister...comes into regular contact in Parliament and elsewhere, should as far as possible be screened by the Security Police. One of the obvious investigations that should be carried out ...should be to establish whether the person concerned is mentally disordered, and if not, whether there is a greater than normal chance that the person could become mentally disordered...Applicants for a post often conceal the fact that they have been in a mental institution or have been treated by a psychiatrist. This is what Tsafendas did. It is therefore suggested that the names – and particulars – of all persons who are

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<sup>57</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, 26.

<sup>58</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, 27.

receiving or have received treatment for a mental disorder in any hospital or similar institution should be sent to the Commissioner for Mental Health, that the latter should compile a list of such persons, and that any psychiatrist or psychologist who is consulted by the Security Police in connection with a security investigation should be entitled to ascertain whether from the said Commissioner whether the person concerned appears on such a list, as well as all the particulars he may have at his disposal...It is recommended that the advisability be investigated that of compelling all medical practitioners - including psychiatrists - to submit to the said Commissioner the names of all patients who are mentally disordered (but who are not in institutions) and who, in their opinion may become a danger to others at some time in the future...It is desirable that every person who requires treatment, and that every person who is a danger to others on account of some mental disorder should be detained in institutions where escape is impossible...<sup>59</sup>

### **Conclusion: The Commission and its after-life**

The Commission's mode of evidence was to locate the cause of a political assassination in the failure of officials to follow the rules applicable to the day to day functioning of the state's bureaucracy. It failed to acknowledge that the work of these officials was at times rendered dysfunctional precisely because of it being tethered to the demands to a highly rationalised racial order. This was evident in the testimonies of Mr Burger and Mr Van der Bergh. The very system that it was designed to protect was its own undoing. This was also the reason why Tsafendas was able to subvert it. Its solution, as is evident in the quote above, was to recommend even more efficient regulatory mechanisms of control that attempted to fuse the methods of sovereign power and disciplinary regimes of normalisation.

The Commission's *Report* and its accompanying documentation have provided the entry point for most accounts of Tsafendas' life. Chapter 11 of its final *Report* informed the production of most of the biographical texts on Tsafendas. The first play by William Tanner, *Tsafendas or An Enquiry into the Circumstances of the death of the late Dr. the Honourable Hendrik French Verwoerd*, written in the 1970s, is based almost entirely on the *Report* of the Commission and newspaper and magazine accounts. Liza Keys' documentary, *A Question of Madness*, (1999) was filmed in

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<sup>59</sup> Report of the Commission of Enquiry, 27



Sterkfontein Hospital, where Tsafendas was moved to after 1994. The film was screened on SABC in 2000. Through the method of the unobtrusive interview, it brings to the viewer an intimate and close-up picture of an ailing and ageing Tsafendas in his hospital surroundings. The film also draws on an extensive newspaper and television archive, as well as the documentary archive of the Commission, and the archives in the South African Police in Pretoria. Dutch writer, Henk van Woerden's *A Mouthful of Glass*, first published in 1998 in Holland as *Een Mond Vol Glas*,<sup>60</sup> is the first full-length book on Tsafendas based on extensive primary research into the documents of the Commission and interviews with Tsafendas. Van Woerden's book gives an overview of the most important biographical contours of Tsafendas' life up to the assassination.

The play *Tsafendas: Living in Strange Lands*, written by Anton Robert Krueger,<sup>61</sup> was first staged in 2001 in at the Wits Theatre in Johannesburg. With Renos Nicos Spanoudes in the role of Tsafendas. Anthony Sher's play *I.D* (2003),<sup>62</sup> in which he also played Tsafendas, was written in 2003. Performed in London in the same year, the play focuses on both Verwoerd and Tsafendas. These works in turn have also drawn upon each other. Anton Krueger, for example, has acknowledged consulting Tanner's play and expressed indebtedness to Liza Key who made her archive material available to him. Both Sher and Krueger have been influenced by Van Woerden's book. Sher was directly inspired by *A Mouthful of Glass*, and originally intended to write a stage version of the book. Reviews of these secondary works have generated an extensive interest amongst a small literary community for whom Tsafendas has been both an enigma and muse.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Subsequent to the Dutch edition, this book was translated into English and Afrikaans. In the U.K it was published as *A Mouthful of Glass* by Granta Books in 2000; in the USA it was published by Metropolitan Books (New York) as *The Assassin: A Story of Rage and Race in the land of Apartheid* in 2001. In South Africa, an English edition was published in 2000 by Jonathan Ball(Johannesburg); The Afrikaans edition was translated from the Dutch by Antjie Krog and published as *Domein van Glas* (Kaapstad: Queillerie, 2000).

<sup>61</sup> A. Krueger, *Living in Strange Lands*. ( New York; Playscripts, 2001). This play was recently staged, in June 2009 at the Wits Theatre, and in July 2009 at the Grahamstown Arts Festival.

<sup>62</sup> A. Sher, *I.D*, (London: Nick Hem, 2003).

<sup>63</sup>I intend to discuss all these works in detail in chapters 4-6.

## Chapter 3

### 'I am a Cosmopolitan Man': The Prison Letters of Mimikos Demitrios Tsafendakis Von Willem De Kanhume, 1966 -1986

Steve Earle

'Ellis Unit One'

(From the soundtrack of the film *'Dead Man Walking'*)

I was fresh out of the service  
It was back in '82  
I raised some Cain when I come back to town  
I left to be all I could be  
Come home without a clue  
Now, I married Dawn and had to settle down  
So I hired on at the prison  
Guess I always knew I would  
Just like my dad and both my uncles done  
And I worked on every cell block  
Now, things're goin' good  
But then they transferred me to Ellis Unit One

Swing low  
Swing low  
Swing low and carry me home

Well, my daddy used to talk about them long nights at the walls  
And how they used to strap 'em in the chair  
The kids down from the college and they'd bring their beer 'n all  
'N when the lights went out, a cheer rose in the air

Well, folks just got too civilized  
Sparky's gatherin' dust  
'Cause no one wants to touch a smokin' gun  
And since they got the injection  
They don't mind as much, I guess  
They just put 'em down at Ellis Unit One

Swing low  
Swing low  
Swing low and carry me home

Well, I've seen 'em fight like lions, boys  
I've seen 'em go like lambs  
And I've helped to drag 'em when they could not stand  
And I've heard their mamas cryin' when they heard that big door slam  
And I've seen the victim's family holdin' hands

Last night I dreamed that I woke up with straps across my chest  
And something cold and black pullin' through my lungs  
'N even Jesus couldn't save me though I know he did his best  
But he don't live on Ellis Unit One.

## Introduction

This chapter will focus on a body of archival material on Demitrios Tsafendas' imprisonment on Robben Island and in Pretoria Maximum Security Prison that is kept in files in the Department of Correctional Services. The documents in these files deal with the administrative details of Tsafendas' incarceration and include transfer documents, doctors' reports on his mental and physical condition, legal documents about the conditions governing his incarceration, and various memoranda.

Interspersed among the documents I found a number of letters written by Tsafendas. They are all filed with the records related to prisoner No. A 5078 D. Tsafendas. The files cover the period March 1967 to October 1985, although they contain a number of letters written from November 1966, while Tsafendas was still on Robben Island, and some letters written in December 1966 when he was already in Pretoria Maximum Security. All the letters are handwritten. Few are dated, but approximate dates can easily be gleaned from the content or the notes made by prison officials.

These letters are significant for a number of reasons. Very little of his prison life is covered in biographical accounts of his life, fictional or otherwise, despite the fact that he spent a total of twenty-eight years in prison. This period of his life is not dealt with in any detail, for example, in Henk van Woerden's auto/biographical novel *Een Mondvol Glas* (1998) or Liza Key's documentary film *A Question of Madness* (1999), both of which will be addressed at chapter length later in the thesis. It is possible that the material was not available at the time they produced their work. Both of them interviewed Tsafendas at a very advanced age (in his late seventies), when his physical health had already deteriorated. These letters, however, were written during a period when he was in his fifties and sixties. His physical health was relatively intact, while his memory and intellect were not yet diminished by old age. Written over a period of roughly twenty years, these letters represent the only record of his own account of his life, apart from the retrospective late life interviews. They thus provide us with rare insight into how Tsafendas represented himself

when, for the first time in his life, he was forced to remain in one place for an extended period. He had spent most of his life, up to the age of 48, in unceasing, restless movement, crossing borders, and spending more time on sea than on land. Now, for the rest of his life, he was confined to a space that was 2.37 x 3.62 metres, with an adjoining bathroom of 2.39 x 3.62 metres.<sup>1</sup>

The wide national political context was one in which the apartheid regime experienced major political crises: the 1976 student uprising, the death in detention of Steve Biko in 1977 and the turbulent 1980s. The imprint of these events is clearly discernable in the letters, as well as in the official correspondence and reports with which the letters were filed. Here it is important to pay special attention to, what Ann Stoler refers to as, the 'pulse of the archive'. This, she writes, can be gleaned

in the quiescence and quickened pace of its own production, in the steady and feverish rhythms of repeated incantations, formulae, and frames. I pursue [the pulse of the archive] through the uneven densities of Dutch [here: apartheid South African] archival preoccupations and predicaments: where energies are expended, what conditioned the designation of an event, what visions were generated in the pursuit of prediction.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter will explore, then, how a reading of the letters that Tsafendas wrote in prison sheds light on how he made sense of his life. As he was completely cut off from all human contact, the letters were a means of communication with the world outside his prison cell. They were also a vehicle for expressing his feelings on his past and his self-reflections about his life in context of rapidly changing historical and political circumstances. Whether he was discussing the quality of clothing for prisoners, the incompetency of the medical profession regarding his 'infirmity', or certain German engineering feats during the Second World War, he revealed himself as at once recalcitrant and respectful, demanding and compliant. On some issues he displayed an attitude and intransigence that seemed quite out of place with his status as a long-term prisoner. Despite being held in the most oppressive of

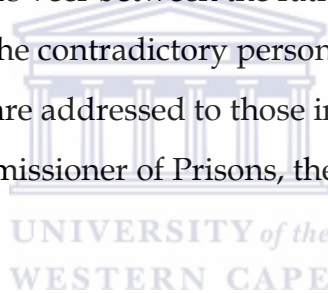
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<sup>1</sup> Memorandum Staatspresidentpatiënt Demitrio Tsafendas: Pretoria Maksimumgevangenis. The Commanding Officer, Pretoria Prison to The Commissioner of Prisons, 30 September 1987. 80/0043.

<sup>2</sup> A. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 35.

circumstances, he would make impossible demands on the prison staff and often exasperated them with his opinionated manner. At times he would refuse to see doctors whom he considered incompetent and he would also refuse to take medication. That the prison authorities did, on many occasions, indulge his eccentricities is clear from official correspondence between medical officials and prison officials.

The letters are strikingly different from those of other prisoners, political and non-political. Prisoners' letters are, in general, addressed to next of kin or close associates. This is the case for example with the letters that Ahmed Kathrada and Nelson Mandela wrote from Robben Island. These bodies of letters are usually read as the discourses of sane, rational men engaging in rational methods toward rational political ends. Tsafendas' letters veer between the rational and irrational, illuminating the full range of the contradictory personality that he was. With a few exceptions, Tsafendas' letters are addressed to those in authority: the Commanding Officer of the Prison, the Commissioner of Prisons, the American Embassy, or a medical officer.



Most of the letters are addressed to the Officer in Command of the Prison who was the only person allowed to deal with him directly. The letters are reflective of the uneasy and dual nature of the power relationships that existed in his case. His was a high-profile case, and those in charge of Tsafendas were acutely aware of the public embarrassment that could result from negative publicity. This concern was visibly demonstrated in the way the Brian Price Affair was managed by the prison administration. When, for example, Tsafendas laid a charge of assault against prison warders, it was thoroughly investigated and meticulous record keeping was adhered to. Tsafendas was not unaware of this and he exploited it to the full, though not always successfully. One of the ways he did so was, through these letters, to declare himself in no uncertain terms, as no mere common man, but as 'a cosmopolitan man', who although he 'did not get his degree' was a man of reading and learning, a man whose opinions needed to be taken seriously, whether these

were about medical matters, the moral calibre of inmates, or the design of aircraft carriers.

Given the number of years that Tsafendas spent in maximum security prison, the letters cannot give us a complete picture of his life in prison. They represent, in the words of Verne Harris, a mere 'sliver of the record' of his time there.<sup>3</sup> The letters he wrote also have to be read along the grain of the official records of prisoner No. A 5078, whose daily life was meticulously recorded as required by official bureaucratic protocols. They are not attempts at self-archivisation, as Catherine Burns suggests to have been the case with Louise Mvembe.<sup>4</sup> They do, however, reflect an attempt to project a particular self-image and take on added importance given that, as he himself notes, he was not given the chance to speak at his trial. They are not confessional in nature because Tsafendas maintains his innocence, but reflect an attempt on his part 'to give an account of himself' as the victim of specific circumstances that would lead up to the events of 6 September 1966.

### **Tsafendas compared with other long-term political prisoners**

Tsafendas was not, legally speaking, a political prisoner, but a mental patient. By law, he should have been sent to a mental institution for treatment, as David Beresford Pratt had been in 1960 (see Chapter 1). The latter was also found to be insane and was sent to Bloemfontein Mental Hospital where he committed suicide in 1961.<sup>5</sup> As a State President's Patient Tsafendas was a ward of the state. Because he was declared insane, and therefore not responsible for his actions, he was not supposed to be punished, but to be treated and cared for. The law stipulated that State President's Patients fell under the jurisdiction of the Department of Health and were only to be kept in prison when the Department of Health did not have appropriate facilities. Even in cases where they were considered dangerous, as in the case of Tsafendas, prison was supposed to be only a temporary measure in the

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<sup>3</sup> V. Harris, 'The Archival Sliver' in C. Hamilton et al, *Refiguring the Archive* (London: Kluwer Academic Publications, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> C. Burns, 'The Letters of Louise Mvembe' in Karen Barber, ed., *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> See chapter 1 for details.

absence of a hospital with the necessary security infrastructure to ensure maximum security.

The decision of the Judge-President of the Cape was, however, interpreted in such a way that Tsafendas did end up being sent to prison rather than to a mental hospital. In a memorandum compiled by the Deputy Commissioner of Prisons, specific provisions of the Mental Disorders Act of 1916 [Act no. 38, Article 28(1) and (2), Article 30(1)-(4), Article 53(1) and (2), Articles 56-57 and Article 61] were cited to support this decision.<sup>6</sup> His legal status in prison mirrored that of his anomalous citizen's status out of prison. Publicly, the South African Government had undertaken to abide by international standards with the regard to the treatment of madmen. Privately, it was to exact its own revenge

Demitrios Tsafendas' life henceforth would be very carefully managed, albeit within the limits permitted by 'civilized society'. The state's strategy was to manage very carefully information about Tsafendas, A key feature of that strategy was to construct a veil of silence around Verwoerd's assassin. He was kept in a maximum-security prison, Section C, which was the death row section of Pretoria Maximum Security, dubbed by those held there as 'Beverly Hills'. Death Row, unlike Robben Island or Pretoria Local where white political prisoners were kept, was a part of the prison system that was shrouded in secrecy. Here, a very specific prison regime existed that was the most punitive from a psychological perspective. The prisoners were kept in complete isolation. They were not allowed to talk to anybody and prison warders were strictly forbidden from talking to them. They were under twenty-four hour surveillance to prevent any suicide attempts. They were dressed in the barest minimum of clothes and their shoes had to be left outside their prison cell. Lights remained switched on for twenty-four hours.

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<sup>6</sup> 'Memorandum opgestel 13/2/67 : Aanhouding van Dimitri Tsafendas in 'n gevangenis ingevolge die Bepalings van die Wet op Geestesgebreken, 1916 (Wet No. 38 van 1916), soos gewysig deur Wysigingswet op Geestesgebreke (Wet no. 7 van 1944) en Regulasies', Correctional Services File 80/0043, Dimitrio Tsafendas, Volume 1, National Archives, Pretoria.

These conditions applied until the prisoner was served with an execution order, which normally took place seven days before the execution. Once served with an execution order, the prisoner was moved to a cell dubbed by inmates as 'the pot'. According to Paula McBride, whose husband Robert McBride spent four years on death row, and who visited him regularly during 1987- 1990, prisoners were not allowed to discuss anything related to what was happening inside the prison:

I had to be sitting here, Robert would be there, and we would have warders either side of us listening in to your conversation, because that was their duty and watching that nothing was said about what happened inside the prison ... You could actually talk about pretty much anything as long as the prisoner didn't mention anything that was happening inside the prison and more importantly and particularly in the early years, that they didn't mention that anybody was due to be executed because it was not supposed to be known, which is why before there was vigilant visiting, before 1987, many people went to the gallows with nobody knowing about it, other than their families who had been sent a second class rail ticket to come up for their last visit ...<sup>7</sup>

The notices for execution or clemency were brought by the sheriff to the prison. She went on to describe the change in the rhythm of daily routine that took place during this seven-day period.

The warder would then walk down the passages in between cells, with prisoners waiting inside wondering whether it was their turn today, whether they were going to get handed a notice of release or a notice of death ... there was complete and utter silence during those periods. There was complete silence, while the footsteps went down, everyone waiting to see where the footsteps would stop. When they stopped outside a door, they would tell the prisoner 'pak', pack your things because you are leaving ... At that stage they were still not told, all they were told was to pack their things. They would then, all those who had been told to pack, would be taken out of their cells, and they would wait in a line outside the office where the Sheriff was waiting. The only time they would know which decision had been made about their lives, was when they went into that office ... those who were given a sentence of death were moved into what was known as the pot and it was known as the pot in my understanding because that is where you boiled because of levels of stress before your death. And in that week, that week was set aside for things like measurement. Measurement of your neck to make sure that the hangman got it right, measurement of your weight to make sure that they are

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<sup>7</sup> Paula McBride, Submission to Human Rights Violation Committee (HRVC)'s Special Hearing on Prisons, 21/07/1997. <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/prison/mcbride.htm>. Accessed 25 October 2010.



guaranteed that the drop would be correct when you were hanged ... In that seven days you had even tighter security just to make sure that you wouldn't take away from the hangman and from the State, the duty of death.<sup>8</sup>

Tsafendas' conditions of incarceration, it could be argued, were far more austere than those of the longest sentenced political prisoners. Of these, the most onerous condition was the rule of absolute isolation. The *Pligstaat*,<sup>9</sup> issued by the Commanding Officer of Pretoria Central, explained to prison staff the exact rules governing the guarding of Tsafendas. It stipulated that no other prisoner must be within sight when he takes his exercise; he could only leave his cell when absolutely no-one was about; only the officer on duty and the Commanding Officer of the prison was allowed access to his cell; no other member of the prison staff or visitors were allowed near his cell; no reading material except his bible was allowed in his cell; he could only receive visitors with the permission of the Commissioner of Prisons. The justification for his isolation was that as a State President's Patient, he was an un-sentenced person and could not come into contact with sentenced prisoners. Furthermore, as a mentally ill person, he could not be in contact with other categories of un-sentenced persons. This meant total isolation which, the commander of the prison, in a memorandum to the Commissioner of Prisons, admitted was '*onmenslik*' [inhuman].<sup>10</sup> He was also incarcerated longer than any other political prisoner, thirty three-years - twenty-eight years in a prison and the last five years of his life in a mental hospital. Of these, twenty-three years were spent in a cell that was next to the room where the stairs leading to the hanging chamber were. All prisoners sentenced to death, had to pass his cell on their way to the gallows. For all these reasons, a comparison of his time in prison with that of long-term political prisoners proper seems appropriate.

In the early years of his incarceration the apartheid authorities were quite content with leaving Tsafendas to languish in complete isolation. That he was severely

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<sup>8</sup> Paula McBride, Submission to HRV's Special Hearing on Prisons.

<sup>9</sup> 'Pligstaat: Bewaking van Demitrio Tsafendas'. Bevelvoerende Offisier. Correctional Services File 80/0043, Dimitrio Tsafendas. Volume 1. National Archives.

<sup>10</sup> 'Memorandum: Aanhouding in 'n Gevangenis: Presidentspasient Nommer 80/0043 : Dimitrio Tsafendas'. Commander of Prison, G.J. Van Wyk to Commissioner, 3 July 1985.

abused by wardens in this period has been attested to by many who spent time there. As the political situation in the country became more unstable during the 1970s and 1980s, the contradiction between Tsafendas' official legal status and his actual conditions of incarceration presented the authorities with increasing difficulties. The much-publicised death in detention of Steve Biko in the 1970s, of Neil Aggett in the 1980s, as well as numerous other incidents forced them to relax the extreme conditions of isolation of his incarceration. Rumours that Tsafendas was being severely ill-treated also reached the international press, in 1976 and in 1980. From the 1980s, senior officials in charge of the prison as well as the office of the Commissioner of Prisons were forced to consider Tsafendas in a very different light. His case had always been an extremely sensitive one, and given the nature of his crime, was likely to attract media publicity. What is also clear from the various memoranda between the prison administration and the office of the Commissioner of Prisons is that they were acutely aware of the importance of Tsafendas' status, and the administrative documentation shows that there was a great difference between the actions of wardens in charge of the daily routine, and of senior officials such as the Commanding Officer in charge of the whole complex. A different generation of civil servants was entering the apartheid system, which included the administration of prisons and hospitals. Doctors in particular began to argue for the removal of Tsafendas to a proper mental hospital. A number of memoranda between the prison administration and the office of the Commissioner of Prisons indicate that from the end of 1984, this matter was given serious consideration.

A number of books have been published during the last two decades on the experiences of political prisoners under the apartheid regime.<sup>11</sup> From these accounts

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<sup>11</sup> See Ahmed Kathrada, *Letters from Robben Island: A Selection of Ahmed Kathrada's Prison Correspondence, 1964-1989* (Belville: Mayibuye Centre, 1999); Zuleikha Mayat, *Dear Ahmedbhai, Dear Zuleikhabeen: The Letters of Zuleikha Mayat and Ahmed Kathrada, 1979-1989* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2009); Raymond Suttner, *Inside Apartheid's Prison: Notes and Letters of Struggle* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001); Breyten Breytenbach, *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985); Hugh Lewin, *Bandiet: Seven Years in a South African Prison* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1974); Mosiuoa Lekota, *Prison Letters to a Daughter* (Bramley: Taurus, 1991); Mac Maharaj, ed., *Reflections in Prison* (Cape Town: Zebra Press and the Robben Island Museum, 2001); Indres Naidoo, *Island in Chains: Indres Naidoo Prisoner 885/63* (Johannesburg: Penguin Books, 2000).

of Robben Island and Pretoria Local, it is clear that while political prisoners were kept separate from other prisoners, none of their conditions mirrored the extreme isolation of Tsafendas. Their separation from other prisoners presented them with an advantage rather than a disadvantage. It encouraged cohesiveness and a continuation of the spirit of comradeship and support. Over time as prisoners graduated to a different status they were granted more privileges. While letters were restricted to two a month and limited to 500 words per letter, they were permitted to study, watch films, play sport, and even to have access to musical instruments. After a number of years they were allowed to read magazines and newspapers. These conditions also improved as a result of international campaigning on their behalf. In a letter written to Sylvia Neane after he had been imprisoned for six and a half years, Kathrada writes in detail about how he and other single cell prisoners were isolated from others' lives in prison:

We are taken to and from work in a closed lorry, are taken separately to visits, have separate church services, write exams separately - film shows, games, everything is separate ... Living with the same faces day in and day out must be having adverse psychological effects on us. We do get on each others nerves and we have long exhausted all conversation relating to our experiences outside. All jokes have been told; even gossip has become repetitive ... The studies are a great help. Wish they'd allow us newspapers. In our studies and general reading, we suffer from narrow verkramppte censorship. They have to keep away from us every scrap of paper containing political news, scantily dressed women must also be torn out of *Panorama* and other magazines ... I once raised the mutilation of our magazines with a senior officer ... [F]rom next year we will no longer be allowed to do politics, history, economic history and any other subjects which necessitates books considered objectionable ... about the only recreation provided by the authorities is the monthly film show... occasionally a good film slips in ... then there is a radio rediffusion service, which has virtually ceased functioning for about a year.<sup>12</sup>

The complaints and grievances that Kathrada writes about highlight the vast difference between the conditions of political prisoners on Robben Island and that of Tsafendas. Political prisoners had stature and respect and were thus able to draw on the support of a wide range of people outside of prison. While they were forbidden to write about political issues, they were still able to exchange views on important

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<sup>12</sup> Kathrada, *Letters from Robben Island*, 47-50.

matters relevant to the religious, social and cultural life of their respective backgrounds. The value of such communication to the emotional, psychological and intellectual survival of long-term prisoners is borne out by the exchange of letters between Ahmad Kathrada and Zuleikha Mayat from 1979 to 1989, up to the eve of Kathrada's release. Kathrada and Mayat were both from a Transvaal rural background; both were descended from Gujarati Muslim Indian immigrants; both were raised in Gujarati speaking households; both learned Arabic and Urdu as children. The letters discuss family and extended family issues; culture and the arts; medicine, the Tabligh Jamaat; Indian history and culture. While they had never met, they knew many people in common and shared a network of ties that straddled extended kin, and social and political circles of the Indian Muslim communities in Durban and Johannesburg.<sup>13</sup>

Zuleikha Mayat was not a political activist in the strict sense of the word, but she was a journalist, a modern Muslim woman active in the social and cultural life of the Indian community in Durban. She engaged Kathrada on the spiritual, philosophical and historical aspects of Islam, as well as on the impact of forced removals on families known to both of them. The letters between Kathrada and Mayat are rich in their range and scope of subject matter precisely because of the gradual increase in privileges allowed to prisoners on Robben Island. Kathrada wrote to her about matters ranging from the quality of radio programmes such as Radio Lotus, to current plays, Indian music and dress, to important articles in certain newspapers.<sup>14</sup> He explained how when rules were broken, punishment took the form of removing privileges. One of these privileges was study which was of course very highly valued by political prisoners. It enabled them to read restricted literature and books beyond the contents of the prison library, and to keep themselves informed. One of the major deprivations recounted by Kathrada was deprivation of news. Prisoners were ever eager to keep themselves informed. In a letter to Dullah Omar dated 31

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<sup>13</sup> Zuleikha Mayat, *Dear Ahmedbhai, Dear Zuleikhabehn: The Letters of Zuleikha Mayat and Ahmed Kathrada, 1979-1989* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Zuleikha Mayat, *Dear Ahmedbhai, Dear Zuleikhabehn*. See especially the letters dated 19 May 1979, 17 January 1981, 14 February 1981, 11 April 1981, 10 August 1982, 28 August 1982, 5 January 1986, 29 January 1986, 10 May 1986.

May 1985, Kathrada mentions that 'on our little FM Radio we listen to over twenty news broadcasts every day. We read the *Cape Times*, *Die Burger*, *Sowetan*, *The Star*, *Sunday Times*, *Rapport*, *City Press*, *Cape Herald*, *Leader*, *Graphic*, *Drum*, *Guardian*, *Time*, *Frontline*, *Die Suid-Afrikaan*, etc., etc. ...'<sup>15</sup>

As Tsafendas' letters will show, he made numerous requests for books, dictionaries, encyclopedias; he asked for language textbooks and permission to continue his study in languages; he inquired about the possibility of books on music for beginners and requested permission to learn a musical instrument to pass the time. He also requested access to radio and television after its introduction in South Africa. These requests were all refused. He appealed for financial assistance to his family and certain individuals to enable him to buy items from the prison stores, but with no success. As the letters will show, he took full advantages of the change in command to repeat his requests anew and he was eventually allowed to borrow two books a week from the prison library and to write to his family.

### **Tsafendas' Arrival on Robben Island**

On 26 October 1966 Demitrios Tsafendas was sent to Robben Island to be kept there until an appropriate place of internment was decided upon. Tsafendas arrived on Robben Island just two years after the conclusion of the Rivonia Trial. Between 1960 and 1966 Robben Island saw a huge increase in the number of political prisoners. By 1966 it was home to some of the most important political prisoners in South Africa. Political prisoners such as Indres Naidoo were amongst the first political prisoners to arrive on Robben Island in 1963 and endured brutal and barbaric treatment at the hands of wardens. Once the Rivonia Trialists arrived, however, Robben Island was put under the international spotlight and this strengthened resolve and resistance against ill-treatment. The prisoners had already begun to establish ways of keeping each other informed and supporting one another.

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<sup>15</sup> Kathrada, *Letters from Robben Island*, 180.

If the official leaders of the liberation movements did not acknowledge Tsafendas as a political actor and were wary of identifying with him, it was a different matter amongst ordinary political prisoners, younger prisoners, prisoners who were not members of the ANC, and prisoners who were kept in close proximity to Tsafendas. Indres Naidoo was in the isolation block while preparations were made for Tsafendas' 'arrival'. He recalls that 'a special section in the isolation section' was being built for him, and that prisoners took advantage of the noise resulting from the hammering and sawing of workmen that continued for days on end.

The partition that blocked off the two end cells in the isolation block was now complete and we waited with considerable curiosity for the arrival of Verwoerd's killer. Even though we knew that his action had solved nothing, and we now had Vorster instead of Verwoerd, with more violence, more torture, more repression than ever before. We felt lots of sympathy for Tsafendas. He had a sort of mad courage and had rid the world of a tyrant whose racial plans had caused untold misery.<sup>16</sup>

He was there on the day that Tsafendas arrived.

I was in isolation on the day that Tsafendas arrived. Security was very tight and we were kept locked in our cells all the time, but that evening we decided to shout to him 'Hello there, how are you?' He remained quiet. 'Welcome to Robben Island, you are among friends.' He returned our greeting cautiously but did not commit himself, and in the next few days, while I was still there, we never succeeded in getting into real communication with him. Not long afterwards he was moved, and all that remained was the blocked-off-cell and his name: whenever we wanted to warn off somebody from some action, we would say jokingly, 'Watch out, I'll Tsafendas you!'<sup>17</sup>

Both Lionel Davis and Marcus Solomon were members of the African People's Democratic Union (APDUSA), a breakaway from the Non-Unity Movement recruited by Neville Alexander into the National Liberation Front (NLF) in the early 1960s. Neville Alexander, according to Lionel, had been to Germany where he was radicalised by the influence of German Marxists. The activities of the NLF consisted of organizing Marxist reading groups, distributing illegal literature and planning a number of sabotage acts against the apartheid government. According to

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<sup>16</sup> Indres Naidoo, *Island in Chains: Indres Naidoo Prisoner 885/63* (Johannesburg: Penguin Books, 2000), 127.

<sup>17</sup> Naidoo, *Island in Chains*, 128.

Lionel, their youth and inexperience in underground activities led to the arrest of most members of this group. Lionel Davis was sentenced to seven years on Robben Island and was in solitary confinement in Section C during the same time that Tsafendas was held there. He describes the lengths to which the prison authorities went to ensure that there was no contact between Tsafendas and other prisoners. According to Davis, prisoners in their section regarded Tsafendas as a hero and were extremely skeptical about reports that he was mad.

The solitary confinement section is what we would then call the C section. The windows are here ... this is a walkway ... the walkway goes right around ... Now we could see from our window ... I happened to be on this side ... these guys could not see ... But the guys on this side could see ... and we would then at least twice a day we would see as they brought out Tsafendas for exercise - and he was only allowed to exercise on this pathway... never here ... Up and down he would be walking ... up and down ... and we would clandestinely wave to him because ... we hailed him as a hero, we saw him as a hero ... in our eyes he had done everyone a favour ... this was the general consensus in our section at least.<sup>18</sup>

They did what they could under the circumstances to let him know that, but Tsafendas was so 'closely guarded' that it was impossible to make any real contact with him. He remembers the solitary confinement section where Tsafendas' boarded up cell was.

What they did ... was so that nobody who was passing by could actually see him ... he was so closely guarded when he was walking here, we would wave to him clandestinely. You had to also watch where the prison guards were because he would be walking up and down, up and down, not communicating with anybody, minding his own business, but we would draw his attention ... just clandestinely wave to him ... and he would just wave you know ...

Marcus Solomon was sentenced to ten years on Robben Island together with Lionel Davis and Neville Alexander in 1964. He remembers the excitement amongst prisoners when news of Verwoerd's assassination reached them. Speculation was rife about who Tsafendas was. To them it seemed that Verwoerd's assassination was executed with such perfection that Tsafendas must have been part of some organised

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Lionel Davis, 17 December 2010.

structure. Speculation was rife as to which organisation was behind his actions, whether he was based in the Mozambican part of the underground movement, Communist International,

... it was sensational ... people were very excited ... who is this guy... some Portuguese, some Greek, half-breed, was he white was he black? ... is he mad? ... he travelled all over the world ... he must be part of a network, a support group. Communist international, ANC, CP or PAC or some underground ... people speculated ...<sup>19</sup>

While the partition was being built the only comment from warders was that '*Iemand spesiaal kom hier annekant* [someone special is coming on the other side.]' He was also in isolation in the last cell right next to Tsafendas, but did not know who was being kept there initially. The warders would remain tightlipped except to say that it is '*'n baie belangrike persoon* [a very important person].' Prisoners had ways of finding out news and soon the identity of the mysterious newcomer became general knowledge.

### **Pretoria Maximum Security, 'Beverly Hills'**

On 14 November 1966 Tsafendas was transferred from Robben Island Prison to the Maximum Security Section of Pretoria Central Prison, nicknamed by prisoners 'Beverley Hills'. There he remained for 23 years until 30 September 1989, when he was transferred to Zonderwater Prison in Cullinan. After 1994 he was once again moved, this time to Sterkfontein Mental Hospital in Krugersdorp where he died on 9 October 1999. It was there, in his late seventies, that he was interviewed by both Liza Key and Henk van Woerden.

Pretoria Prison is the name given to three separate prisons: Pretoria Central Prison; Pretoria Prison (also called Pretoria Local Prison); and Pretoria Maximum Security known as 'Beverly Hills'. Pretoria Local Prison had a maximum security section where white male political prisoners were kept. It was here that Raymond Suttner, Jeremy Cronin, Denis Goldberg, David Rabkin, Tim Jenkins, Alex Moumbaris, Stephen Lee, David Kitson, Anthony Holiday and Renfrew Christie, were held.

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Marcus Solomon, 28 December 2010.



Pretoria Local provided the same network of support and sustenance to fellow comrades that Robben Island did for their black counterparts.

Maximum Security or Beverly Hills was where the condemned and State Presidents' Patients were kept. All political prisoners were first placed in Beverly Hills for an observation period. Raymond Suttner spent three months in solitary confinement there.<sup>20</sup> In some cases these observation periods stretched to a number of years. In the case of Jeremy Cronin, it was extended to three years.

Breyten Breytenbach was the only white political prisoner who spent his entire period in Pretoria Prison in Beverly Hills in solitary confinement. In 1973 Breytenbach entered South Africa illegally under the name of Christian Galaska. He was a member of an underground group Okhela which sent him into the country to recruit individuals who would be willing to run a trade union office in Europe. This office would act as a conduit for financial support for the black trade union movement. Okhela instructed him to meet with members inside the country to explore the possibility of expanding their activities in South Africa, and to discuss important questions of principles and tactics of the organization.<sup>21</sup> Breytenbach was arrested in August 1975 at Jan Smuts Airport and driven to police headquarters in Pretoria where his interrogation began. For the first forty-eight hours he was interrogated without interruption. Thereafter his interrogation would continue during the day in the Compol building, while at night he would be driven to Pretoria Maximum Security Prison, 'The Death House' as he calls it.

At night, every night, I was driven back and turned over to the gentle care of Nit Arselow, and my nights were populated and punctuated by the

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<sup>20</sup> Raymond Suttner, *Inside Apartheid's Prison: Notes and Letters of Struggle* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Breyten Breytenbach, *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1986), 79. See also Peter Harris, *In A Different Time : The Inside Story of the Delmas Four* (Roggebaai: Umuzi Books, 2008) for another detailed description of the Maximum Security Section. The book deals with the arrest, brutal torture, and the trial of 'the Delmas Four': Jabu Masina, Ting Ting Masango, Neo Potsane and Joseph Makhura. (This is not to be confused with the better known Delmas Treason Trial). They were held in solitary confinement for eight months. During this period they were incarcerated in Pretoria Maximum Security, where they remained until their trial in February 1989, and afterwards when they were sentenced to death.

terrible outpouring in song of the so-called 'condemns' or 'ropes'. I wrote one day a desperate plea addressed to Snaaks, going in my words down on my knees, asking to be removed elsewhere because I couldn't stand this stench of death. But it was probably of the same effect as of praying to a god.<sup>22</sup>

Beverly Hills was to become his home for the next two years. He was incarcerated there during his interrogation, his trial and for the first two years of his sentence. Breytenbach was kept in complete isolation. This meant that no-one (neither warders nor prisoners) was allowed to communicate with him. After two years in 'The Hills', as he calls it, he was moved to Pollsmoor Prison in 1977. In *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*, he provided one of the most comprehensive accounts of the experience of solitary confinement there and a detailed description of the death row section of the prison and its workings.

Maximum is a building all by itself ... sitting on an incline behind the others. The cherry on top of the cake. If one had windows given to the outside, one would have had a lovely view over the city of malediction, Pretoria. But there are no windows to the outside and there's also a very high wall encircling the building completely. In this wall is an entrance gate which is electronically controlled by a *boer* sitting, in fact in the wall itself. You drive in, gates slide open before you, you are in a space between two gates, those behind you close before those in front of you open. Sure, there are also watchtowers on the wall. Congratulations: you are now in the space between the wall and the prison building - immaculately kept with lawns and shrubs and a few wild deer they allow to roam there. So peaceful. The approaches to the prison and the grounds around it are constantly observed by rotating television eyes. When I left they were to proceed with the installation of eyes in the corridors and in the ceiling of every cell.

Mount the few steps to the entrance. Don't be shy - knock! Use the big brass knocker. A little judas eye will slide open and an eye and ear will inquire into the nature of your death wish. Now a small door in the portal is unlocked and you are among the chosen few allowed inside to tread the sacred soil. Look at how clean everything is, listen to the quiet: like being at the undertaker's ... Once your identity has been ascertained by a man sitting behind a table, keeping his big ledgers, balancing his columns of death and life ('you have an appointment?'), with death winning hands down because surely not even one percent of all those admitted ever leave the same way again, the grill will be unlocked - not by him but by a warder whose sole duty it is to unlock grills from morning to night ...<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Breytenbach, *True Confessions*, 37-38.

<sup>23</sup> Breytenbach, *True Confessions*, 132-4.

According to Breytenbach, it probably held up to 200 prisoners at a time. It is clear from his descriptions that those prisoners kept in solitary confinement, were intimately aware of the experiences of those prisoners awaiting execution, 'the condemns'. 'Lying in my cell I was obliged, as we all were, to assist at the horrible final leave-taking, since sounds from the visiting cubicles flooded the corridors – the wailing wives and the mothers, the screaming perhaps of a baby who had exceptionally, been allowed into the prison for that last visit.'<sup>24</sup>

Solitary confinement was a strict prison regimen that forbade any communication or contact between prisoners and any other human beings. Not even the warders were allowed to talk with them. Prisoners were not allowed to see or hear any other prisoners. To this end a great number of warders were employed to ensure that no visual or auditory contact occurred when a prisoner had to go to the bathroom, for his exercise or to receive medical attention. According to Breytenbach, for the 'average of five white prisoners', 'a day staff of fifteen *boere*' were allocated to 'looking after us.'<sup>25</sup>

Very often - no all the time really - I relive those years of horror and corruption, and try to imagine, as I did then with the heart an impediment to breathing, what it must be like to be executed ... Hanged by the passage of breath and words. Sure, I remember the ritual preparations, the singing of those in the 'pot', the final leave-taking a day before, when the weeping and the wailing of the mothers and the wives reverberated through the sections surmounting even those high barriers, which separate the bereaved from the doomed, and how the black condemns would regroup in the corridor after those last visits to return singing to the pot, the cell of the condemned ones, stamping their feet, rattling their chains and raising their voices in a rhythm of life and sorrow so intimately intertwined that it could only be a very dislocation of the very notion of the body of God; sure and the next morning when the cool light of daybreak envelopes the prison and it is still dark in the tunnels, the voices behind the wall breaking with the poignancy of warm, breathed harmonies, the bursting of the pomegranates, the breaking of the fast and the rapidity of exhalation, and the indecency of man to man, of handcuff and hood and rope and trapdoor – the earth falling forever away: we are the wind and we are the birds, and the singing, singing of the weighted ropes ...<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 136

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 215-6.

His early letters, some of which were written while he was still on Robben Island, are brief and inchoate. Most were written to fellow members of his church congregation. His memory seems weak and disjointed. The letters begin in a flurry and then taper off, often ending with him saying 'I have not much more to write' or 'I don't know what else to write'. They are often written on the same day and the opening lines are very similar, and they resemble one another in tone and handwriting. Most of the letters are undated, but he does give the address from which they were sent as either Robben Island or Pretoria Central.

In these letters, he asks for members of his congregation to visit him and for news of church conventions, particularly the speeches and specific chapters and verses mentioned. He also discusses his feelings with regard to the assassination. That he drew strength and comfort from this collective is clear. These early letters are crammed with notations from Bible chapters, verses and psalms, which suggest a state of emotional vulnerability. He always ends his letters to the congregation with 'My regards to all irrespective of their colour', or 'My regards to everybody, both European and Non-European'. In a letter dated 9 November 1966, written from Robben Island to a member of his church, he writes:

Just a few lines to let you know that I am still alive ... I hope you are alive and well. I still have memories of \_\_\_\_\_ your mother ... and ... saw Mr \_\_\_\_\_ Please give my sincere regards if you see him. When I look back on everything and know what I know today, it would have been better if I had stayed with the Lord. One makes mistakes in life (Psalm 20, Verses 1-5). However I have put my trust in the Lord. I know I am innocent of this matter and I am not here to condemn anybody. But if the judgment of God begins amongst his people what will be the end of those ungodly beings. I had a lot to mention but, I just can't remember it now ... I would like to get letters of the workers and their speeches at the Conventions. I hear that the Church is big in Hollywood and Los Angeles now. My regards to everybody and tell them that I am praying hard for everybody.<sup>27</sup>

In a second letter, also written from Robben Island, he writes,

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<sup>27</sup> Letter No.2, Robben Island, 9 November 1966. Leer 80/0043, Correctional Services, National Archives, Pretoria. For the sake of convenience for reference, I have used my own number system, and simply numbered all the letters in accordance with their chronological order. In the documentation that I was granted access to there are 44 letters. It is possible that this does not constitute all the letters that Tsafendas wrote while in prison.

...However all I want is information. Were there any conventions, have you any letters of the speeches there or chapters marked? I would like to follow up what the prescribed chapters for the coming year will be. I am sorry for what happened, but these things do happen, even to the best of people. I hope you realise they were beyond my control.

Please give me the correct answer. My regards to everybody & tell them I am praying very hard for them.

Sincerely yours in

Christ Jesus.<sup>28</sup>

In a subsequent letter, he requests the addressee to 'inform the congregation that I wish somebody could come and see me' and 'also inform the church in Cape Town about this'. After asking about the welfare of the addressee's family, he switches to a completely different topic:

Now my stepmother is arranging a multitude of people to try and claim me as her son, will you please get my real mother from Lourenco Marques and her family to come and see me and claim me as her real mother. I am still ill with a tapeworm and hope to get it out some time. My regards to everybody, both European and Non-European.<sup>29</sup>

In another letter from Central Prison Pretoria he once again makes reference to his stepmother and 'real mother', and to 'both European and non-European':

\_\_\_\_\_ told me here that my mother was still alive. I don't believe that, but if she is I am sure she would claim me, as my step-mother is out to claim me. I don't have much to write and I hope you give my regards to everybody both European and Non-European ... I am very ill with intestines and have been that way for a long time. That is all for now ...<sup>30</sup>

It is not quite clear what Tsafendas means here when he complains that his stepmother 'is out to claim me'. At the same time he was writing to family members to visit him and help him with procuring items from the prison stores. Two letters, both dated 28 December 1966, are addressed to members of his family. In both he appeals to them to visit him and assist him with expenses in prison. Here his tone assumes a desperate note,

You are my Sister and Brother in Law in the Flesh. I kindly request you to be of help because of my very life. I know you are prosperous now and your

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<sup>28</sup> Letter No. 1, Sunday, November, Robben Island.

<sup>29</sup> Letter No. 5, November, Central Prison Pretoria.

<sup>30</sup> Letter No. 4, Central Prison Pretori, n.d..

business has been a success. Any expenses you make for me, I will one day try if possible to pay you back. If any wardens from me come and see you please offer [?] to them. I don't have much more to write, and I am very regretted [sic] for what happened, my regards to all.<sup>31</sup>

I heard \_\_\_\_\_ went to Cape Town to look for me. My whole life depends on you people. I am a poor man, if you can help me something could be done. This is an opportunity for you to help me, their [sic] will not be another chance. If any people come in my name, please attend to them. Maybe a meeting could be arranged and you could come and see me, if we could talk things over, and arrange something.<sup>32</sup>

During this early period he makes constant reference to his health and what he calls as his 'infirmity'. They are strewn with obscure Biblical references as in this letter.

Just a few lines to let you know where I am at present. I am still very ill with those pains in the intestines or bowels. My infirmity is great. Psalm 7 + Verse 1-3-4-5. I have no more to write to you now, I have been thinking of you all. And I wish I could see you and talk things over with you if necessary. I am not blaming anybody for my actions, nor have I accused anybody. Corinthians Chap. 11 - Verse 3. I know my shortcomings. Psalm 19 - Verse 2, Verse 1-2. I am sorry about all this = Psalm 18 - verse 5-6 - 7 = But what do I know concerning this matter + Psalm 19 - Verse 12 + 13. I have kept the Law and the prophets to the best of my ability and my ill-health. Psalm 22 + Verse 1-6-7-8-9-10-11-1 4 = Psalm 23 - Verse 4 + Psalm 26 = Verse 1-2. Psalm 35 - Verse 1-19 + Psalm + Psalm 38 - Verse 9. Psalm 40 - Verse 9 = Psalm 41 - Verse 8. Psalm 43 - Verse 1 + Psalm 44 - Verse 22. Psalm 130 - Verse 3. Due to my condition I don't know what to write to you more would be glad to hear from you. My regards to everybody.

Sincerely yours  
Demitrio Tsafendas

P.N. I wish I had stayed with you from the first time and beginning.<sup>33</sup>

In a letter dated 3 November (no year given) to Dr \_\_\_\_\_ The language and logic is much clearer and suggestive of a more settled state of mind.

I am still ill with the same infirmity, I have not changed, but the diarrhoea is more violent. Remember you told me not to eat bread because it contained gluten. I tried that but it had very little effect. My only hope is a new type of X-Ray which has come out and is being used for gastric troubles at the Queen Mother Maternity Hospital in Glasgow. The conventional X-ray won't show anything except bones. I have thought of you quite a lot when I

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<sup>31</sup> Letter No. 12, 28 December 1966, Central Prison Pretoria.

<sup>32</sup> Letter No. 13, 28 December 1966, Central Prison Pretoria.

<sup>33</sup> Letter No. 8, 28 December 1966, Central Prison Pretoria.

was away and when my mind wandered. If I had been cured, I would not have got to this stage. I have no hard feelings against anybody, except the medical profession for not being competent enough to cure me. The pains or pangs are terrible at times and I cannot sleep day or night. The doctor here has given me some medicine, but it has had little effect. That is all for now.

Sincerely yours

Demitrio Tsafendas.<sup>34</sup>

A letter addressed to 'To His Excellency, The High Court, Cape Town' in which the addressee is referred to as 'My Lord' is obviously meant for Judge-President Beyers who presided over his summary trial. In this letter he thanks the judge, the witnesses, and the police at Caledon Square, and then proceeds with a long religious incantation with relevant citations from the bible in the left margin:

My Lord, this I have to state, {Hebrew Chap 1} I wish to manifest myself I am {Genesis Verse = Joseph, and I was sold into Egypt 14-19-20} Their [sic] is no other, and from childhood as I am an orphan, I have had the protection of my spiritual father. {Psalm 19 did not mention this before, because Verse 1-2} don't want honour from men, My Lord, Glorify God in the Heavens, who took us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage I do believe in the living God as worship him Who did so many miracles and in a cloud by day and a Flame by night guided the people out of the land of Egypt and across the Red Sea and offer all these signs and wonders on the Earth and in the Heavens ... My Lord, their [sic] are many things I wished to mention, but I cannot think of them now. My Lord, I would like to request, according to the law, if I could be put in a Mental Institution until such time as the authorities or government decide what to do with me,

I have no more to mention wish to thank My Lord for everything.

Sincerely Yours

Demitrio Tsafendas<sup>35</sup>

This letter must have been written in either late in 1966 or in early 1967, as the trial is still fresh in his mind. This letter reflects a mind in an acute state of fragmentation. The line between biblical narratives and his own life have become blurred. The addressee in the letter is particularly ambiguous, and could refer either to the Judge President, or 'The Lord' as in 'God'. Tsafendas himself was sent to Egypt, at age two, to live with his grandmother. That he cites the passage that speaks of how 'the Lord'

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<sup>34</sup> Letter No. 13, 3 November [n.d.], Central Prison, Pretoria.

<sup>35</sup> Letter No. 14, [n.d., but late 1966 or early 1967], Central Prison, Pretoria.

guided the people 'out of the house of bondage' suggests that he is appealing to the Judge, upon which he projects the image of a God figure with God-like powers, to release him from prison and place him in a mental institution. There is no doubt that this letter was written under a state of duress, possibly caused by abuse at the hands of prison warders, or the exposure to the weekly hangings on death row. His mind seems to be experiencing what Cathy Caruth has described as 'a break in the experience of time'.<sup>36</sup> Yet at the same time, he is reminding the judge that 'according to the law' he is entitled to be in a mental hospital and not a prison.

On 4 January 1967 Tsafendas wrote three letters, all of them dealing with different issues. In one of them he asks the Commanding Officer 'with the greatest respect', for permission to converse with a prisoner whom he has heard is English speaking, signing his letter 'your obedient prisoner'. In the other two letters, which seem to be two different versions of the same letter, he writes,

I wish to testify the main reasons which led me to kill the Prime Minister. The main events that led me to kill the Prime Minister, was the immoral meeting between \_\_\_\_\_ Prime Minister of The British Protectorate of Basutoland, a protectorate since Queen Victoria and Dr ... (indecipherable) I did not consider Dr Verwoerd the right person or party to represent South Africa in such a meeting. I did not consider Dr Verwoerd the legal representative or the right party to represent South Africa in such a meeting. I was stirred by what was taking place then, that I lost complete control of myself and stabbed and killed the Prime Minister Dr Verwoerd, after his return from the said meeting on a Tuesday at the House of Assembly.<sup>37</sup>

In May 1968 Tsafendas laid a complaint of assault against the chief warden. In a sworn affidavit taken down under oath by a Commissioner of Oaths, he stated that 'at approximately 9.00 am on Thursday the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 1968' he was let out of his cell for his exercise and while he was walking in circles, the chief warden 'cursed' at him with the words 'mau mau'. Fears about the Mau Mau rebellion against white power in Kenya were prominent in the white press in South Africa of the early-mid 1960s. He was ordered back into his cell.

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<sup>36</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 61.

<sup>37</sup> Letter No. 16 and 17, 4 January 1967, Central Prison, Pretoria.



I entered my cell and started polishing my cell's floor. I don't know whether my door was locked behind me or not. A few seconds later while I was polishing my floor the chief warden came in and kicked three times on the right hand-side of my head about one and a half inches above my right ear. I fell down and every time I was kicked. The impact of the chief warden's boot on my head was painful but did not leave any scar or mark whatsoever. I was dizzy after the assault.<sup>38</sup>

When the Commanding Officer came to check up on him later, as was his custom, Tsafendas did not say anything as he was 'still dazed' and 'very nervous' and did not experience any pain. It was only afterwards that he felt 'much pain'. The complaint was taken very seriously by the prison authorities and an investigation was commenced. Four wardens who were on duty in the section where Tsafendas was held on the day in question had to make sworn statements. All four testified that that they had no knowledge of the assault, and that they had not witnessed anything. Since no supporting evidence from other wardens could be obtained, no actions were taken against the four wardens. Nevertheless, strict instructions were given that the chief warden not be allowed to handle Tsafendas in future:

Ek het opdrag gegee dat op/Bew\_\_\_\_\_ onder geen omstandighede met Tsafendas moet werk nie. Indien hierdie opdrag nie uitgevoer word nie sal daar opgetree word teen die betrokke persone. Die volgende persone word verantwoordelik gehou vir die hantering van Gev. Tsafendas. (1)

(2)\_\_\_\_\_ Genoemde lede sal die gevangene oop en toesluit, die oefening behartig; sien dat hy bad en kos kry en te alle tye die sleutel tot die sel gedurende die dag onder beheer hê.<sup>39</sup>

### **Tsafendas' Prison Letters, 1972-1986**

From the early 1970s the letters that Tsafendas wrote while in prison were markedly different from his early letters in a number of ways. His writing flows more smoothly, his tone is more confident; he is constantly making requests from the authorities; there is much less religious quotations, although he was no less serious

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<sup>38</sup> Klagte D. Tsafendas. 'Beedigde Verklarings geneem tydens ondersoek na klagte van aanranding ingedien deur bogenoemde op 15/05/68'. Correctional Services Vol 1, File A5078.

<sup>39</sup> Klagte : D Tsafendas. Beedigde Verklarings geneem tydens ondersoek na klagte van aanranding ingedien deur bogenoemde op 15/05/68. Correctional Services Vol 1, File A5078.

about being a Christian. That the prison authorities relaxed the heavy restrictions attached to his incarceration is clear from a number of letters. That he was hungry for communication there is no doubt. Always an incessant talker and highly opinionated, once granted some privileges he took full advantage. His requests were always polite and respectful, but spared the prison authorities no amount of detail. At times he is so stubborn and obsessive, he exasperated both medical and prison staff in charge of him. He remains convinced of the ignorance of the medical profession, in their refusal to acknowledge the problem 'that is inside him'. It is because of their incompetence that he blames his present condition. He writes a number of times asking for independent medical tests, examination by specialists and various kinds of X-rays.

In 1971, he writes to Brigadier Visser, head of the maximum security section, requesting a visit from 'my family doctor'. His request was not granted. Two years later, he refers to his request from the doctors in attendance for a 'Biomal X Ray'. This was refused because 'it was too expensive'. He therefore requests the 'authorities concerned' to contact his 'relatives or friends to defray the costs'. That he was persistent in his requests is clear from the letter as he mentions the doctor had one of the officers explain to him that the Department of Justice will not pay for the X-Ray.

In 1984 he makes a request for an examination by a 'specialist parasitologist' and for a scan as the conventional X-ray 'will not show up my infirmity'. He blames the incorrect diagnosis on the part of the medical profession for his 'condemnation as a Staats Presidents Patient'. According to Tsafendas, a proper diagnosis would have been made if the appropriate medical specialists had examined him. However, they were unavailable to him as they 'were English and were boycotting the government'. As a result, he became a victim of a lack of expertise ('shortcomings') needed for a proper diagnosis. In his view, an incorrect diagnosis was directly responsible for an incorrect verdict. He should have been charged with manslaughter; but he was 'caught between the disagreements, conditions and circumstances of that period'.

Since then I have had plenty of time to analyze my behaviour. Undoubtedly a sick body makes a sick mind. But I am perplexed at the lack of discrimination by the authorities concerned to discern or judge ... There[fore] I kindly request once more for the necessary Medical attention and Scan which has not been granted to me in the 18 years of imprisonment and which should have been manslaughter. May God Judge between me and those responsible for all that has Befallen me.<sup>40</sup>

In a letter to Gordon Winter, who interviewed him in 1976, he is eager to clarify his position regarding a surgical operation he mentioned during their interview.

... However your visit was un-expected and abrupt. Therefore I want to clear away any misunderstandings that may have taken place. First you mention a surgical operation. During our interview, I informed you about the Matron of the Vereeniging Hospital who is willing to perform the operation by using cotton balls soaked in ether. Should the above not be successful then I would be most willing to undergo a Surgical Operation as you mentioned in our interview. ... if you could assist her concerning the formalities or access to enter here for that purpose. ... Furthermore, I repeat what I mentioned in our interview that I would not like to leave Prison or my confinement before being treated first. As I know, I would not be responsible for my behaviour and would come into conflict with my surroundings.<sup>41</sup>

In a second letter to Winter he expresses a desire to be transferred to Sonderwater Psychopathic Hospital where he could 'obtain medical attention'. One of the reasons that he wants to be transferred to Sonderwater is that it is better equipped with facilities such as a transistor set, radios and portable televisions. According to Tsafendas,

The Sonderwater Psychopathic Hospital was built for that purpose. I don't know whether a Transistor Set, Radio or Portable Television Set is permitted for all Prisoners or Patients ...The Sonderwater Hospital was built for that purpose. [The] Social privileged have had the latter at certain times. General Le Roux is in charge of that Hospital. In your Office you could phone and find out. ... I could obtain medical attention at Sonderwater. But if I could meet you we could talk things over. Sonderwater Hospital could treat me better ... I could be more precise and give you more details about my needs and requirements. Did you enjoy the Olympic Games? ... I should have [been] sent to the Sonderwater from the beginning. I advise you to get in touch with the authorities concerned first by telephone or otherwise. This is no place for a sick and Hypochondriac Person. And you could obtain

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<sup>40</sup> Letter No. 42, Pretoria Central Prison, n.d.

<sup>41</sup> Letter No. 26, Pretoria Central Prison, n.d. [probably late 1976].

official confirmation first of anything I have mentioned. My father was Greek. I am not Portuguese. If you would say that Greek and German Blood runs in my veins you would be nearer the Mark.

P.N. Should you have any doubts ask Prince Philip he will give you more details and a better description.<sup>42</sup>

It is not clear in which year he wrote these two letters to Gordon Winter. The first one must have been written soon after Gordon Winter interviewed him October 1976, as he makes direct reference to the published accounts of the interview. The reference to the Olympic Games in the second letter suggests that it was written in 1980, when the Olympic Games were held in Moscow between 19 July and 3 August. This is also born out by an accompanying instruction written on a single lined full-scap page in an irate tone. While the names of officials are deleted, the author of this angry rejoinder in the form of an instruction to a subordinate is clearly from the Commanding Officer.

Luitenant \_\_\_\_\_

1. Die brief van Tsafendas gaan nie uit nie. Ek het gesê hy kan aan sy familie skryf. Nou skryf hy behalwe vir 'n klomp snert aan 'n koerantman.
2. Deel hom mee dat die brief nie uitgaan nie. As hy nie sy familie se adresse ken nie - skryf hy nie.
3. Liasseer

80/10/03

Bêre<sup>43</sup>

Connected to his obsession with his health was his concern with his diet. Sometimes he decides not to eat at all and promptly informs the commanding officer about his reasons, as in the following short letter,

Sir,

Considering the two meals I did not eat. I wish to inform those concerned that I [was] supplied with two bananas yesterday afternoon and as that is wholesome food, I thought of giving it time to digest in my stomach by not eating two watery meals of boiled squash. <sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Letter No. 27, Pretoria Central Prison, n.d. [probably 1980].

<sup>43</sup> Untitled note accompanying Letter No. 37, Tsafendas to Gordon Winter.

<sup>44</sup> Letter No. 32, Pretoria Central, 13 July 1978.

On one occasion he decides not to eat for three days, and writes to the Commanding officer that he 'is not on a hunger strike', and has no complaints against any officer or the food.

My reasons being those which I told you in our private interview in your Head Office. As I have repeatedly mentioned my condition to the prison doctor, I have not much more to mention. I feel alright on an empty stomach, as I have less pains.<sup>45</sup>

That such actions on his part caused the authorities great concern was evidenced by the notes made by the commanding officer on this letter, in which he instructed his staff: '*sorg dat hy elke dag deur a mediese beampte ondersoek word*' [ensure that he is examined every day by a medical official]. In an undated report by one of the psychiatrists treating him, the doctor reports that Tsafendas has been examined and treated by a range of doctors and psychiatrists, but is often uncooperative by refusing medication for his digestion problems and high blood pressure. According to the doctor,

Hy het van tyd tot tyd aangedring op spesiale diëte waarvan die inhoud deur himself bepaal word en was dan sulke kos onder 'n kraan omdat hy oortuig is dat dit deur die personeel vergifting was.

[From time to time he insisted on special diets, the content of which is to be determined by him, and then he washes the food under a tap because he is convinced that it has been poisoned by the staff.]<sup>46</sup>

While he was concerned with eating wholesome food, he had a voracious appetite. Some of his letters include requests for assistance to purchase from the prison stores items such as biscuits, chocolates, sweets, fruit, fresh milk, condensed milk, canned foods, cold drinks, fresh juices, coffee, tea, cocoa, cheese, cake, fried chips and spaghetti. The lists are always long, detailed and very specific. He asks for nail-clippers, combs, shoe polish, a hairbrush. The obsession with his health was matched by the punctiliousness that characterized his attitude towards other prisoners. In 1973, after having 'completed seven years as a Staats President Prisoner, which was mostly in solitary confinement', he was granted 'the privilege of being among other

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<sup>45</sup> Letter No. 28, Pretoria Central, 5 October 1978.

<sup>46</sup> Memorandum to Commissioner of Prisons from : Aanhouding in 'n Gevangenis: Presidentspatiënt Nommer 80/0043: Dimitrio Tsafendas. Psychiatric Report.

prisoners'. After thanking the authorities for this privilege, he elaborates on his views regarding the manner in which prisoners are judged:

... However I do agree with the procedure that a man must be judged according to his behaviour and this process I am sure is in use all over the world at present. I know that in all correction houses prisoners are judged according to their behaviour = not by their Reputation, Personality, Appearance, Complexion, Language, Race, Religion, Party, Class or the amount of possessions a prisoner owns. Under the circumstances I kindly request that separate quarters for those whose behaviour is like mine, in my section only Mr \_\_\_\_ is eligible to this privilege, however there may be more who are chaste and don't go in for drugs, dagga or Bush Straw. We abstemics have nothing in common with drug trafficking, I am sure we are only a minority. I have enough sins of my own without having to carry somebody else's. I therefore request you first for this kindness, before going on to other major problems, issues of this most Historical period of this century.

He signs the letter, Tsafendas Von Willem and ends his letter as he often did with a relevant citation from the bible, in this case 'See Salvation chap = 6 = New Testament'.<sup>47</sup> In August 1976, he writes a letter in which he grants permission 'to the authorities concerned to hand my clothing over to the Prisoners. Central', while his toolbox and kitchen utensils were to 'remain here at maximum for local maintenance and the local kitchenette' (Letter No. 76). In a postscript, he further requested that

I want my clothing to be distributed irrespective of colour, race, religions and Language.

I prefer that you will give preference to those who deserve such by their character especially those that do not smoke like me, by their behaviour.

Signed

Mimikos Demitrios Tsafendakis Von William de Kanhume.<sup>48</sup>

## **Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, and a 'Small musical instrument'**

In April 1976, Tsafendas writes the following letter:

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<sup>47</sup> Letter No. 78, Pretoria Central.

<sup>48</sup> Letter No. 25, Pretoria Central.

Dear Sir,

Kindly request permission from you for the repair of my Expensive goatskin Bible, which I treasure as I Bought it in London, while I was overseas. Any expenses of same I shall be most willing to pay for and can be deducted from the 40 Rand which I deposited at the office.<sup>49</sup>

His bible was not the only book that Tsafendas regarded as valuable. Knowledge through reading was very important to him. He took pleasure in reading as a vehicle for increasing the scope and breadth of his knowledge of the world at large.

Amongst his most constant requests in letters to a number of people was assistance in the procurement of encyclopedias, dictionaries, language books, and books that aid in the learning of a musical instrument. Whether he wrote about his pension, his requests for specialists, X-rays, assistance to acquire funds to purchase from prison stores, he always included a request for one or other book to read. He was also very precise as to what it was that he wanted. In an undated letter written to one of his stepsisters living in Rhodesia, he writes that he is trying to learn Afrikaans so that the can converse with the prison wardens. Amongst an almost page-long list of items (biscuits, sweets, chocolates, canned foods, nail cutter, combs, hairbrush and shoe polish) that he asks for help in acquiring, he includes the following items: 'an Afrikaans-English Grootwoordeboek, an Oxford Collegiate Dictionary, Encyclopedia Britannica, 'the Americana in Two Volumes' and one World Atlas and a Music Book for beginners'. He complains that he is not allowed to attend the prison school or workshop 'because of this apartheid policy which has become a doctrine in this country'. In his second letter to Gordon Winter in which he also requests some assistance in procuring the financial means to purchase items from prison stores, he writes:

I need certain books, schoolbooks I mean which are difficult to obtain here, and will have to be purchased outside that also requires money. In order to understand the prison authorities I am trying to learn more Afrikaans. = I need a Groot Woordeboek Afrikaans-English, English-Afrikaans as the one in my possession is half-century old and many words and grammar have changed since then. I shall also need a Std IV Afrikaans reading school

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<sup>49</sup> Letter No. 24, Pretoria Central.

book, Gideons Afrikaans-English Bible, = A new School Atlas preferably college, = An English Oxford Collegiate Dictionary, or Encyclopaedia Britannica, As I am a very Cosmopolitan man, any other international Books for beginners such as Yiddish, self-taught French, Greek would be welcome. I am much too old to be in a place like Maximum. I am willing to give these books to the Prison Library after I have read them. At Maximum I see and hear the death marches the prisoners every week.

**Name of Books:**

The meaning of Meaning  
What price Glory  
Man Must Fight by Gene Tunney  
Britannia Divide and Rule  
Britannia Rule the Waves  
Britannia Waives the Rule  
The Greenwich Meridian  
On Alexander the Great Path  
The Philosophical Theory of Relativity = Huxley.

A book for beginners of Music and a small instrument of music would be most welcome and would be allowed here and help me pass the time.<sup>50</sup>

It is the desire to obtain these books that motivates a number of letters regarding what he refers to as the 'partial pension' due to him as a result of social security deductions made when he served on liberty ships in the North Atlantic during the Second World War. In 1975 he writes to Brigadier Visser requesting assistance with obtaining a pension from the American Government who deducted social security benefits from his salary while he did 'war service in the North Atlantic'. He would like to use the money to acquire a pair of spectacles and make purchases from the prison canteen. He ends with 'I thank you for the gastroscope, but I have not seen any of the pictures.'<sup>51</sup> There is no indication whether the authorities responded to this request from Tsafendas. One can only assume that they decided to ignore it as another one of his fancy delusions. Tsafendas, however, pursued the matter doggedly. He followed up this letter with one addressed directly to the American Embassy, asking them to send a representative regarding the pension that is due to him. In a postscript to this, he requests, 'Should you be able at present to supply me

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<sup>50</sup> Letter No. 27, Pretoria Central.

<sup>51</sup> Letter No. 23, Pretoria Central. Here he signs the letter Tsafendas Von Willem.



under the Bill of Rights with a Webster's Dictionary, The Americana or some Modern Map Book to follow the trend of the times, I would be much obliged.'<sup>52</sup>

In a second letter addressed to the American Embassy, he explains the change in his name from Tsafandakis to Von Willem, mentioning that he has decided to use both his parents names 'as they were of two distinct races in order to keep track of my heritage. I am not a pedigree but a Hybrid = Quadroon you call in America.'<sup>53</sup>

In 1978, after he has turned sixty years of age, he pursues the matter again.

Addressing his letter to the Commanding Officer of the prison, he elaborates on his 'war service':

I was employed by the U.S. Merchant Marine Service with official government documents, issued to me by the U.S. Coast Guard, and a bona fide member of the National Maritime Union, a branch of the Congress of industrial organizations ... I was employed by the Luckerbach Steamship Co., The S. S. Pillory, S.S. Edgar ... and other steamship Companies. Predominantly along the Eastern seaboard, Canadian Maritime States, Quebec all along the Saint Lawrence, Greenland, small Antilles, Trinidad, ... the British Isles mostly in the North Atlantic. Wish to remind those concerned that war-time service in danger zones and extreme adverse conditions as Baffin Island and the extreme adverse, sub-zero conditions as Baffin Island in the Arctic Circle where I got sick, had a nervous breakdown and my health since then not recovered and hospitalized. ... Furthermore, the abovementioned ruined my career and ended my life in a dungeon. The lump sum would help as I can purchase my most elementary requirements from the prison stores.<sup>54</sup>

Because of the hazards involved, war service in 'danger zones' should be compensated, he feels, with danger zone bonuses as 'in all civilized countries'. In 1981 he writes again to the commanding officer regarding his pension, requesting the latter's intervention on his behalf by making inquiries with the American Embassy in Pretoria. In this letter he also broached the subject of his treatment at the hands of American authorities at the time, in particular their 'incorrect diagnosis' which resulted in him ending his life 'in a dungeon'.

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<sup>52</sup> Letter No. 30, Pretoria Central.

<sup>53</sup> Letter No. 22, Pretoria Central.

<sup>54</sup> Letter No. 33, Pretoria Central.

... Furthermore I wish to inform those concerned that I have no criminal record whatsoever anywhere. I worked and preached the gospel in my spare time, not by precepts of men, but by giving example and behaviour. I was simply deported by the U.S.A. authorities because I was sick after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. The diagnosis was wrong as they were treating me for some kind of psychosis or other and giving me electric shock treatment or computer and narcotic vitamin and other miscellaneous tablets, pills, capsules etc. As is now being proved I told them the truth, then, there and elsewhere but they were obstinate conceited and contradicted me in everything I said. My symptoms prove now that I do have a tapeworm and that the diagnosis of the U. S. Immigration doctors and the Verdict of the local authorities is [sic] wrong.

\_\_\_\_\_ was misinformed concerning my infirmity and accordingly passed judgment which is now proving wrong. The truth will eventually be completely revealed. I therefore not only am entitled to talents which I worked for, but also for compensation. This matter must appear before the medical Board for my whole life and the life of Dr. Verwoerd was sacrificed because of the ignorance and irresponsibility of the doctors that examined me.

Sincerely yours  
Demitrios Tsafendas.<sup>55</sup>



### **The Brian Price Affair of 1976**

In August 1976 *The Observer* in London published a report in which Brian Price, an ex-prisoner who escaped from Zonderwater Prison in Pretoria, alleged that Tsafendas was being severely ill-treated in prison. According to Price, he 'was treated with gross inhumanity and was a broken man'. The news of Price's allegations reached South Africa, and the publication of this report led to renewed media focus on Tsafendas. David Bloomberg, instructing attorney at Tsafendas' summary trial, visited the latter in prison. Prison records of the visit revealed that Bloomberg visited Tsafendas on the 28 September 1976 and stayed for a total of twenty-five minutes. After his visit, he released a statement to the press, an extract of which appears below.

... I found Tsafendas in apparently good physical condition and seemingly far healthier than he was ten years ago. His major mental aberration, that he has a giant tapeworm, which dictates his life, remains dominant in his thought processes. However, apart from this obsession, he is mainly rational

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<sup>55</sup> Letter No. 39, Pretoria Central.

and one is able to carry on a reasonably intelligent conversation with him ... I questioned him closely as to whether he had been ill-treated in any way. He had no hesitation in stating that he was completely satisfied with his treatment, cell conditions, exercise facilities and with the food given to him. He told me that he received the same rights and privileges as other maximum security prisoners and was perfectly happy in prison and had no desire to be released ...

In his statement, Bloomberg notes that while Tsafendas 'remembers having spoken to Price briefly on occasions', he 'firmly denies' that he suffered any ill-treatment. He also informs the public that 'Tsafendas spends his days reading, mainly the bible, helping with gardening and has added Afrikaans to the many languages he speaks.' What emerges is a picture of a man in happy retirement.

The prison authorities responded swiftly and made efficient use of the apartheid's state propaganda props. The National Party had just launched their new mouth-piece *The Citizen*, an English language newspaper, in an attempt to woo white English speaking South Africans. Gordon Winter, a journalist for *The Citizen*, was granted an exclusive interview with Tsafendas. Winter's published article ran for several days in *The Citizen*, to the ire of other newspapers which objected to the Prison Authorities' decision to give Winter exclusive access to a major scoop. Some of these newspapers, according to Winter, plagiarized his work and he instituted court proceedings against them.

Winter's account was aimed at directly refuting Price's allegations and the published story included photographs of a healthy, slim, and fit Tsafendas, exuding a positive and pleasant demeanor. Accompanying the articles in *The Citizen* were pictures of a smiling Tsafendas, enthusiastically polishing his shoes and holding animated conversations with wardens. The articles appeared between 19 and 22 October 1976. They covered in great detail the biographical details of Tsafendas' life, the number of countries, mental hospitals and ships in or on which he had spent his life. The first article quotes Tsafendas at length talking about the 'devil tapeworm' inside him and his attempts to get the prison authorities to take him seriously. While he dismissed any reports of ill treatment, 'his only complaint', according to Winter, is the insistent refusal to let him have an operation to remove the tape worm. 'Tsafendas hated all

doctors' because of their refusal to remove the worm. Verwoerd came to personify for him 'the number one doctor in my mind. I felt I had to kill him to end this conspiracy of doctors once and for all'. The worm 'was a manifestation of the devil inside me' and 'created temporary insanity'. 'I am a God-fearing man. The Devil placed the serpent inside me to counteract my godliness.'

Tsafendas' belief in the existence of the 'devil worm' inside him was the most dramatised aspect of his life in Winter's four-day front page account of his interview with Tsafendas in Pretoria Central Prison. The second article opened with the dramatic headline 'I was a Red', and focused readers' attention on the fact that Tsafendas at one stage, at age 21, had joined the South African Communist Party. Winter presents this as a new revelation and as 'Verwoerd's assassin's best kept secret'. This fact was actually already well documented in the summary trial, the Commission of Inquiry, in newspapers and police investigations ten years earlier. Not only does Winter grossly exaggerate the number of hospitals that Tsafendas had been admitted to, but he also gave the misleading impression that these facts had come to light as a result of his own findings.

My subsequent investigations show that this strange enigma of a man had visited no less than 24 countries since he was 18. In each and every one of them he had been hospitalized for one reason or another. In two countries, he was certified insane. In four countries, he was declared mentally unbalanced. He had been deported from six countries and detained in 13 others. He has been held in eight mental hospitals and managed to escape from three of them.

The Gordon Winter interview was printed in a number of newspapers that did not have access to the original information. Yet if one studies newspaper reports of 1966, there was nothing new in Winter's articles. All he succeeded in doing was to dramatise aspects of Tsafendas' life to a different generation of readers. Those who were too young to follow the newspaper reports of the time would have read Winter's account as the first. 1976 was a tumultuous year in South African political history. The student rebellion was in full swing, and the apartheid regime was in the international spotlight, attracting negative publicity over alleged brutalities. It was therefore not a small matter when a British newspaper carried a much-publicised

report that one of its prisoners, or rather a mental patient, was being ill treated. Tsafendas used the publicity surrounding his case to make new requests from the prison authorities, and in November 1977 he wrote to the Commanding Officer,

...With the approach of my sixtieth birthday on January 14, 1978, I kindly hereby request your permission to permit or allow me next year to acquire or buy a portable Set or transistor. I am an old man and would use the set only for special occasions, such as an overseas Rugby match, wrestling or boxing or cricket or Golf Tournament.

The letter is signed D. Tsafendas, but at the top right-hand corner, which is customarily used for the name and address of the writer, he uses the name, 'Mimikos Demitrios Tsafandakis Von William de Kanhume'.<sup>56</sup> This request was not granted, and he repeats the request for 'any available transistor radio, loudspeakers connection or television set or apparatus in portable form or otherwise' in a letter to the Commanding Officer written in 1981. He complains that he 'is completely isolated from the land of the living',

Besides the above I kindly request you for any new schoolbooks so that I can further my studies in English, Afrikaans, French, Greek and Russian or Yiddish. With the increasing influence of Bantu numbers, I would also like to learn of Bantu languages, especially Shangaan as I know a little and am proficient in that pronunciation and Phonetics but do not have a literary knowledge of the Grammar which constitutes that language.<sup>57</sup>

In this letter he also reminds the authorities of the interview with Gordon Winter, who made certain promises regarding books and correspondence with 'appropriate selected pen-friends and reliable characters'. He asks for the authorities to follow this up, and in case of doubt 'as to what I have mentioned',

I wish to point out as proof that photographs were taken of me from different angles by special photo apparatus in different parts of this prison, and various angles and standpoints and were forwarded to London for distribution in Europe, and elsewhere where I am known by certain friends. Furthermore copies and negatives are in possession of Mr. Gordon Winter = Editor of the Citizen.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Letter No. 31, Pretoria Central.

<sup>57</sup> Letter No. 36, Pretoria Central.

<sup>58</sup> Letter No. 36, Pretoria Central.

## The Moumbaris Affair of 1980

In 1980 the prison authorities had to deal with another press report of assault against Tsafendas. On 15 January of that year, *The Argus* published allegations by Alex Moumbaris that Tsafendas was being regularly assaulted in prison. Moumbaris was a political prisoner who had been sentenced to twelve years in 1973. Later he, together with Tim Jenkins and Stephen Lee, succeeded in escaping from Pretoria Local's maximum security section.<sup>59</sup> Moumbaris was also born of Greek parents in Egypt, and was able to speak to Tsafendas in Greek, Arabic and French. The Office of the Commissioner of Prisons sent a telex to the Commanding Officer of Pretoria Prison, asking for comment on the report in *The Argus*, 'met die oog op 'n begrotingsnota'. In his reply the Commanding Officer states that the allegations must be regarded as unsubstantiated on the grounds that Moumbaris, who had plenty of opportunity to report such incidents to the ICRC or prison officials, did not do so at the time, and that Tsafendas himself never reported such incidents to members of the visiting inspectorate of magistrates and judges.<sup>60</sup>

If punishment did not take the form of actual ill-treatment, it did certainly take the form of the starvation of company, news, emotional connections, empathy and compassion of any kind for an extended period. By 1985, official correspondence between the Commander of Pretoria Central and the Commissioner for Prisons indicates that the authorities were considering transferring Tsafendas to a mental hospital. On 24 March 1985 a telex from the Staff Officer of the Parliamentary Office to the Headquarters of the Department of 'Veilige Bewakingsdienste' communicated an instruction by the Commissioner for a formal evaluation report of Tsafendas' case with a view to transfer him to an institution for the mentally ill (*geestelike ongesteldes*).<sup>61</sup> Between March and September 1985 a series of memoranda

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<sup>59</sup> The story of their escape has been published as a book. See Tim Jenkins, *Escape From Pretoria* (London: Kliptown Books, 1987).

<sup>60</sup> Telex K86 8/2/1, 1980/03/24, Kommissaris aan HAK, Correctional Services, Vol 2. File A5078.

<sup>61</sup> National Archives, Department of Correctional Services 80/0043 Dimitrio Tsafendas, Vol. 1, Maart 1967-Oktober 1985. Telegram, K270/85, 24 March 1985.

went back and forth between the Commanding Officer of Pretoria Central, The Commissioner for Prisons and the Department of Health and Social Services. These included a detailed report on the legal framework governing Tsafendas' case, medical and psychiatric reports, as well as the availability of suitable alternative accommodation for him.

On 19 August 1985 the Director-General of the Department of Health expressed its support for the transfer of Tsafendas to Ward 11 at Weskoppies Mental Hospital.<sup>62</sup> The Minister of Justice, however, had the final say in the matter. In a memorandum from the Office of the Commissioner of Prisons to the 'Direkteur, Gevangenisbeskikking', the latter was informed that the Minister of Justice has '*op 23 August 1985 aangedui in die lig daarvan dat hierdie 'n sensitiewe saak is die pasient nie na Weskoppies hospitaal oorgeplaas word nie.*'<sup>63</sup> Despite this decision, the prison authorities continued to motivate for the transfer of Tsafendas, and as the political climate in the country became more unstable in the late 1980s, they were acutely sensitive to the potential political embarrassment that his case held for them. This is demonstrated, for example, in September 1987 when the Commanding Officer requested permission to install improved ventilation in his cell to deal with rising damp. In the letter, mention is made that if the prisoner, being of an advanced age and in poor health, should die as a result, it could cause '*die Department en Republiek oneindige verleentheid en probleme*'.<sup>64</sup> Tsafendas was not unaware of the changes in the political climate in the country and the implications these held for him. This is shown by the following letter, written in 1986, and addressed to 'The Storekeeper and General Clothing Department', informing them about his 'outlook' regarding the quality of clothing and shoes issued to prisoners.

Considering the present period we are going through and with the changes taking place in the Government Administration by the authorities

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<sup>62</sup> National Archives, Department of Correctional Services 80/0043 Dimitrio Tsafendas, Vol 1, Maart 1967- Oktober 1985. Telegram, Departement van Gesondheid en Welsyn aan Kommissaris van Gevangenis, Sielkundige Verslag: Dimitrio Tsafendas, 19 August 1985.

<sup>63</sup> Memorandum: Aanhouding in 'n Gevangenis Presidentspasient Dimitrio Tsafendas Nommer 80/0043, 19 September 1985.

<sup>64</sup> Letter to 'Kommissaris van Gevangenis': Verbeterde Kruisventilasie : Sel: Staatspresident Pasient Maksimumgevangenis Pretoria. From Bevelvoerende Offisier', 22 September 1987.

concerned, I wish to inform you more precisely about my outlook in relation your store and the quality of Clothing and foot wear and other items you have in stock which the prison service produces or manufactures and through the years has been distributing to the prisoners. The quality has been improving of the Items I mentioned above,

1. The shoes which prisoners had to wear and also the clothing almost a score years ago when I first arrived here, was terrible in those days – a(nd) further I or any other prisoner was not allowed to wear their own clothing.

2. As I expect to leave soon due to the reforms being made by the government I kindly request you to investigate and inform me Concerning my tool-box, Hat Box, Shoe box, and the suitcase with my London-made or tailored suits and also the South African made suits and shoes etc. I also had a brand new Gabardine overcoat and 1 Pamizza Hat, A straw Panama Hat for the Summer Time etc.

3. I am making these inquiries so that I shall have the proper or appropriate size of clothing to wear when I meet members of my Church, Family People or other Friends or acquaintances.

4. Captain ----- and ----- had my clothing deposited in the stores.

However during Captain ----- Period, my clothing, I was informed was by Captain ----- that my belongings were to be transferred as they were useless to me here etc. etc.

6. Will you please inquire and find out about the abovementioned items etc. I have no more to write.

P.N. Do you supply the prisoners with adequate clothing according to their category when they are released, set free, put on probation or Parole?

Sincerely Yours

Mimikos Demetrios Tsafandakis Von William D Kanhume.

Section C3 P.N.A. 5078. Pretoria Maximum T.V. L.<sup>65</sup>

His expectations about his release suggest that he was not unaware of political events in South Africa in the mid-1980s. He is concerned that he should be appropriately dressed on his release. I cite this letter at length because it gives us such a clear sense of how Tsafendas thought about himself and his station in life. The letter displays a confident tone, not unlike that of the English educated colonial

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<sup>65</sup> Undated letter written by Tsafendas. He refers to having arrived ‘almost a score years ago’, which indicates that the letter must have been written in or before 1986.



citizen/subject, though he was raised speaking Greek, Arabic and Portuguese. It is this duality, this citizen/subject identity, that he deploys in a letter written in 1979 in response to an article published in *Scope* on 19 June 1979. The article dealt with an award of £25 000 to Lieutenant Commander Doug Taylor for his design of Skior Sky Ramp. In a three-page handwritten letter he responds in detail, informing readers that the Germans had already pioneered this design and used it during the Second World War to bomb London. This letter demonstrates considerable technical knowledge and provides details of the nature of his experience on ships during wartime.

I wish hereby to congratulate this man in convincing the British Admiralty that such a design was feasible and possible to the advantage of making aircraft carriers more compact, concentrated and efficient ... When I joined the Allied Merchant Navy and later the U.S. merchant marine service ... we took a zig-zag course and nobody at the time knew of the direction to be taken as the orders ... were strictly sealed. The captain of the ship together with the Chief Officer had to open one envelope at a time. My action station was Gunners' Mate on Liberty Ships. Off duty I was deckhand, coal passer, Galley Boy and messman. As the Liberty Ships were flat-bottomed, they rolled at a 45 degree angle and we almost always missed our target when firing the 4.7 inch naval gun ...

At that time the Nazis were dropping magnetic mines by parachute ... Eventually the Allies counteracted with the Anti-magnetic degassing system which consisted of a copper cable around the inside of the ship's [ ] - connected to the ships' generators. The Nazis soon retaliated by dropping mines by parachute, these were very effective and caused much damage till the very end of the war. There was no anti-dote to stop this menace ... Skior Sky Ramps were soon diversified in properties and [?] all along the coast...

Further proof that the Germans invented the Skior Sky Ramp -They propelled their V1 and V2 Rockets from their ramps and bombed London. To be brief, these rockets consisted of a design like a Torpedo with wings and a small jet or gas turbine for propulsion. Very simple, with no electronic devices or remote controlled and easy to mass produce. Once the projectile or missile reached its objective ....due to the lack of calculated fuel it dropped and dived at a steep angle exploding and causing much devastation.

I am certainly baffled that it has taken the Naval Airforce authorities so long to adapt and copy this type construction and design which had been extensively used by the German Army engineers , and called the Todt Organisation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. Todt Engineering built bunkers, [?], pens and the Great Wall at Marseilles which I inspected and visited in 1949.

He then goes on to address another article, which alleges that he was ordered by General Van den Berg to assassinate Dr Verwoerd.

I wish hereby to refute any such connections or plot. I have enough sins of my own without having to carry somebody else's. But I am still innocent, though the authorities will not give me the opportunity to prove that it should have been manslaughter and not his so-called state president's patient. Only last week I was allowed to proceed to the Most Modern Medical Building [sic] in South Africa, The Louis Pasteur Medical Centre. However, when I arrived there the same Dr that gave me the X-ray ten years previously attended me with old equipment which he used at De Kock, 7 Van Riebeeck Building. When I asked or requested for a Fetal- or Thesmogram X-Ray they did not know what I was talking about.<sup>66</sup>

In a letter he wrote after eighteen years in prison, he reveals his reflections on his condition and his own perception of the circumstances that he finds himself in.

Please forgive [me] for my shortcomings but you must realise that I had a broken-up environment. The first part of my life was completely abnormal due to my stepmother and the environment I was brought up in at L.M. or Maputo. I ended up speaking several languages non-specialised and without a degree ...

I am still ill and the local prison doctor refuses to give me permission to have a Scan or check. This has been going on since I was detained 18 years ago, which should have been one of Manslaughter as what I have and can prove it is inside me which caused my behaviour. Furthermore, the electric shocks, which the Portuguese gave me in Portugal, caused me to drift and I have not stopped drifting since then. It is only lately that I have regained some of my reason and it took time for the cells of my Brain to heal after those electric shocks.<sup>67</sup>

Speaking of his experiences when he attended the Technical College in Johannesburg in 1941, he wrote,

...when I attended classes the professors told me to sit at the corner. I was victimized so much that I had to abscond. I was so disgusted that I left for the U.S. and Canada. Because of all this, racialism ruined my whole life. I did not get my degree. However my brother did succeed and was working with Iscor. This is just a glimpse of my Experiences in an Abnormal World. I intend writing a Book if ever I have the opportunity, but medical attention is what I need at present.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Letter No. 35, Pretoria Central, Addressed to the Editor of *Scope*.

<sup>67</sup> Letter No. 43, Pretoria Central.

<sup>68</sup> Letter No. 43, Pretoria Central.

## Conclusion

Tsafendas had committed nothing less than regicide, and if the law did not allow him to be sentenced to death, he would at least experience the idea of death and dying every day - his punishment for felling the arch-sovereign of apartheid. His punishment was almost a near perfect demonstration of what Foucault described as the 'ideational' character of punishment under a disciplinary mode of power. (See Chapter One). He also argues that instead of a staged spectacle, punishment also takes on an increasingly hidden character under a regime of disciplinary power. What took place on death row was certainly hidden from unauthorized eyes, and not to be spoken about by unauthorised persons. It therefore provided the perfect cloak to conceal the actual barbaric quality of his punishment - barbaric from the perspective of accepted civilised legal practice. In the case of Tsafendas, the barbaric nature of his incarceration consisted not only in the fact that a mentally ill patient was held on death row, but in the fact that his punishment was *staged repeatedly* - in the organized ritual of the weekly hanging timetable.

However, the letters that Tsafendas wrote in prison do show that it was the very nature of his crime that would be his 'salvation'. As escaped ex-prisoners publicised his conditions in prison it was no longer possible to hold him under the conditions of the initial 'pligstaat'. That the regime was acutely sensitive to publicity surrounding his case is clear from the fact that as early as 1967, the commanding officer of the prison issued a press statement denying that Tsafendas was being held in a cell on death row.<sup>69</sup> Neither his madness nor his reason could be ignored. His conditions of imprisonment did not remain the same in the twenty three years that he remained in the Maximum Security section of Pretoria Central Prison. It is unlikely that he was kept in the same cell for the duration of his imprisonment. . What is evident is that in the initial period, his cell was very close to where the actual hangings took place, and it is during this period that his letters demonstrate

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<sup>69</sup> Klagte D Tsafendas, 'Beeidigde Verklaring', May 1968. Department of Correctional Services 80/0043 Dimitrio Tsafendas, Vol 1, Maart 1967- Oktober 1985.

psychological vulnerability. Over time his privileges were increased, as different Commanding Officers obviously interpreted their brief differently according to changing political circumstances. That his psychological state continually fluctuated is also shown by the contrast in mood and subject matter.

I have tended to use lengthy quotations from the letters to give the reader a sense of the nature of his discourse. His letters show such a remarkable level of coherence and rationality that one wonders whether being forced to stay in one place did not actually contribute to a measure of psychological integration.



## Chapter Four

### Henk van Woerden's *Een mond vol glas*

#### Introduction

In this chapter I explore how Henk Van Woerden's *Een mond vol glas* offers historical insights of a different order of magnitude. I suggest that because it straddles the genres of biography and autobiography, as well as fiction and history, it offers an alternative view to a historical discourse that has been profoundly shaped by the overtly instrumentalist nature of South African society. I argue that as a biographical novel it is not located within what Ciraj Rassool has described as the 'biographical order' of post-apartheid biographic production.<sup>1</sup> Rassool analyses how the 'exemplary heroic life' as a recurring motif has dominated political biography in the publishing arena as well as in the public narration of lives at ritual occasions such as funerals and memorials. It is also not emblematic of another aspect of the biographic order in post-apartheid South Africa – the narration of what Desiree Lewis has described as the life of the exemplary victim.<sup>2</sup> In a review of biographic narrations of the figure of Sara Baartman, Lewis argues that she has come to symbolize the iconic victim of South African history. Her discussion of works that attempt to transcend the 'foregrounding of Baartman's victimization'<sup>3</sup> highlights the difficulties of negotiating the tension between 'what we

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<sup>1</sup> Ciraj Rassool, 'The Biographic order: further notes on biography in South African public culture after apartheid'. [n.d.]. Author can be contacted at History Department, UWC. Email: crassool@uwc.ac.za.

Paper presented at...'; Also see C.S. Rassool, 'The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa' (Ph.D., University of the Western Cape, 2004); for recent debate, see C.S. Rassool, 'Rethinking Documentary History and South African Political Biography', *South African Review of Sociology*, 41(1) (2010), pp. 28-55; J. Hyslop, 'On Biography: A Response to Ciraj Rassool', *South African Review of Sociology*, 41(2) (2010), pp. 104-115.

<sup>2</sup> Desiree Lewis, 'Sara Baartman's Agency: history, biography and the imbroglios of truth'. Paper presented at South African Contemporary History and Humanities Seminar, Centre for Humanities Research and Department of History, UWC, Seminar No. 321, 30 March 2020. Also see her *Living on a Horizon: Bessie Head and the Politics of Imagining* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, 'Saara Baartman', 2.

understand by choice, freedom, independence, passion, attachment, affection, intimacy'<sup>4</sup> and the 'all-determining influences of social structure and relations of domination'.

The bulk of historical scholarship on apartheid has tended to emphasise the structural and representational aspects of apartheid. Even where scholars have paid serious attention to identity or subjectivity, the focus has been on the 'production' of historical knowledge, of the self, of subjectivity and identity, as if these are processes that should conform to the mode of factory floor production. In their rejection of an overly instrumentalist political economy view of apartheid, some historians have nevertheless applied the idioms of political economy to questions of memory, subjectivity and identity. The notion of the 'production of history' has been extended to that of ideas, culture and subjectivity, leaving little option for any exploration of the way in which culture and subjectivity shape the psychic interior lives of individual and the way they make sense of historical events. Historical novels published in South Africa in recent years, such as Shaun Johnson *The Native Commissioner*<sup>5</sup> and Michael Cawood Green's *For the Sake of Silence*, have also drawn attention to the complexity of the role of the subjective, emotional and the personal in the unfolding of South African history.

Michael Shapiro has argued that conventional political science literature, when discussing events such as the Bosnian War or India's partition, 'serve as a relay' for 'seeing like a state'.<sup>6</sup> He presents as a counterpoint to the 'state-centric' view of history the work of writers such as Urvashi Butalia (India's partition), Hanan-Al-Shaykh (the Lebanese Civil War), Semezdin Mehmedinovic (the Bosnian War)<sup>7</sup> and Henk Van Woerden (Apartheid South

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<sup>4</sup> Lewis, 'Saara Baartman', 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> Shaun Johnson, *The Native Commissioner* (Johannesburg: Penguin, 2006). Also see Michael Cawood Green, *For the Sake of Silence* (Roggebaai: Umuzi, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Michael Shapiro, 'Partition Blues'. *Alternatives* 27 (2002), pp.249-271

<sup>7</sup> See Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1998); Hanan al-Shaykh, *Beirut Blues* (New York: Doubleday, 1995); Semezdin

Africa). What these works share is a perspective of historical events as experienced *within* the life worlds of people, whose existence were not *always and only* subject to what he refers to as 'geopolitical time'. We might ask if historians of the apartheid era have not reproduced the very codes of inscription of a system they profess to oppose.

It is perhaps for these reasons that we have seen the emergence of what has been called "literary non-fiction" or "creative non-fiction", as a form to capture the complexity of the relationship between the inner life worlds of individuals and events of geo-political significance.<sup>8</sup> It has been suggested that Van Woerden's *Een mond vol glas* could be located within this genre. I argue rather, that this work is located within a global culture of literature on migration and the stateless person. I argue that the book is an integral part of the whole of Van Woerden's oeuvre on loss and 'ontheemding' (uprooting), in a world where the nation state constructs what Wendy Brown has termed increasingly dense 'walls of sovereignty'.<sup>9</sup>

*Een mond vol glas*,<sup>10</sup> the first book-length account of the life of Demitrios Mimikos Tsafendas, is an attempt to provide a portrait of the inner psychic life of an individual born into a society and culture where, to use Shapiro's description, 'the normative grid was dense, surveillant, and discriminating in

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Mehmedinovic, *Sarajevo Blues* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1998); Ronit Matalon, *The One Facing Us* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of debates around fiction, 'literary non-fiction' or 'creative non-fiction' see Duncan Brown & Antjie Krog, 'Creative Non-Fiction: A Conversation', South African Contemporary History and Humanities Seminar No. 335., Centre for Humanities Research and Department of History, University of the Western Cape; Hedley Twiddle, 'In a Country Where You Couldn't Make this Shit Up?': (Some thoughts on) literary non-fiction in South Africa'. Paper presented at The Archives and Public Culture Research Group Workshop, 9-11 March 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Wendy Brown, Public Lecture on 'Sovereignty', University of Cape Town, 24 July 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Henk van Woerden, *Een mond vol glas*. Amsterdam, Podium, 1998. In the U.K it was published as *A Mouthful of Glass* by Granta Books in 2000 and was translated into English by Dan Jacobsen; in the USA it was published by Metropolitan Books (New York) as *The Assassin: A Story of Rage and Race in the land of Apartheid* in 2001. In South Africa an English edition was published in 2000 by Jonathan Ball (Johannesburg); The Afrikaans edition was translated from the Dutch by Antjie Krog and published as *Domein van Glas* (Kaapstad: Queillerie, 2000). All page references in this thesis are from the American English title, *The Assassin*, although when referring to the book in the text of the thesis, I prefer to use the original Dutch title.

a totalizing way'.<sup>11</sup> What emerges is the story a man whose identity is not only fraught by race, but also by nationality in a world that is organised according to national belonging. His family, who is 'of pure Greek descent' and hence classified 'white', have no problem obtaining permanent residence in South Africa. Tsafendas, on the other hand, in the racial landscape of colonial Mozambique is a mulatto, which in South African racial lexicon translates into half-caste or the derogatory Afrikaans word, 'halfnaaitjie'. He is unable to obtain legal entry or residence because of his racial classification, and enters South Africa illegally on two occasions in the 1930s.

He spends approximately twenty years at sea (literally) because he is regularly deported after contravening the immigration laws. When he is apprehended after illegal entry, the authorities struggle to make sense of his nationality. They cannot decide whether he is Greek, Portuguese, South African or Egyptian and do not know what to do with him. At one point, it is decided that he is Greek, and is deported to a country (Greece) that he has never been to. Once he finds himself in Portugal, where it is decided that he is a citizen, but is then arrested for never having done military service. While in Greece and Portugal he applies again for South African citizenship. Again, it is refused.

### **Biography, Autobiography and the Restless Anxiety of the Migrant**

*Een mond vol glas* was first published in Holland in 1998, and has been translated into several languages, including Italian, Portuguese, Greek, French, German, Spanish, Norwegian, Danish, English and Afrikaans. It has received wide critical acclaim and reviewed favourably worldwide. It has been reviewed in a wide variety of publications across different genres and disciplines. In the United Kingdom it has attracted reviews from *Race and Class*; *Times Literary Supplement* and newspapers such as *The Times*, *Observer*,

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<sup>11</sup> Shapiro, 'Partition Blues', 252.



*The Guardian*.<sup>12</sup> In the United States, diverse publications such as *African Studies Review*, *The New Internationalist*, *New Statesman*, and the *New York Review of Books* have published reviews.<sup>13</sup> In South Africa, every major newspaper in English and Afrikaans has reviewed the book. It has also been reviewed in a number of magazines as diverse as *De Kat*, *Femina*, *Leadership SA*, *Financial Mail*, *True Love* and *East Cape Weekend Leisure*, as well as more scholarly and academic publications such as *Literator*, *Current Writing*, the online literary journal *Litnet* and the *South African Medical Journal*.<sup>14</sup>

The book has won the *Sunday Times* Alan Paton award in the category 'non-fiction works with South Africa as a theme - either historical or contemporary- available inside the country'. The book also inspired a play, *ID*, written by South African-born actor Anthony Sher, in which he also plays the lead role of Tsafendas. After he read the book, Sher took a flight to Amsterdam to negotiate stage rights with van Woerden. The play was staged in 2003 at the Almeida Theatre in London.<sup>15</sup>

The book's prominence in the South African media is a reflection of the compelling remembrance that the name of Tsafendas evokes amongst many South Africans of a certain age: of a day where they can remember exactly where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news that Verwoerd had been assassinated. The book is the last of a trilogy that deals with the author's relationship with South Africa, where he lived from age nine, when his family emigrated from The Netherlands in 1956, to twenty-

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<sup>12</sup> See Barbara Harlow, 'If truth be told...' *Race & Class*, Jul-Sep 2002, Vol. 44 Issue 1, 119; Leslie Chow, 'The Wandering Greek', *Times Literary Supplement*, Issue 5087, 29 September 2000, 25; Deborah Levy, 'A sick Man in a Sick Country', *The Times*, 30 August 2000.

<sup>13</sup> *New Internationalist*, Issue 330, December 2000, , 31.

<sup>14</sup> See De Kat; "SSM." *Femina*, December, 2000, 165; *Leadership SA*, 1 January 2001; *Financial Mail*, 24 November 2000; Glynis O'Hara. *True Love*, March 2001, 21; Mike Oettle. *East Cape Weekend Leisure*, 23 December 2000, 5. Van Coller, 'Proewe van 'n rekonstruksie: Een mond vol glas deur Henk van Woerden'. *Literator* 22(1) April 2001,137-15; Sheila Roberts, 'A cautious attempt at anamnesis'. *Current Writing*, Vol. 12, Issue May, 2000; R. Kaplan, 'A Mouthful of Glass', *South African Medical Journal*, Vol.91, Issue 5, May 2001, 395-396.

<sup>15</sup> Anthony Sher, *ID: inspired by the book Een mond vol glasby Henk van Woerden*. London: Nick Hern Books, 2003. 'Authors Note'. I discuss the play in more detail in Chapter Six.

one, when he left. It is the only book in the trilogy that has been translated into English, extending its readership beyond a Dutch audience, and Afrikaans, widening its South African readership.

It is impossible to understand Van Woerden's portrayal of Demitrios Tsafendas' encounter with race and madness in *A Mouthful of Glass*, without insight into his own biography. Van Woerden's own life was shaped by the very same entanglement of race, madness, identity and the restless anxiety that haunts the migrant. In *Een mond vol glas* he writes, 'The migrant is an uncertain and incomplete man. He lives in an inveterate state of unease'.<sup>16</sup> It is this 'inveterate state of unease' that characterizes his understanding of Tsafendas. It is also the same 'unease' that overshadows his own life.

There are also a number of oblique resemblances between his own life and that of Tsafendas. Both experienced migration as a child to another country via a long ship voyage, Tsafendas at age one, from Mozambique to Egypt; Van Woerden aged nine, from The Netherlands to South Africa. Both lost their mothers at a young age. Both have to deal with stepmothers, who in different ways shaped their experience. Both lived in South Africa, leaving in their early twenties, and return after twenty years. Greece is another connection in their biographies. Tsafendas, of Greek descent, is deported to Greece from the United States, where he lives on and off for two years. It is to Greece that Van Woerden goes when he literally flees The Netherlands after arriving there from South Africa in 1968. Describing his experience when he arrived in The Netherlands in 1968, he says,

..I couldn't connect with this country. It reminded me too much of my parents' circles: gentleman farmers from Groningen and Sweet manufacturers from Delft. When I lived in South Africa I disliked Dutch immigrants and when I arrived in the Netherlands, I found a country full of that kind of people...I thought the Netherlands was horrible. And then the climate! I was shaped by South Africa, by the

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<sup>16</sup> *The Assassin*, 1.

light, the space, the mountains. I felt stifled here, if only because you couldn't see beyond the end of the street.<sup>17</sup>

Henk van Woerden was born in Leiden, Holland in 1947. His family emigrated to South Africa in 1956 as part of a post World-War Two initiative in which the Dutch Government encouraged its citizens to emigrate. The Netherlands experienced high levels of unemployment after the war.<sup>18</sup> The apartheid government, also followed an official immigration policy heavily in favour of Dutch immigrants.<sup>19</sup> Van Woerden was nine years old when the family undertook the long sea voyage to South Africa. His family settled in Claremont, which at the time was still racially mixed. He grew up in a period in South Africa that saw the implementation of Population Registration Act and The Group Areas Act. As a young teenager he witnessed the forced removals of Coloureds and Indians from Claremont. This made a deep impression on him as he had been drawn to the culture and practices of his Muslim neighbours. As a boy he was more impressed with the local Indian grocer, who 'could speak four languages and was the only person who read books rather than the comic strips in the newspapers'.

Bent over the Koran, in the half-light of his shop, he became my own image of a learned man. His shop smelled of samosas, of bredies, sosaties and other cape malay dishes. The faith he followed appealed in equal measure to my nostrils, my stomach and my understanding.

He visited the Claremont Mosque, the Dorp Street Mosque as well as the Karaamat of Sheikh Yusuf at Macassar. He describes this experience

I knew next to nothing of Islam. But it seemed to me to have adapted itself in a more comely fashion to the harsh realities of Southern Africa than the Dutch reformed or Anglican Churches. From about the time I was twelve the faith began to exercise an irresistible attraction over me, both because in my eyes it was so bound up with book learning -

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<sup>17</sup> Elsbeth Etty, 'The lost loyalty of a migrant: Interview with Henk Van Woerden'. *NRC Handelsblad*, 11 November 2005. [www.nlpf.nl/book](http://www.nlpf.nl/book). Accessed 10/05/2011. 1146 am.

<sup>18</sup> Rachele Conradie, 'n Terugblik op Verwoerd in die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis met spesifieke verwysing na Henk van Woerden se *Een mond vol glas*'. *Litnet*, September 2001. <http://www.oulitnet.co.za/neerlandit>. Accessed on Friday 25 March 2011, 21h00 .

<sup>19</sup> Sally Peberdy, *Selecting Immigrants: National Identity and South Africa's Immigration Policies 1910-2008*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009). See especially Chapter 5, 'Building an Un-hyphenated Nation', 85-108.

preserved and transmitted in a strange, attractive orthography – and because of what I perceived to be its sensuousness. The frigidly ascetic Bible classes of the Anglicans and Methodists offered nothing comparable to the recurring resonant cries from the minaret, to the *riempie -sny*, a feast celebrated with banners and fluttering citrus leaves, and to the ceremonies of *khalifah* or *ratiep*. My father disapproved of the last particularly: the beating drums, the dancing of those dagger-brandishing men, and then at the high point of the ritual, skewers run through cheek or lip, swords slashing at bellies, bare feet walking on burning coals -everything wonderfully without blood or blister. *Inshallah! Allahu-Akbar!*<sup>20</sup>

He was enrolled in an Afrikaans medium boys school but ‘hated it’.<sup>21</sup>

When he was ten years old his mother died after a lengthy illness. While she was ill, he was placed with foster parents and his siblings in an orphanage. With the death of his mother, family stability disappears as his younger brother develops schizophrenia and is sent from one institution to another. His father remarries a number of times, with unhappy consequences for the children, as the relationship with the stepmothers are anything but amicable.

In 1960 he began secondary school at Westerford High and matriculated in 1964. He then enrolled for a Fine Arts degree at the University of Cape Town’s Michaelis School of Art. It was during his student days that Verwoerd’s assassination took place. *In Een mond vol glas* he vividly recalls the impact of the news and the sense of anxiety and stillness as people stopped what they were doing and gathered in front of radios:

The sixth of September 1966 is inscribed sharply in my memory...At a few minutes before three in the afternoon the regular programming of the South African Broadcasting Corporation was interrupted by an urgent news item. The prime minister had been attacked during a parliamentary session. It was not yet known whether Verwoerd had survived...Here and there groups of people stood around radios. They spoke in low tones. An hour went by. Another thirty minutes. The stillness of the town was palpable. It is true: an entire country can hold its breath. Public life had come to a halt. An unfocused anxiety seemed to rustle through the streets.

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<sup>20</sup> *The Assassin*, 14.

<sup>21</sup> ‘A Biographical Note’ 1.

Shortly after four o'clock it was announced that the father of the nation had passed away...<sup>22</sup>

By the time he entered university he had already acquired a deep sensitivity to the South African political landscape. He had never adjusted very well to the culture and attitudes of white South African society, not quite fitting in with English - or Afrikaans speaking whites. He remembers feeling 'most at ease' with coloureds. After Verwoerd's assassination he recalls how, in a climate where the Population Registration Act was being rigidly enforced, he was frozen out because he was drawn more to coloured people. After the end of his third year, of study at UCT he left South Africa for Holland. Van Woerden had refused to register for national service or apply for a white identity card. When he left South Africa, for Holland in 1968, he 'hardly existed'. He then travelled extensively in Europe, Turkey, Iran, and Greece, where he lived for a period of two years on the island of Crete. He returned to Amsterdam in 1972, where he has been living since, with his wife and two children.

Before he took up writing, Van Woerden became an accomplished and internationally recognized painter. He won numerous awards for his work including the Royal Award for painting in 1980. His work exhibited in Nice, Paris, Lisbon, Nuremberg and Basel. *Een mond vol glas* was the third in a series of three novels on South Africa. All three books play with the borderline between fiction and history. His own biography is the raw material for the first book, *Moenie Kyk Nie* (1993), and which won the prestigious Geertjan Lubberhuizen Prize for best literary prose debut in 1994. In the same year it was also shortlisted for the Libris Literary Award, which is the equivalent of the Booker Prize in the Netherlands. The main character is based on the author himself, and the story of the Barkman family corresponds very closely with his own family's history, and his own experience of growing up in South

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<sup>22</sup> *The Assassin*, 6.

Africa.<sup>23</sup> He describes the book as 'die geskiedenis van 'n wit Europese familie wat in Afrika verlore raak'.<sup>24</sup> It is about 'gesinstrauma' – about a family that disintegrates as a result of 'ontheemding' (displacement/uprooting)), and migration to a country that is dogged by political unrest, and unbending racial apartheid.<sup>25</sup> The book is a form of homage to his younger brother in real life, represented by the character of Hans, who develops schizophrenia under the pressure of a strange environment where the children's mother dies and they are placed with strange families and institutions. For Van Woerden, the result has been that South Africa has always been a country associated with loss, and remained for him a 'aaisel... 'n onopgeloste saak.' He tells Ettienne Van Heerden, 'Die land is nie alleen vir my 'n oop wond nie, maar ook 'n vraagteken wat ek moet oplos'.<sup>26</sup>

His return to South Africa after twenty years is the beginning of a journey to unravel the 'raaisel' (puzzle), and is captured in the second book, *Tikoes*, where the main character, Thys, with his partner, Tikoes, travels through the country, on a journey of rediscovery, meeting old friends, family and familiar places. This journey takes them to urban as well as rural settings and the book takes on the form of a kind of travelogue. According to Van Coller, the book is also reminiscent the 'ontdekkingsverhaal', in the tradition of Dutch travel literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth century Southern Africa.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Aletta Susannah Bruwer, 'Henk van Woerden se "Kaapse trilogie" as 'n vorm van bekentisliteratuur'. M.A., Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe, Departement Afrikaans en Nederlands, Duits en Frans, aan die Universiteit van die Vrystaat, November 2003, bl. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Etienne van Heerden, 'Van Woerden se glasoo draai na drieankerbaai'. Interview with Henk van Woerden. *Volksblad*, 19 June 1999, 2. "the history of a white European family that loses itself in Africa" (my translation).

<sup>25</sup> Van Heerden, 'Van Woerden se glasoo'.

<sup>26</sup> Van Heerden, 'Van Woerden se glasoo'. "The country remains for me not only an open wound, but also a question that I need to resolve.

<sup>27</sup> H.P. van Coller, 'Proewe van 'n Rekonstruksie', 144.

The important quest however, for both narrator and his companion, is whether South Africa can offer a home to someone who is a perpetual migrant, 'n landsverhuiser,'<sup>28</sup>

A constant theme in his paintings and his novels is the question of the loss of a sense of belonging. It is the dilemma of the migrant, torn from his place of birth by the exigencies of history, and incapable of finding a place that is home. 'Ontheemding' – literally referring to uprooting – leads to a permanent state of unease – the migrant caught between two worlds, the one he left and the one he is incapable of returning to. This is also the subject of his last book, *Ultramarijn* (*Ultramarine*) published before he died in November 2005. In this book, the only one he wrote that does not deal with South Africa, he explores the theme of migration in the Mediterranean. He returns to the question of loss, and this links it to his previous three books on South Africa. 'If there is anything that I wanted to treat in my four books, it's the feeling of loss'.<sup>29</sup>

*Ultramarijn* also deals with identity crisis, on the level of the individual as well as on the larger historical stage. Turkey and Greece, two countries that have always been a site of the constant migration and intermingling of its citizens and cultures, are forced to draw clear national boundaries and sharp distinctions after 1922. Millions of Greek speaking Turks must uproot themselves and move to Turkish defined areas; millions of Turkish-speaking Greeks living in Turkey must uproot themselves and move to Greek defined cities. In his novel, *Birds Without Wings* (2004), Louis de Bernierès, explores how this enforced migration translates into the impact on the inhabitants of one village in Anatolia.<sup>30</sup> This is the setting of Van Woerden's novel, in which the lives of the main characters Joakim, Aysel and Oslem are uprooted and they undergo identity crises, just like the cities, which have to change

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<sup>28</sup> Bruwer, 'Kaapse Trilogie', 28.

<sup>29</sup> 'Migration, Morality and the Mediterranean: Henk Van Woerden's *Ultramarijn*.' The Foundation for the Production and Translation of Dutch Literature (NLPVF).

<http://www.nlpvf.nl/book/book2.php>. Accessed 10/05/2011. 11h46am.

<sup>30</sup> See Louis de Bernierès, *Birds Without Wings* (New York :Vintage, 2004).

identities. He has deliberately kept the precise geopolitical identity (Turkey or Greece) of the place of the novel vague and abstract, combining elements of both to represent the Mediterranean as space of continual migration and cultural intermingling.

*Een mond vol glas* the last of a trilogy of books on South Africa, all of which, as genre, sit on the borderline between fact and fiction, history and auto/biography. In *Een mond vol glas* Van Woerden weaves elements of his own biography into the book. The idea of a book about Tsafendas began to take root in 1989 when he returned to South Africa to do research for *Moenie Kyk Nie* at the South African Library<sup>31</sup>. His research for *Een mond vol glas* eventually took him to the National Library, The Library of Parliament, and the National Archives. It was only 'in 1994 or the beginning of 1995' that he found out that Tsafendas was still alive.<sup>32</sup> In 1998 he interviewed Tsafendas at Sterkfontein Hospital, where he was placed after his release from prison in 1994.

Using the tools of novelistic construction, he is able to focus on how the individual, rather than an anonymous mass of people, experiences the impact of large historical events. He illuminates that aspect of history so often overlooked by historians - the relationship between individual psychic development, and what the psychoanalyst Erik Erikson called 'contemporary crises in historical development'.<sup>33</sup> He refuses scientific objectivity in favour of 'intuitive understanding'. At the end of *Een mond vol glas*, he notes,

All that said, it would clearly be false for me to claim that my impression of Demitrios' selfhood and inner consciousness was based exclusively on facts that could be established retrospectively. His innermost life - that what he felt - had to be grasped intuitively.

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<sup>31</sup> Herman Wasserman, 'Tsafendas se storie is te lank weggesteek, sê Van Woerden'. Interview with Van Woerden. *Die Burger*, 25 March 2000, 4.

<sup>32</sup> 'A Question of Madness.' Carte Blanche program on Tsafendas: Interview with Henk Van Woerden and Liza Key. 2 September 2001. <http://beta.mnet.co.za/carteblanche/article.aspx>. Accessed. 15 June 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Erik Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*. (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), 23. For a fuller discussion of this point see the Conclusion to this thesis.



A transaction can be verified. A dilemma, his dilemma, is much harder to delineate. To do that I had to rely on instinct, an intuitive understanding of his personality and the things that affected him<sup>34</sup>.

The author has a glass eye, as does the main character in *Moenie Kyk nie*. As a result of being blind in one eye, his vision in the remaining eye becomes perhaps sharpened. He is also a painter, and it is with the painter's eye that he writes. Perhaps this is why he is able to communicate the *sensuality* of loss in all his books. In the case of Tsafendas it is the abrupt change in the sensual landscape, from Alexandria in the Mediterranean, to Lourenco Marques that is his first encounter with Southern Africa, that Van Woerden portrays:

He missed the familiar sounds and the comfortable neighbourhood of his grandmother's house. He was sent to school in a Portuguese mission in the city and was placed in the lowest grade. The white children spoke in a harsh, clipped manner, as if giving orders. The blacks shouted. Even nature and natural events seem loud and abrupt here. In the evenings it looked as if the sun died in a single moment behind the hills. In the mornings it stood up as if with a clap above the horizon. There was no sense of the intermediacy, no dawn or dusk.<sup>35</sup>

### *Een mond vol glas*

Van Woerden chooses to begin his story of Tsafendas in Hamburg in 1955,

On 11 February 1955 a man could be seen wandering about the streets of Hamburg, Germany. Sometimes he halted and stared up at the Branches of trees. He wore a hat but no overcoat. Absorbed in conversation with himself, he crossed Langenhorner Chaussee. It was shortly after nine in the evening; the street was empty and ill-lit. A half hour later he entered the main gate of General Hospital and made his way to the emergency ward. In broken German, speaking excitedly, he told his story to the receptionist. He had swallowed twenty sleeping pills, he said. Exactly twenty<sup>36</sup>

This reconstruction is based on a lengthy archival fragment in Volume Four of the documents of the Commission of Enquiry into the Circumstances of the death of the Honourable Dr Hendrik French Verwoerd. It is a detailed report

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<sup>34</sup> *The Assassin*, 166.

<sup>35</sup> *The Assassin*, 36.

<sup>36</sup> *The Assassin*, 1.

of Tsafendas' hospitalisation at the Ochsenzoll Clinic in Hamburg, Germany. It is the only medical record of Tsafendas that the Commission's files contain, despite repeated requests for his hospital records from the United States and Canada. It is also one of the most intimate and lengthy accounts of Tsafendas on a day to day period. Van Woerden's account deftly weaves this fragment into a moving introduction to a man in the middle of a psychic crisis.

The story of Tsafendas arrival and stay in the Ochsenzoll Hospital functions as a kind of prologue. Germany lies in the centre of Europe, a country that has always been Janus-faced in its orientation between east and west. Perhaps he begins here to mark a point of centrality to anchor the reader in making sense of the continual back and forth of Tsafendas' unceasing restlessness, which is both bewildering and unsettling and in Van Woerden's words, "stuns the imagination". The year 1955 also marks, more or less, the midpoint in the twenty years that Tsafendas spent at sea – literally and metaphorically. By 1955, he had already been to Canada, the United States, United Kingdom, Greece, France, Portugal (during which he was deported to Lourenzo Marques, but refused entry, and shipped back to Portugal). He arrived in Germany in 1954, from where he travelled to Portugal, back to Germany, United Kingdom, Germany, Egypt, Beirut, Turkey, the Balkans, Greece, and Portugal again.

The very next section of the book covers van Woerden's own experience on 6 September 1966. It is also an opportunity to reflect on the position of the migrant, not only of Tsafendas, but Verwoerd and Van Woerden himself. The immigrant or migrant will always be two halves, caught emotionally between two countries. Michael Shapiro has compared *Een mond vol glas* with a number of novels, which deal with individual lives being displaced because of geopolitical shifts imposed on people along lines of race, nationality and ethnicity. His narration of Tsafendas' life has placed the dislocation as a result of apartheid's race policies along a continuum of experiences that includes the Bosnian War, India's partition, the Lebanese Civil War and places such as

Egypt and Israel where the nation state has enforced distinctions between Arab and Jew, that for centuries were not that distinguishable at all.

These works give voice to 'structures of feeling' that enact 'the lived experience of race' of a particular generation in time and place. It is often the creative cultural expressions of a period that, according to Raymond Williams, who developed the concept, that best capture the structures of feeling embedded in specific historical experiences. Shapiro argues that Van Woerden's book has succeeded in achieving an 'epistemic shift' similar to that of Clyde Woods 'blues epistemology', by which he means that the blues is much more than a musical form but 'an ontology and a way of knowing'.<sup>37</sup> It is a lyrical expression of the 'lived experience of race'<sup>38</sup> :

..Rather than render South Africa's apartheid policy within a discourse dominated by state-system mode of explanation, he focuses on the consequences of the policy for an exemplary body. His story foregrounds the ways in which the (varying) national and racial identities lent to Tsafendas at different times and in different places affect his ability to dwell, to move, to work, and to form attachments. ...The story of Tsafendas' peregrinations reveal a world of state boundaries, a normative grid that retards movements, particularly for one with ambiguous national lineage. The bulk of van Woerden's narrative addresses itself to the question of race and nationality as lived experience...<sup>39</sup>

What these works exemplify is what Shapiro calls the 'partition blues': they give voice to 'a structure of feeling lived and felt on the ground'<sup>40</sup> before an enforced geopolitical partition, whether along lines of race, ethnicity, religion or nationality. It foregrounds the tension between 'geopolitical time' and the time associated with 'the bonds of familial and personal affiliation'.<sup>41</sup>

Leslie Chow has written of Van Woerden's book that 'it attempts to engage with Tsafendas' emotional life'<sup>42</sup>, and here a good example is his imaginative

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<sup>37</sup> Shapiro, 251.

<sup>38</sup> Shapiro, 256.

<sup>39</sup> Shapiro, 251-2.

<sup>40</sup> Shapiro, 256

<sup>41</sup> Shapiro, 259.

<sup>42</sup> Chow, 'The Wandering Greek', 25.

construction of Tsafendas' discovery of his mother' identity. Race was an all important aspect of one's personal identity in colonial Southern Africa. In the Report of the Commission we read, according to his stepmother, 'it was not until he was already working that he discovered that he was the illegitimate child of a non-White. This upset him considerably'.<sup>43</sup> In Volume Ten of the Commission's files, in a report of the visit to his family members after the assassination, there is some acknowledgement that he had an inner life as we read, 'hy was terneergedruk toe hy daarvan gehoor het maar het nie 'n word gesê nie'.<sup>44</sup>

The discovery that he was a double negative – illegitimate and non-white – is recreated by Van Woerden in two and a half-pages giving concrete expression to what Erikson described as 'an identity crisis located in the core of the individual and the communal culture' (see conclusion).<sup>45</sup> He uses his skills as an imaginative writer to paint a picture of the psychic interior, and transforms a dispassionate description into an emotionally charged event in the life of an already troubled seventeen year old. He describes in detail how the discovery took place and how the young Tsafendas reacted. When Tsafendas entered the house of a neighbour, Mrs Sideris and 'omitting the usual greetings in Greek, went straight to the gramophone', she retorted 'You're are just like your mother'.<sup>46</sup> While he stared at her, dumbfounded, she elaborated,

Your mother, your real mother, was a black, a coloured woman. A mulatto, she repeated, in Portuguese. He heard her, but regarded what she had said as just another of the many obscure insults and accusations he had shaken off before. He was a Greek, the son of a Greek, the grandson of a Greek. He left the house without replying.

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<sup>43</sup> *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Circumstances of the Death of the Honourable Dr Hendrick French Verwoerd*, 1.

<sup>44</sup> K150, Volume 10. 'Verslag Insaake Besoek Aan Familie-lede van Demitrio Tsafendas – Pretoria, 21 October 196'. "He was depressed when he found out, but did not utter a single word". (My translation).

<sup>45</sup> See the Conclusion for a more detailed elaboration of Erikson's use of the concept, 'identity crisis'.

<sup>46</sup> Van Woerden, *The Assassin*, 51.

The next day he went to look up his birth records at the office of the Administraçao Civil and found the name of his mother, Amelia Williams.

Suddenly he had to think of himself in two parts, as a kind of double: one half this, the other half that; half nonwhite, the other half... acceptable. In South Africa, white and Swazi were written with capital letters, as if they referred to nations; mulatto and bastard, with lowercase letters, for such people were without consequence - they had come from nowhere and would amount to nothing. He listened to the fan going round and round and round just below the ceiling of his room. Who then were his grandparents?

The records of the Administraçao Civil had stated that Amelia Williams, of part Swazi origin, her father being either of German or English origin, had died nine years earlier. He could not find any information about where she was buried.

..everything he had always felt to be suspect or ominous about himself fell into place. His tightly curled hair. His skin colour - which he had always thought of as Mediterranean. Grandmother Tsafandakis vagueness whenever he asked about his mother...the teasing at school. The negative reply from the South African immigration service. The tentative, curious glances thrown at him; the indefinable hesitation with which people greeted him. In One blow he had become other to himself, irrevocably. He now knew himself to be literally and figuratively the black sheep of the family...<sup>47</sup>

It is this loss of identity, - its absoluteness that is captured by Van Woerden's word for it - ontheemding - that is the source of his madness. This madness, as portrayed by Van Woerden, is not so much a cause, but an escort, which accompanies Tsafendas on a twenty year journey 'adrift without an anchor'. In a review of the book and interview with the author, Herman Wasserman argues that Van Woerden becomes absorbed with Tsafendas because he is 'gefassineer met iemand wie se identiteit vir goed verlore is nadat hy op 17 ontek dat sy moeder swart is'. From then on Tsafendas learnt what it felt like to be a 'nie- mens', a 'ie- blank, a 'nie-swart'.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Van Woerden, *The Assassin*, 51-2.

<sup>48</sup> Van Heerden, 'Van Woerden se glasoo'g'

Van Woerden does not deny the question of Tsafendas' madness. 'Hy was beslis ook versteurd, maar sy waansin is gevoed deur sy omstandighede. Die omvang van sy waansin is ver oorskat. Hy was wel eienaardig'.<sup>49</sup> (He was definitely disturbed, but his insanity was fuelled by his circumstances. The extent of his insanity was grossly overestimated. He was however very strange). Van Woerden is not interested in portraying him as some kind of freedom fighter either, but his actions were not without political motivations. His was not a conventional political awareness, informed by a distinct ideology and a supporter of a particular programme or political party. His was an everyman's awareness of 'rassewaan' - the madness of race - and its impact. Tsafendas' madness was a reflection of 'a country itself gone mad'<sup>50</sup> and the assassination of Verwoerd was simply 'a moment in the country's history where the power of madness equalled the madness of power'<sup>51</sup>

Michael Morris, interviewing Dan Jacobsen, who translated *Een mond vol glas* into English, also raises the question of the nature and extent of Tsafendas insanity:

How insane could he have been to have had the foresight or judgment or conviction or courage required to eliminate the man at the nexus of an appalling madness?<sup>52</sup>

Jacobson believes that 'Tsafendas was insane' and one should forego political correctness and state it unambiguously. He differed with Van Woerden about 'diminishing the psychoses' and the 'wish to make it a political crime'. For Morris, however, what the book demonstrates, is that 'the development of a potent political consciousness runs as a compelling strand of rationality, parallel to, or intertwined with, his insanity...political consciousness and

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<sup>49</sup> Herman Wasserman, 'Tsafendas se storie is te lank weggesteek, sê Van Woerden'. Interview with Van Woerden. *Die Burger*, 25 March 20004.

<sup>50</sup> Andre Brink, 'The sad life and mad times of Tsafendas'. *Sunday Times*, 7 May 2000, 24.

<sup>51</sup> Barrie Hough, 'Roman wysig beeld van Tsafendas'. Interview with Van Woerden. *Rapport*, 9 April 2000, 2 (My translation).

<sup>52</sup> Michael Morris, 'When madness and power converge'. Interview with Dan Jacobson. *Cape Argus*, 10 November 2000, 10.

mental instability were conceivably inseparable, both sustained by a life of 'object alienation'.<sup>53</sup>

Jacobson draws attention to the opposite poles that Verwoerd and Tsafendas represented,

There is this extra-ordinary contrast between the tormented, half-Greek, half-African from Mozambique and his lifestory, and Verwoerd's story of a slow, deliberate, ideologically driven accretion of power over the years. Every honour that this country could give to Verwoerd had been given, and every bit of obloquy and rejection the world could give to Tsafendas had been given to him.<sup>54</sup>

### **The Madness in/of the Archive**

When Tsafendas left South Africa in 1942 it was wartime. His first ship journey, at age twenty-four, was aboard a ship that was constantly threatened with destruction from German U-boats in the North Atlantic. He was a junior mess boy amongst a group of older, hardened crew members. The possibility of sexual molestation as a constant threat hovering over him cannot be ruled out, and possibly added to his psychological fragility. It is clear that on the journey between South Africa and Canada, through the war-torn Atlantic, Tsafendas became unhinged. As soon as the ship docked in Canada he deserted, only to be arrested by the Canadian authorities. He begged them not put him back on the ship. While in detention he escaped and walked for five hundred miles across the frozen St Croix River into the United States. He was arrested again in Bangor, Maine, by the U.S. authorities 'for contravening Immigration laws'. It is at this point that he first becomes ill and is admitted to a mental hospital, the Boston Psychopathic, for the first time at age twenty five. From the Boston Psychopathic he was transferred to the Metropolitan State Hospital, where he stayed from April 1943 to June 1943. According to

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<sup>53</sup> Michael Morris, 'When madness and power converge'.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Morris, 'When madness and power converge'.

the report of the Commission, his condition was described as 'psychoneurosis- mixed type'.

The Commission's report does not make any link between the actual experience of Tsafendas at this time and his mental health. It simply lists, in chronological order, the ships he was on and the hospitals he was in. Van Woerden correctly draws attention to the emotional impact of the long ship journey from South Africa to Canada and suggests that the life threatening conditions that existed once the ship entered the war zone in the North Atlantic had 'indeed unhinged' Tsafendas. He also suggests that Tsafendas was so terrified of being sent back to sea that he exaggerated his conditions so that he would not be sent back on the ship.

The Commission's report does mention the Liberty Ships that Tsafendas was placed on. Van Woerden mentions that after he left the Boston Psychopathic Hospital, 'the next four years were either spent in detention or in service on so-called Liberty Ships'. Liberty Ships were specially built during the Second World War to ferry supplies to the Allies. They were part of a mass production ship building effort for the war. The building process was designed in such a way that they could be replaced at a faster rate than the German U-Boats sank them. Huge publicity events were organized to highlight the reduction of time it required to build a Liberty ship. To be on board a Liberty ship was to engage in a dance with death. They were eventually replaced by the Victory Ships, as they proved too slow for the U-boats and too small for the tons of supplies that had to be supplied for the Allies. Tsafendas was forced accept service on the Liberty Ships as the U.S refused him permission to stay on land.

Attempts to deport him failed as no country would accept him. Europe was at war - he could not be sent there. It was during the period that he served on these ships that he was regularly hospitalised for mental illness. Between 1942 and 1947, when he was finally deported from the United States he was



hospitalised eight times. While in prison in Pretoria Central Tsafendas wrote numerous letters to the American Embassy, asking that his 'war service' with the United States Merchant Marine Service be taken into account for the purposes of granting him a veteran's pension. He claimed that social security had been deducted from his earnings and he was therefore entitled to a war veteran's pension from the American government. He provided a detailed description in these letters as to just how his time in the United States was spent. This fills the gap in the archives as well as Van Woerden's biography.

Tsafendas makes a very specific link between, on the one hand, his 'war-time service in danger zones and the extreme adverse, subzero conditions as Baffin Island was in the Arctic Circle', and becoming sick and having a 'nervous breakdown'. He also expressed the feeling that his health and career was permanently ruined, leading him to end his life in a dungeon".<sup>55</sup>

Tsafendas describes in detail what happened to him after he left Cape Town on the S. S. Eugenie Livanos under the Greek flag, with a Greek passport. ( He explains that although he was a Portuguese citizen, he could not travel with a Portuguese passport as Portugal was a neutral country. He obtained a Greek passport because his father was Greek, while Greece was a member of the Allies):

After a voyage of three months, we docked in a place called Saint Johns, New Brunswick, in the Bay of Fundy Canada. I was detained in Ottawa at the Immigration Headquarters - Mines and Resources Building. I was then transferred to the Montreal Immigration Dept, Saint Catherine Street. I was then brought before a Board &[sic] was charged for Desertion in War Time[sic] and then sentenced to one month imprisonment and then sent to Bordeaux Prison on the outskirts of the city of Montreal. After the month expired, I was then transferred back to St Catherine Street Immigration Station, Montreal were[sic] I was detained for an unstipulated period of time. I was then transferred to the Novia Scotia Peninsula - a city called Halifax. After a period of time at the above Immigration

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<sup>55</sup> Demitrios Tsafendas, Letter to Brigadier Gericke, Commanding Officer, Section C, Maximum Prison, Pretoria, Tvl. Letter 40. No date is given, but Tsafendas mentions that he 'is now sixty years of age', so one can assume it was written in 1978.

station I then escaped from detention and entered the U.S.A. at or via the Saint Croix River at Calais, Maine = to my knowledge which was called Saint Job? at that period.

My companion and I was captured by the authorities. We were transferred to a prison in Bangor Maine. After a short period we were transferred to the Immigration Station at Boston, Massachusetts. I was offered a ship while at the Immigration station and I accepted. We sailed on a ship called the S.S. Pillory to a place called Baffin Island in the Arctic Circle

On my return I obtained American Seaman's Papers at the War Shipping Administration, New York, & forthwith I sailed on American ships around 1944 or 1945 I cannot remember the exact date I had a nervous breakdown and was sent to the U.S. Army Field Hospital in England. They transferred me to the Charleston Hospital in the U.S.A., later to the Metropolitan State Hospital -& Grafton State Hospital - Boston Psychopathic or the Fenway? - last to the massive Hospital on Ellis Island.<sup>56</sup>

I was charged for being a Public Charge by certain Immigration officials who did not like my War Record - as they were pro Axis of Italian & German Origin. They then demanded a 500 Dollar Bond to allow me to stay in America. As I did not have the above they decided to deport me to Greece. I informed them that I was from the Southern part of Africa, but it was of no avail, that[sic] said it could not be effected & insisted on sending me to Europe.

I quote this extract at length as I think it is an important account by Tsafendas himself, however inaccurate or accurate in terms of dates and times. It is remarkable that he remembers this period in such great detail. Not only is he arguing for the right to be recognised as a war veteran, but he is also insisting on an acknowledgement that his experiences in the war led directly to his mental collapse. He is also desperate for financial resources to make his prison life more tolerable, so that he could 'purchase my most elementary requirements from prison stores'. He was not allowed visitors and his family did not respond to any of his requests for help.

In March 1946 , at age twenty eight, he was admitted to the North Grafton State hospital and diagnosed with schizophrenia. He stayed at this institution till July 1947, a total of sixteen months. From the length of his stay one can assume that he had become seriously ill. Crucial information missing from the

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<sup>56</sup> Demitrios Tsafendas. Letter to the Commanding Officer, Maximum Security Central Prison, Pretoria. 'Request concerning pension and disability claim from the U.S.A.'.Undated.Correctional Services Files Volume 2.

archives are Tsafendas medical records of his stays in hospitals in the United States. These records were requested first by Dr Sakinofsky and then the defence team (see Chapter Two). They were certainly made available to the South African Government, and later to the Commission, as sections of its final report quote directly from it.

In a letter from the United States Consul in Cape Town, dated 3 October 1966, to the Security Branch in Cape Town, it is clear that copies of documents related to Tsafendas' stay in the United States, which included his medical reports, were forwarded to the South African Government. The letter is a response to a request by the defense team to see Tsafendas' medical reports 'as a matter of information and in order to assist them in arrangements for the defense'. The letter makes it clear that the information was 'given on a strictly government -to -government basis', and cannot be made public because of protocols regarding doctor-patient relationships. The defense team would be allowed to see the medical reports 'on the understanding that they would not be used in evidence or publicized in any manner'.<sup>57</sup>

The U.S. government did not want to be seen publicly to be co-operating with the apartheid state. In 'top secret' communication between the South African Embassy in Washington and the Secretary for Foreign Affairs in Cape Town, what is revealed is the reluctance of the American authorities to hand over the file containing information on Tsafendas. The State Department apparently felt that 'handing over information at this stage could have undesirable consequences at Commonwealth Conference since the file apparently reveals that Tsafendas is quarter Negro or African'.<sup>58</sup> Part of the reluctance of the American authorities to release the details of this information is possibly due to the fact that the documents are evidence that the American Government

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<sup>57</sup> Letter from Embassy of the United States of America to Officer in Charge, Security Branch Cape Town, 3 October 1966. K150, Vol, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Immediate Telegram, S.A. Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Cape Town. 9 September 1966. K150. Volume 4, Subfile 1/8, Buitelandse Sake.

forced a mentally-ill individual to serve on warships in the dangerous North Atlantic.

### **Conclusion: Radical Inconsequentiality and the shards of everything and anything**

In using the narrative techniques of fiction writing to construct a biography based on an extensive primary archive, Van Woerden has also drawn attention to the 'fictiveness' inherent in the archive. To represent Tsafendas' life 'as a collection of shards', he argues, is to represent it as an itinerant, inconsequential life. It is the radical inconsequentiality of Tsafendas' life that the Commission's final *Report* foregrounds when it discusses Tsafendas' motives for killing Verwoerd. In an otherwise remarkable acknowledgement of the role of Tsafendas' life history, and that he did have some political inclinations, the *Report* concludes:

Whatever the causes were, there can be no doubt that he was a maladjusted, rejected, frustrated, feckless rolling-stone...In the clouded mind of this outcast, who was a complete failure, whose life meant practically nothing to him, was born a cunning plan to make use of his power to destroy the head of a Government that he hated...<sup>59</sup>

In the *Report* of the Commission, Tsafendas comes across as little more than an 'international tramp'.<sup>60</sup> Van Woerden allows us to see that Tsafendas' unceasing movement is shaped by the State as an international bio-political and geopolitical police force. Born into a society over-determined by the codes of description, Tsafendas exemplified someone literally driven mad and political at the same time. He is refused legal entrance into the United States once he has become institutionalised as a mental patient, and is compelled to spend the next four years either in a hospital or on sea under conditions of a world at war. He is reduced to the status of an individual who bears the stigma of two orders of undesirability: madness and race. At the same time

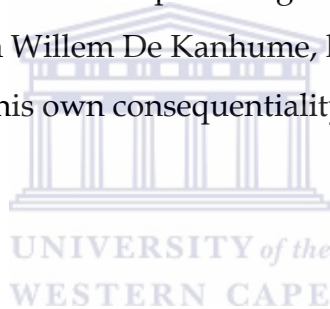
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<sup>59</sup> *Report*, 16.

<sup>60</sup> David Beresford, 'Dimitri Tsafendas: Long-jailed assassin of South African premier'. *The Guardian*, October 11 1999..18.

Van Woerden is also careful not to represent Tsafendas as simply a victim of an international geopolitical order; he also compels us to see how the sense of consequentiality bestowed on individuals as victim or beneficiary of race/gender/class is over-determined at the expense of emotional and psychological influences.

When Judge-President Beyers compared Tsafendas to a dog – an animal burdened with radical inconsequentiality in our language – he was judging the fact that – as he himself so eloquently put it – that “‘n niksbeduidende skepsel “ (a meaningless creature) – had ended the existence of ‘A Cedar of Lebanon’. History it seems, was being reproached by the judge for not providing us with a more venerable assassin worthy of the stature of his victim. Tsafendas, in his last letters in prison signs himself of as “Mimikos Demitrios Tsafandakis Von Willem De Kanhume, laying claim to all his shards and authenticating his own consequentiality.



## Chapter Five :

### Liza Key's *A Question of Madness: The Furiosus* (1999)

#### Introduction

This chapter discusses the film, *A Question of Madness: The Furiosus* by Liza Key, completed in 1998 after four years of work and released in 1999. I argue that it is best read as an archival document shaped by the historical conjuncture of two distinct temporalities: the history of post-apartheid South African documentary film and the political moment of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa. The work of the TRC produced a very particular temporality which I refer to as 'the time of the TRC'. Many intellectual, scholarly and creative projects in this period engaged, were shaped and constructed by this temporality. Subjectivities and identities were being remade in the discourse of victim, perpetrator and beneficiary.

*A Question of Madness* needs to be located within a new tradition of documentary film-making in South Africa in the post-apartheid period. From 1990 documentary film-makers began to explore subject matter that went beyond the larger political questions of the day that had dominated the documentary film-making movement under apartheid. By the time the Truth and Reconciliation Commission began its hearings in April 1996, many of South Africa's documentary film-makers were interested in exploring themes of a more personal nature, those that provided insight into the psychic interior lives of their subjects.

The work of the TRC in particular inspired the production of a host of documentary films. These include Mark Kaplan's series of three films on the murder of Siphiwo Mtinkulu (*If Truth Be Told, Where the Truth Lies, Between Joyce and Remembrance*), Reid and Hofman's *Long Nights' Journey into Day* and Lindy Wilson's *The Gugulethu Seven*. Given the timing of the film - as well as the prominence of Liza Key's

submission to the TRC on Tsafendas that is shown in the film itself – it might be simply argued that *A Question of Madness* belongs in the same genre as these other documentaries arising out of the work of the TRC. After all, Key's second film *The Man Who Knows Too Much* (2001) is more characteristic of the post-TRC documentaries and was made after the subject matter came to light during the hearings. Instead I argue that *The Furiosus*, while made *in the time of the TRC*, is not of that history and stands outside of the TRC discourse.

*A Question of Madness* was begun before the hearings and its making and completion ran parallel to the time of the TRC. It is a film that was being shaped as the TRC hearings were unfolding. Liza Key's submission to the TRC in October 1997 was made at the hearings on 'The Role of the Judiciary under Apartheid'. What distinguishes her subject matter from the above films is that the case of Tsafendas was a marginalized anecdote in the life of the TRC. It could be argued that had Liza Key not brought the matter to the attention of the Commission, his story would have gone unnoticed.

Verwoerd's assassination is also not an event that features prominently in the production of memory in post-apartheid South Africa. It was an act that was neither condemned nor condoned. Tsafendas was neither victim nor perpetrator in the strict sense of the discourse of the TRC. The memory of Verwoerd's assassination was submerged along with that of his assassin who was locked away in the deep recesses of apartheid's prison system. The film brings back to public consciousness this submerged memory and with it the memory of race-making and its impact on the psychic lives of *individuals*. It is an archival document in its own right; a work of memory and history that goes beyond the dominant dualistic discourse of perpetrator and victim. A far more complex unraveling of the effects of the apartheid regime's race-making policies on psychic lives of individuals emerges. The film establishes connections between archive and memory, psyche and history. Film is a medium that, unlike the written document (be it archival or not), is a direct

sensory reception and the imagination is prodded differently from the written text.<sup>1</sup> *A Question of Madness* establishes the visual archive of the mind firmly on the historical agenda.

In the sections that follow I begin by describing the historical context shaping South African documentary film. Secondly, I discuss Liza Key as a biographical subject located within South African history and within the history of documentary film in South Africa. Thirdly, I describe and analyse the filmic narratives of *A Question of Madness* based on the film itself but also on a close reading of the fuller documentary footage archived at the University of Cape Town's African Studies Library. I conclude by arguing that in its foregrounding of the questions of identity and madness, the film functions as a work of archival testimony that counters the dominant narrative of trauma of the TRC.

### **The history of South African documentary film-making**

South Africa has a long tradition of independent film-making. Like most other creative intellectual endeavors this history, argues Taryn da Canha, has been profoundly shaped by the history of the country.<sup>2</sup> While state documentary film-making began to take off in the 1950s and 1960s, receiving further impetus in 1964 with the establishment of the National Film Board, an independent documentary film movement emerged in the 1970s, only coming into its own during the political upheaval in South Africa during the 1980s.<sup>3</sup> The 1970s has been described as critical in this emergence by a number of scholars of documentary film in South Africa for

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<sup>1</sup> For a useful discussion of the distinct language of the visual and its differences from written sources, see R. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Ideas of History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), especially 45-79.

<sup>2</sup> Taryn da Canha, 'Redefining the Griot: A History of South African Documentary Film' (M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 2001), 1.

<sup>3</sup> The history of independent documentary film has been traced back to the making of *Come Back Africa* in 1959 by Lionel Rogosin, and *Last Grave at Dimbaza* by Nana Mahomo in 1974. For accounts of this history, see T. da Canha, 'Redefining the Griot'; J. Maingard, 'Trends in South African Documentary Film and Video: Questions of Identity and Subjectivity', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21(4), 1995; J. Maingard, 'Narrating Popular Consciousness: Testimony in Fruits of Defiance', *Current Writing*, 9(1), 1997; J. Maingard, 'Strategies of Representation in South African Documentary Film and Video from 1976 to 1995' (Ph.D thesis, Witwatersrand University, 1998).



two reasons: the introduction of television in 1976 and, in the same year, the Soweto uprising.<sup>4</sup> The student revolt of June 1976 plunged South Africa into the international political headlines and led to an increased demand for film and television footage from inside South Africa. The introduction of television made available the new video technologies inside the country. This lighter hand-held technology was more conducive to filming direct action, such as scenes of what were then termed 'political unrest'. The new technology was also cheaper and more accessible. Local film-makers could now service the foreign news media with their own independently produced film footage of events in South Africa. Television also significantly enlarged the potential audience for the work of local documentary film-makers.

In the late 1970s many universities introduced film and television production courses into their curricula.<sup>5</sup> Some of the students emerging from these courses, enlightened and politicised, chose to join the ranks of independent film producers rather than join the industry or work for the state television broadcaster (the South African Broadcasting Corporation) which was seen as a tool of apartheid propaganda.<sup>6</sup> This new generation came to independent film production with fresh ideas and skills. Those film-makers who took an intellectual position in opposition to apartheid wanted to use their art to expose the apartheid system. Like their counterparts in politics, they saw their role in film as those of cultural activists changing audience consciousness through the medium of film. Oppositional documentary film-makers began to develop organizational structures such as the Video News Service (VNS), later renamed Afravision, or the independent collective Free Films Makers. VNS was the most prolific producer of struggle documentaries during the 1980s, and supplied the IDAF with most of their material. They filmed political meetings, trade union activities, protest marches and funerals. Their films include *Fruits of Defiance* on the 'purple rain march' and *Compelling Freedom*.

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<sup>4</sup> See K.G. Tomaselli, 'Visual Images of South African Communities' (Paper presented at the African Studies Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 13 August 1984), 3-4; J. Maingard, 'Strategies of Representation', 2-3.

<sup>5</sup> Tomaselli, 'Visual Images', 4.

<sup>6</sup> da Canha, 'Redefining the Griot', 35.

The Weekly Mail Film Festival introduced in the late 1980s gave a major boost to progressive independent film-makers. It challenged the South African Censor Board by providing a forum for the screening of censored material.<sup>7</sup> The festival also provided a platform for new experimental work that did not strictly conform to the struggle mode of documentary. Liza Key, who organized the Weekly Mail Film Festival from its inception, emerged as a member of this new generation of independent film-makers.

Taryn da Canha argues that 1994 was an important watershed in the documentary film movement in South Africa, and given that this was the year that Key began work on *The Furiosis*, her argument seems particularly relevant. She argues that there was still a clear division before 1994 between those film-makers who saw their work as contributing to the struggle against apartheid and those who were involved in the production of film for state propaganda purposes. da Canha argues that this stark division produced a 'polarity' within South African documentary film making that limited subject matter and marginalised questions of aesthetics. Themes covered in documentary films were mostly of the expository variety and focused on subjects related to protest politics or the socio-political impacts of apartheid in relation to poverty, forced removals, resettlement and displacement.<sup>8</sup>

This polarity began to dissipate after 1994 and a more nuanced distinction of subject matter began to emerge. It was now possible to focus more on aesthetics and there was scope for greater experimentation with different filmic styles. Subjectivity and identity were being explored in more complex ways than the rigid struggle identities of 'worker', 'black', 'student', 'activist', or 'comrade'. An example of this new direction was the series *Ordinary People*, produced by Weekly Mail Television in 1993, and commissioned by the SABC.<sup>9</sup> Film makers often chose to focus on more subjective issues and marginal figures. With the beginning of the TRC hearings in

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<sup>7</sup> da Canha, , 'Redefining the Griot', 38.

<sup>8</sup> da Canha, , 'Redefining the Griot'.

<sup>9</sup> Weekly Mail Television was a joint venture between Free Film Makers and the Weekly Mail.

April 1995, the psychic effects of apartheid violence were placed firmly on the national agenda. South African television screens were broadcasting narratives of trauma and loss, even if this was limited to 'instances of gross human rights violations'.

The transformation of the broadcasting environment in South Africa in 1994 meant that the work of local film-makers could be screened on national television. A new SABC board was established to ensure that the media would be 'free and fair' in the upcoming first democratic election. Legislation passed in 1993 made provision for the establishment of an Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA). One of the first tasks of the IBA was to investigate, amongst other things, the provision of local content. In 1995 it made the recommendation that the SABC Board should increase its screening of locally produced content to fifty percent.<sup>10</sup> It was against this background that Liza Key began the making of *The Furiosis*.

### **Liza Key as Film-Maker**

Liza Key was twelve years old when Demitrios Tsafendas plunged the dagger four times into the chest of Hendrik Verwoerd in the House of Assembly. She recalls that her parents rejoiced with champagne. Her father, who was playing golf when he heard the news, apparently 'threw his hat in the air and rushed off to the 19th hole to celebrate'. She remembers feeling puzzled as to why 'death could bring such joy'.<sup>11</sup> It was a question that continued to haunt her. When Tsafendas was released into Sterkfontein hospital in 1994, she returned to what she would describe as 'my childhood fascination with the mad Greek'. She decided to 'go and find out who he was and what had happened to him'.<sup>12</sup> The making of a film about Tsafendas was a quest on her part to discover whether he was 'a madman driven to kill by a tapeworm or a man who so hated Verwoerd's race policies that he took it upon

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<sup>10</sup> J. Maingard, 'Strategies of Representation', 291.

<sup>11</sup> L. Key, 'Tsafendas : Odyssey of an Outcast', *Sunday Independent*, 10 October 1999, 6.

<sup>12</sup> 'A Question of Madness', Carte Blanche Interview with Henk van Woerden and Liza Key. [Http://beta.mnet.co.za/carteblanche/article.aspx](http://beta.mnet.co.za/carteblanche/article.aspx). accessed 2 September 2001.

himself to rid the country of apartheid'.<sup>13</sup> The product of her endeavours was *A Question of Madness: The Furiosus*.

By the time she began work on *The Furiosus*, Liza Key was already well-known in progressive film circles in South Africa. She organized the Weekly Mail (now the *Mail and Guardian*) Film Festival from 1987 to 1994, and also founded the M&G Short Film Competition and Limits of Liberty Festival. She was a director of the South African Film Foundation, formed in 1994. In this capacity, she organized the first South African International Film Festival. She also founded SCRAWL (The South African Screen Writers Laboratory), an initiative that provides an alternative to the Schuster brand of film culture in South Africa. SCRAWL's purpose is to produce good screenwriters in South Africa 'by providing an experimental space in which writers can workshop their scripts with actors ... so that the chasm between a good performance and a good piece of writing could be narrowed'.<sup>14</sup>

*A Question of Madness: The Furiosus*, completed in 1998 and released in 1999, was her first film. It is 52 minutes in length. A slightly different version of the documentary was produced for the BBC's Channel Four with the subtitle *The Story behind I.D.* This version was screened for a British audience as background to Anthony Sher's play *I.D.* which premiered in 2003. The film has also recently been released in DVD format.

Since the completion of *The Furiosus*, Key has gone on to direct a number of well-known and highly acclaimed documentaries for television as well as film festivals. Her filmography includes *The Man Who Knows Too Much* (2001), *Karoo Kitaar Blues* (2003), *A Sentimental Journey* (2004), *Distant Cousins* (2008), an episode in *The Healing Power of Nature* series (2008) and *Rewind: A Cantata for Voice Tape and Testimony* (2009). She was also involved in the production of the highly acclaimed, *A Country Imagined*, narrated by Johnny Clegg and which is currently being screened on SABC

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<sup>13</sup> L. Key, 'Tsafendas : Odyssey of an Outcast', *Sunday Independent*, 10 October 1999, 6.

<sup>14</sup> A. Haupt, 'Putting Words into Action', *Mail and Guardian Online*, 9 April 1998. <http://mg.co.za/article/1998-04-09-putting-words-into-action>. Accessed 15 May 2011.

2. Of these films, two deal directly with issues raised by the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work. *The Man Who Knows Too Much* looks at the trial of Wouter Basson, also known as 'Dr Death', and his role as the man who headed the apartheid government's biological and chemical weapons unit called Project Coast. *Rewind: A Cantata for Voice Tape and Testimony* features a Cantata composition by Philip Miller sung by Sibongile Khumalo. It is a collaborative work with two other directors, and Miller, who conceptualized the whole project, was inspired by listening to the TRC testimonies on radio.<sup>15</sup> Journalist Anthea Buys describes the film as follows:

Tape recordings of testimonies from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings are played amidst the music, but this sonic element is incorporated more as an additional instrument than as a narration. The testimonies recited steer the words sung by the soloists and choir, and often a soloist will mimic the role of the interpreters at the TRC hearings, singing the testimony translated into English, or in its original language if the dominant voice in the recording is the English translation.<sup>16</sup>

That two of her films deal with issues arising out of the work of the TRC is not surprising as her debut as a professional film-maker took place as the TRC was being established and the Human Rights Violations Committee began its hearings. While Key's work on *The Furosius* commenced at least two years before the beginning of the TRC hearings in April 1996, its course ran parallel with the hearings. It is impossible that, as work progressed on the film, the subject matter being the apartheid past, in particular the killing of a Prime Minister, that her conceptualisation of the film would not be influenced and shaped by the work of the TRC. Indeed, eighteen months later, on 27 October 1997, after she had met and interviewed Tsafendas, she made a submission to the TRC on his behalf. This submission drew directly from her own research for the film, which was not yet completed. Sections of the text of her TRC submission, as read by Liza Key, are

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<sup>15</sup> A. Buys, 'A loaf of bread, a choir and the TRC'. Mail & Guardian Online, 2 May 2008 <http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/antheabuys/2008/05/02/a-loaf-of-bread-a-choir-and-the-trc/>. Accessed 22 May 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Buys, 'A loaf of bread, a choir and the TRC'.

inserted into the film as a narrative device. The submission plays a major role in the film, both as testimony and a structuring device for organizing the content of the film

### **The Making of *The Furiosus***

Work on the film began in 1994 and took four years to complete. Research for the film commenced at the South African Police Services (SAPS) Museum Archive in Pretoria. 'Dusting the cobwebs off the police investigation files, untouched for 28 years, I sneezed my way through 16 boxes of faded documents neatly tied in green ribbon. It was from these fragile pages that the real story began to emerge.'<sup>17</sup> The film crew conducted extensive preparatory work at the SAPS Museum. Her team filmed their arrival at the Museum, their tour of the building as they attempted to get a feel of the atmosphere of an imposing edifice whose street entrance belies the hefty historical heritage that is housed within. The film shows the imposing gilded spiral staircase and busts cast in marble of former Ministers of Police.

In the opening scene, we see Mrs. Hill, who works in the records room of the SAPS Museum, opening these files. She shows us various items from the evidence police collected about Verwoerd's assassination in 1966 and about the attempted assassination by David Pratt in 1960. The material evidence includes the gun used by Pratt in April 1960, the dagger used by Tsafendas in September 1966, the parliamentary messenger's uniform that Tsafendas wore when he stabbed Verwoerd and the autopsy photographs of Verwoerd's corpse. This archive includes biographical documentation about Tsafendas and his family, the identity parade, affidavits collected by the police, the case docket, as well as a transcript of the summary trial.

The film crew also recorded the *process* of the making of the film: the gathering of information at the Police Museum, the setting up and recording of all interviews

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<sup>17</sup> L. Key, 'Tsafendas: Odyssey of an Outcast', *Sunday Independent*, 10 October 1999, 6.

conducted for the film, takes and retakes of the different scenes. Viewing these 'rushes', Key's approach to documentary making becomes transparent to the researcher. She treats the making of the documentary in the same way as the making of a feature film. Her method of work is like that of a professional feature film director, where each person being interviewed for the film is treated as an actor rehearsing a scene for a film. For example, the interview with one of the attorneys who defended Tsafendas, Wilfred Cooper, in front of the court buildings in Cape Town is shot a number of times. He is asked to tell his story repeatedly until the 'take' is perfect in terms of filmic quality.

Key comments on the influence of Frederick Wiseman, one of her 'favourite' filmmakers.<sup>18</sup> Like most of Wiseman's films, her film is a piece of 'reality fiction'. His methodology involves editing the film so that it has a dramatic structure, and a strong narrative. He comments as follows on his method:

The final film resembles fiction although it is based on un-staged, un-manipulated actions. I don't manipulate the events, but the editing is highly manipulative and the shooting is highly manipulative, not in the sense that people do things differently from what they will ordinarily do, but the way that people are shot. First of all what you choose to shoot, the way you shoot it, the way you edit it and the way you structure it.<sup>19</sup>

The first take with Mrs. Hill in the records room of the SAPS Museum is filmed with her speaking English and handling the archival items in a normal everyday manner. After a number of attempts, she is directed by Key to speak in Afrikaans and is made aware of the fact that she is part of a filmmaking process, especially when she removes items from their archival boxes. The cameraman intervenes to make her aware of the sound implications of her actions for the filmic quality of the scene. She is told not to 'bang' items on the counter, but to place them gently as the clatter disturbs the sound quality. The final version of this scene in the finished film is thus a carefully choreographed product. This method of cinematic takes was used in all the scenes in the making of the *Furiosus*.

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Liza Key,

<sup>19</sup> Kaleem Aftab & Alexandra Weltz, Interview with Frederick Wiseman, *Film West* 40.

<http://www.iol.ie/~galfilm/filmwest/40wiseman.htm>. Accessed 26 August 2011.14h34 pm

Her later archival research draws on a wide range of sources including Reuters Television Library, Times Media Library, the Film, Television and Sound Archives in South Africa, and the SABC Archives. The film covers the events on the day of the assassination, Verwoerd's funeral, Tsafendas' life before the assassination, the summary trial, and Tsafendas' stay on death row. A number of individuals, who are related to the events and subject matter are interviewed. They include David Bloomberg and Wilfred Cooper the attorneys who defended Tsafendas, Jaap Marais the leader of the Herstigte Nasionale Party, Gordon Winter, BOSS informant and journalist for the *Citizen* who was given the exclusive right to interview Tsafendas in 1976, Wilhelm Verwoerd the grandson of Verwoerd, Patrick and Louise O' Ryan who were members of the Church of Christ with whom Tsafendas stayed briefly, and Lydia Poggenpoel who was also a member of The Church of Christ and was a young widow when Tsafendas briefly boarded with them.

### **The Film's portrayal of the assassination.**

*It's now or never*

*Verwoerd het gesterwe*

*Wie't hom geskiet*

*Sy eie bandiet*

*Wie't hom begrawe*

*Sy eie soldate*

*It's now or never*

*Verwoerd het gesterwe*

The film opens with this song, performed by a group of children in the street of a coloured neighbourhood. As the song plays out, the camera slowly scans over Verwoerd's tombstone, while its keeper Alfred Mamela runs his fingers over the lettering on the tombstone to enable the viewer to read the text. We are not told where and who the children are nor how the song came about. This introduction at



once establishes Verwoerd's death as legend, its mythical quality captured in the words of the children's song. In the very next scene we meet Mrs Hill in the SAPS Museum in Pretoria, as described above. She is unpacking a box containing Verwoerd's personal gun, the gun that David Pratt used to shoot Verwoerd in 1960, and the knife used by Tsafendas to kill Verwoerd in 1966. With this archival weaponry, the film begins the excavation that will unravel the legend.

'Because Dr Hendrik Verwoerd was an immoral man, that's why I decided to stab him and I killed him.' With these words, we hear and see Demitrios Tsafendas, the man who assassinated Verwoerd, in the flesh for the first time in almost thirty years. He is 78 years old and his health is clearly failing. His face is bloated and red. He is overweight, slow in his movements. He is hard of hearing, his speech is slurred but audible. The fingers of his left hand seem to be set in a permanent clasp, and he is unable to move the rest of his arm. He wears a white, red, blue and yellow-striped gown over his clothes and a kind of cowboy hat with the sides turned up. Seated on a chair with a blanket over his knees in what appears to be a long corridor of Sterkfontein Hospital, he is rather comic in appearance.

What is striking is the physical change - in the film he appears as an ailing old man, remarkably different from the man whom we had seen in newspaper photographs during 1976 when Gordon Winter interviewed him. Then aged 58, he appeared fit, trim, healthy and energetic in his demeanor. Before that the only image of what he looked like was a photograph published of him after the assassination and during the summary trial in October 1966. The apartheid government took great care to keep him invisible from the public eye. It is therefore with a sense of shock that thirty years later one confronts the image of the man who once felled 'a Cedar of Lebanon'.

Tsafendas' memory and cognition, however, seem relatively unimpaired. As the film progresses, one soon forgets the image of an ailing old man. He speaks with the kind of energy and drive that had characterised his earlier letters from prison (see chapter

3). While he is clearly chair-bound, with the use of only one hand and ear, his right hand is constantly gesturing forcefully as he speaks.

His words are followed by images of Verwoerd's dead body, covered by a blanket, being carried down the steps of the House of Assembly by men in white coats. The original radio broadcast of his death plays out. Images of four young men listening to the sombre broadcast, ears close to their radio sets; a man in the street totally engrossed in reading about the assassination, the newspaper held close to his face; photographs of a number of women who fainted upon hearing the news. All this gives us a sense of context, a recognition of the enormity of the event. What we see in the film is a recreation of a stunned and traumatised public, and the dismay that permeated through sections of South African Society. Verwoerd – a once impregnable and towering figure – is now no more than a covered corpse on a stretcher.

Key was probably the first person from outside of the prison or prison hospital that Tsafendas had spoken to since his interview with Gordon Winter in Pretoria Central over two decades earlier. She interviewed Tsafendas in two locations in Sterkfontein Hospital at two different time periods. The second location is clearly the patient lounge. In the second interview the deterioration in his health as a result of a stroke is markedly visible. He has to be spoon-fed. He is childlike in demeanor and almost infantile in his behaviour. These real time images of Tsafendas in the mid-1990s provide a strong and powerful visual contrast with the earlier images of him and with the eyewitness accounts of the assassination, such as that given by Gerald Shaw, then correspondent for the *Cape Times* who witnessed the event from the Press Gallery.

My first memory is of this burly messenger bustling up the floor of the House from the ... lobby entrance. ... I thought it was odd as they normally walked around in a decorous way and [are] almost invisible as messengers in the house. Suddenly this messenger loomed above Dr. Verwoerd and whipped out a knife, and began stabbing him. I just saw the knife flailing away. I don't know how many times, but it was more than once.

Shaw recalls being in a state of shock 'as if I was watching a cowboy movie'. He began operating on 'automatic pilot', taking notes of details such as the time, and who was doing what. Both he and Helen Suzman, who was also in Parliament that day as an Opposition Member, related the story of how P.W. Botha reacted. This is how Suzman recalls what happened in the film:

While this crowd was still around his bench, P.W. Botha, who was then the Minister of Defence, came hurtling down the aisle of Parliament, waving his arms, stopped in front of me and shoved that famous finger in my face and said 'now we'll get you, it's you liberals, you did this', and stormed out again. Of course I was quite astonished at this outburst from him.

The film then introduces the viewer to Tony Harrison, the owner of City Guns in central Cape Town where Tsafendas bought one of the knives that he carried hidden under his messenger jacket. Harrison describes the morning of 6 September 1966. Tsafendas was his first customer and arrived in the shop just after 9 a.m. Harrison recalled that he 'seemed to be agitated' and was struck by the fact that Tsafendas picked up the knife from the counter and held it in a manner that simulated a stabbing movement instead of 'picking up the knife like a normal person'. Harrison stepped away rather alarmed.

I was all alone and I was a bit worried. I noticed that he was sort of scruffy looking. His clothes weren't clean, they hadn't been to the laundry or cleaners. He had a sort of white jacket, a linen jacket and grey trousers and an open-necked white shirt.

Harrison remembers the knife that Tsafendas bought from him. 'It was a normal sheath knife which you can use for all purposes.' The knife that Tsafendas bought from Rawbones, however, was 'a terrible weapon'. It was known as 'a Black Forest ... a double edged knife'. It had an aluminium handle and a silver blade, 'they made it in black and silver and I believe the one that he bought was a silver one ... This is the one that he actually used to assassinate the Prime Minister with.' Harrison later had to attend an identity parade to point out Tsafendas. He immediately recognized him because 'he had that look about him'.

When Lisa Key asked Tsafendas what he remembered of that day, he replied: 'I don't remember much, I do remember that I stabbed him.' Tsafendas, in fact,

remembered a great deal and in the film he described in detail what happened immediately after the stabbing.

The blade ... the dagger had a kind of an anti-rust solution on it. I did not take it off when I stabbed Dr Hendrik Verwoerd ... I stabbed [he makes a stabbing motion with his hand]. Dr Verwoerd died when the doctors tried to pull the dagger out ... it was stuck ... you understand... the solution stuck onto the flesh ... and when they tried to pull it out, it caused a bigger wound and it killed him.

Tsafendas described Verwoerd's cause of death in technical terms as if he was conducting an autopsy into the cause of death. It is almost as if he was not present, or was simply an actor playing a part. The cause of death, in his view, was the anti-rust solution that remained behind after the doctors tried to remove the dagger, tearing the flesh and causing bleeding. He went on to recount what happened immediately afterwards in the House of Assembly:

They took me down and held me, three people on one side and another three people on the other side ... and they dragged me ... and they were dragging me toward the entrance. Then Verkuil, one of the men, one of the big men that was there, asked them ... 'what is this commotion all about?' And they answered, 'he has just stabbed the Minister.' He turned around ... and he broke my nose ... he punched me ... I fell back and I took those men that were holding me to the ground ... Three on one side and three on the other ... They all fell down because they wouldn't let me go.

The image of the frenzied knife-wielding assassin is displaced by the account then given by Wilfred Cooper, the attorney appointed by Judge-President Beyers as pro deo counsel for Tsafendas. Cooper described his first encounter with Tsafendas.

When they opened the cell door, I saw a bundle in the corner ... It was an individual. It looked like a hobo ... the bundle then bestirred itself ... and he got up and I spoke to him. He told me his name ...

When he told Tsafendas that he was appointed to defend him, Tsafendas responded by saying that according to the tenets of his religion, he does not need legal defence. Cooper explained that it was in his best interest to be defended, to which Tsafendas responded: 'I don't know why the Good Lord should have chosen such an infirm person like me.' According to Cooper, Tsafendas was aware of the implications of what he had done, but his emotional response was that of someone who 'had

participated in a dream'. Tsafendas' description of the cause of death, while very exact in its clinical details, does demonstrate what Cooper refers to in the film as 'a certain remoteness about him, as if he wasn't there'.

### **The Question of Madness**

The second section of the film explores more closely the central 'question of madness' posed in its title. Key is careful not to reduce this to that of an either/or. She skilfully allows contradictory views of Tsafendas to emerge beginning with those of his fellow congregants. Thus Louise and Patrick O'Ryan who were followers of the Church of Christ with whom Tsafendas stayed in Lansdowne present him sympathetically as 'a normal, natural person', a rational subject. They remember him mainly as 'a lonely man' who wanted to get married, but one was definitely capable of forming emotional attachments. 'He loved children ... he was very fatherly [towards our children].' According to Patrick O'Ryan, the lawyers for the defence asked them to exaggerate the importance of Tsafendas' notion that he had a worm in his stomach in order to strengthen the legal case for insanity.

Lydia Poggenpoel provides a more ambiguous account, though the footage has been cropped for the final cut to give a contrasting impression. Tsafendas' strangeness seemed to have evoked mixed reactions in her. When he spoke in meetings, she recalled, he would not stop until her father had to remind him that there were others who needed an opportunity to voice their views. The original footage in which Poggenpoel was interviewed does not give the impression that she had an entirely unsympathetic view of Tsafendas. While she was wary of being alone with him in the house and would go outside to avoid discomfort, she does remember his stay with them with some measure of empathy and humour. This is not portrayed in the film. For example, she tells of how Tsafendas spoke of his tape worm 'purr[ing] like a kitten' whenever he walked past shop windows in which food was displayed. He 'cried bitterly' when the church decided that he should leave their home, not because he was classified White, but because it was considered improper for an unmarried man to board with a family where a young widow (herself) was living.

While she and her family never noticed anything about his mental instability, she remembers that the Reverend Johnson of Pinelands with whom Tsafendas went to stay after he left their home did once comment that he was 'not entirely normal'.

Gordon Winter was convinced that Tsafendas pretended to be mad to hide the fact that he was part of an assassination plot. The role of the worm was merely a ruse invented to deflect attention from this plot. Winter stated: 'I don't believe Tsafendas was mad. I believe Tsafendas invented his madness in the form of a tapeworm because it was something you can't prove ... because he had been in 30 or 40 hospitals. He had been interviewed by so many psychiatrists and he said "I learned very quickly, I learned very quickly what answer they wanted in order to fit into the category they had already decided I was"'. Winter argued that the possibility of mental programming could not be ruled out: 'you can program someone, particularly if they have a mental imbalance'. One of his handlers told him that both Pratt and Tsafendas were treated by the same London psychiatrist in the same year (1959). Winter claimed that evidence does indeed exist to suggest an assassination plot and mental programming.

I know that there is on BOSS files ... there is a file in which it is stated that when David Pratt was sitting to the right, on Verwoerd's right shoulder, he was sitting with *that*, and *that* psychiatrist had programmed him with two words - 'Black Bull'. This is the monster of apartheid and when you see it, you should have your gun ready to deal with it. And he was sitting next to him when Dr Verwoerd walked out of his box and went down onto the grass and looked at some cattle, one of which was a black bull. Pratt went down. When Verwoerd came back to his box, Pratt went down and shot Verwoerd ... and Verwoerd's bodyguard fainted ... [Laughs]

Jaap Marais, leader of the HNP, shared this view that 'Tsafendas was not mad' and that he had not acted alone. 'It is impossible for two madmen to try, within a space of six years, to kill the head of government.' For Marais, the success of Verwoerd's policies was born out by the development of South Africa as 'the economic power house' of Southern Africa. Since this was undermining current British and American foreign policy in the area, which was aimed at encouraging decolonisation and handing over power to what Marais viewed as 'terrorist organisations', he saw

Verwoerd's assassination as a foreign conspiracy that was meant to pave the way for the beginning of a military onslaught against South Africa.

While covering these conflicting views regarding Tsafendas' sanity or madness, it is evident that Key herself is eager to present Tsafendas as having been motivated by rational ideals. This is clear from the way in which she chose to introduce Tsafendas in the film, and her choices in what to exclude and to include in this scene.

Tsafendas' opening statement 'Dr Hendrik Verwoerd was an immoral man' is, in the original footage, associated with the views of 'a lady from the United Party' who 'came to me and said Dr Hendrik Verwoerd was an immoral man...'. When asked if he knew the lady, he said: 'I don't remember her face ... there were quite a few ladies in Parliament ... very beautiful, she looked like an actress ...'. By attributing the quote to Tsafendas himself then, Key is attempting to persuade the viewer that there was a clear and rational underlying political motive behind the killing.

In the preparatory film footage it is clear that the film crew of *A Question of Madness* experienced a number of problems at Sterkfontein Hospital. By the time that Liza Key and her team returned to Sterkfontein Hospital to conduct the second interview, Tsafendas had had a stroke and his health had deteriorated. Tsafendas can hardly hear; his memory has to be jolted by photographs that he does not always recognize. Repeated attempts fail to produce the desired results because he does not hear properly, or because he does not understand what is being asked of him. Sometimes his mind wanders off and other memories come flooding in a kind of free association. Yet when he does understand what is being asked of him, he remembers events in remarkable detail. From the final version of the film it appears as if Tsafendas is responding spontaneously. However, an examination of the raw material, the full interviews reveals that Tsafendas was being asked very specific questions, ones which have been edited out of the final version. Extracts of his answers are stitched together to make up the fabric of the film.

Another example of the exclusion of material that might support the theory of madness comes from the original footage with Tsafendas' lawyer. At the beginning of his interview, Cooper described how he became involved with Tsafendas' case. The Judge-President, Beyers, telephoned him on a Monday morning and summoned him to his office. He already had an idea what it was about. When he arrived, he was informed that he was appointed as *pro deo* counsel for Tsafendas. Beyers 'did not beat around the bush' and told him that Tsafendas 'would swing' unless he was found to be insane. Cooper went on to present his view that Tsafendas was 'a highly abnormal' person. He recalls his first interview and Tsafendas' response when asked why he had killed Verwoerd. Rather than answering the question, Tsafendas told a long and bizarre story about horse-racing.

[He told me that] A month prior to the assassination he had been working in Durban. He had a girlfriend who lived in Bellville. They were pen pals. He decided to seek her out in Bellville. He had no money, so he decided to hitchhike, which was not unusual at the time. He started hitch-hiking on a Saturday morning. His route took him past a race course ... and he was walking past the race course when a race was in progress. One of the jockeys fell off a horse. The other horses narrowly missed killing the jockey and went to the end of the race. He was terribly concerned about the jockey ... He explained to me that he loved horses. And for a long time he explained to me that he was terribly preoccupied with the race at the beginning of his hitchhike ... as he was on his way to Bellville ...

After several attempts to get a coherent answer out of him, 'I gave up.' Cooper noticed a strong 'incongruity' about Tsafendas. 'He had the appearance of a hobo, a rough looking individual, yet when he spoke, he described his feelings with a certain measure of delicacy.'

### **The Question of Identity**

The 'question of madness' is closely related in the film to another theme, that of identity. The film makes explicit links between madness and identity. For Tsafendas the question of identity was indeed complicated. In *A Mouthful of Glass* (see Chapter 4) Van Woerden has skillfully drawn attention to the complex layers of Tsafendas's identity. His childhood was spent in three different countries, Egypt, Mozambique and South Africa, all of which imparted their own markers of identity. While born in



Mozambique, a country under Portuguese colonial rule, his life there was as part of the immigrant Greek community in Lourenço Marques. The discovery that his mother was a black woman, of Swazi and German descent, profoundly affected his sense of personhood.

I was born in Lourenço Marques, the capital of the Province of Mozambique on the 14 of January 1918 ... My mother was a mixed woman ... she died when I was a baby ... Some children were very jealous of me. The principal's son, Mr Jack Cox used to call me a half-caste. He used to bawl me out and call me a half-caste. Miss Irene Walker was only the one woman who used to defend me. She turned around and said they are jealous of you ... they are jealous ...

These blond people gave me an inferiority complex. I used to feel inferior to them. The only blond girl I used to know when I was a child ... [was] ... Sophie Nobriega in Lourenço. She appeared to me to be very beautiful ... and when I got here I used to get an inferiority complex ... I never wanted to be coloured. On the contrary, I always wanted to be very high up ... to the extent that I ended up in the North Pole, in the Scandinavian countries. I wanted to be blond and blue eyes and all that.

He was a question, not only in South Africa but in the world at large. Already indefinable in terms of nationality, in South Africa he faced a society that was rigidly fixed in its adherence to identity categories. Although in appearance he could either be coloured or white, Tsafendas believed that in South Africa, when he worked in parliament, he was classified white because of his fair complexion and 'because my pronunciation was good ... [and because of] my perfect English.'

Before he returned to South Africa in November 1963, Tsafendas had lived in South Africa in two different periods: between 1927 and 1931 as a school pupil at boarding school in Middleburg in the Transvaal, and then between 1937 and 1942 working in Pretoria and Johannesburg, where he joined the teeming numbers of South Africa's urban proletariat. Both periods fell in decades which, according to Thriven Reddy, were marked by intensified fears of miscegenation as industrialisation and urbanisation drove the multi-racial poor into the same urban cauldron.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> T. Reddy, 'The Politics of Naming: The Constitution of Coloured Subjects in South Africa' in Z. Erasmus, ed., *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001), 72.

The film brings into sharp focus the administration and fine-tuning of a key piece of apartheid legislation, the Population Registration Act of 1950. This Act was the foundation upon which every other piece of apartheid legislation depended.<sup>21</sup> Reddy has argued that the passing of this Act eliminated all ambiguity in the definition of racial identity markers that was characteristic of all previous segregation legislation. The population register made possible 'a grand dictionary of state',<sup>22</sup> whose terms of reference became the *only* way of speaking and naming its subjects. He shows that without such a dictionary, it would not have been possible to institutionalise separate development in all spheres of social and political life. The bureaucratic edifice of the apartheid state was organised and structured by this 'grand dictionary', giving rise to separate government departments for the purposes of day to day administration. Once institutionalised the categories of race classification, he argues, became naturalised.

South Africa of the 1960s was a society in which the system of racial classification was being fine-tuned and perfected. An extensive surveillance apparatus was being developed to ensure that citizens adhered to the laws governing interracial marriage, sex, and residential practice. Several amendments had been passed to prevent loopholes in the original Act from being used for reclassification.<sup>23</sup> It granted the police the right to swoop on citizens in matters of privacy. A culture of fear permeated South African society as individual citizens were encouraged to exercise surveillance over their own family members and neighbours. Loopholes that still existed and that enabled people to challenge their classification and apply for a reclassification were eliminated by a series of Amendments.

Through its biographical exploration of the life experience of Tsafendas, the film is a historical testimony to what Gerald Shaw describes as a period in South African

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<sup>21</sup> Reddy, 'The Politics of Naming', 73.

<sup>22</sup> Reddy, 'The Politics of Naming', 74.

<sup>23</sup> Reddy, 'The Politics of Naming', 75.

history when there was 'an obsession with classifying people'. As a reporter he attended many of the hearings of the Race Classification Board, and in the film he recalls,

In the Cape that led to many tragedies, because families would find one or two of their members classified the other way ... And then to remain in the superior class you had to avoid those members of the family because you could be reclassified ... it was an awful situation ...

Most of the hearings he attended involved the borderline of Coloured/Black and Coloured/White. In making decisions, members of the Board relied on what he termed 'a very primitive anthropological knowledge'.

... in the coloured and African borderline [cases] ... they would ask, 'do you keep bricks under your bed?' Apparently this related to a tokolosh problem ... you had to protect yourself from the tokolosh ... weird questions like that, you know based on a very primitive anthropological knowledge ... No, look also the hair thing, the shape of your nose, the thickness of your lips, it was humiliating.

Gordon Winter, of all people, provides one of the best oral accounts of how the individual internalised the state's racial matrix:

When I went to South Africa and started working as a reporter in 1960, it didn't take me long to realise that I suddenly acquired a light-meter in my eyes, rather like [that of ] a camera ... I started looking at people and started putting them in a racial slot ... a category ... 'A touch of the tarbrush' ... 'Coloured, probably a Black father and a White mother...yeah' ... 'Oh he's Black' ... 'He's a Zulu' ... 'He could be Coloured' ... 'I wonder if he's playing the colour line' ... You develop light-meters in your eyes, particularly if you are a reporter whose eyes should always be searching for information for your newspaper ... Yes, I developed light-meters in my eyes...

The Judge-President of the Cape, who presided over Tsafendas' Summary Trial was, according to Cooper, as deeply racist as the ordinary man in the street. He had his own solution to the problem of race-mixing.

Beyers said [that] the problem in this country is that the White man didn't understand the Black man ... and he drew a distinction between the Black man and the Coloured man ... and he said 'as far as the Coloured people was concerned we must fuck them white' ... that was his solution ... The Black man remained an insoluble problem. He didn't understand ... he was at a loss ...

Being sane and rational was partly defined by one's adherence to this juridical regime, to which Demitrios Tsafendas returned in November 1963 after being absent for twenty years. The film explores what happens when the individual refuses the juridical categories of the apartheid regime, insisting on his own identity – initially as 'a Christian'. For Tsafendas his religious identity was the primary marker of self-ascription. 'I am a Christian' was his constant refrain whenever he was questioned about whether he was a member of the Communist Party. Tsafendas, according to Cooper, wanted an 'open' identity. 'He didn't want an ID book ... because according to the ID book his racial classification would have to be mentioned in the ID book. No, he wanted an open ID book.'

Mr Ryan recalls that Tsafendas was very frustrated by the racial laws of the country.

There was a concern as to whether he was White or Coloured, since he had no identity document with him. If he were White, he would have to gather in services in White homes. On the contrary, if he was Coloured, he would have to attend services with Coloureds. That upset him a lot. Then he was taken from the Coloured meetings that he had been attending with us and he was put into a White home in Pinelands. He attended meetings there for a while ... and things didn't go well ... He was very, very frustrated regarding this racial tension wherever he went.

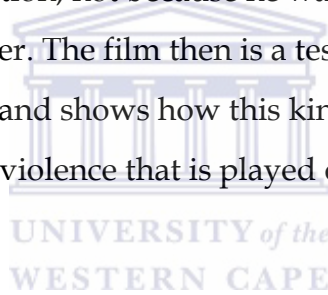
Asked by Keys whether Tsafendas ever 'talked politics' or 'expressed a dislike for Dr Verwoerd', Mr Ryan recalls that at one time Tsafendas said to him that 'if I were to get hold of him [Verwoerd]. I'd bash his skull.' Ryan didn't mention this in his interviews with lawyers.

### **The Film as a Work of History in Testimonial Mode**

I would argue that the film can be read as a work of history in testimonial mode. Profoundly shaped by the TRC hearings where individuals gave testimony to torture, abduction, murder, and imprisonment – the film has adopted the testimonial mode of the TRC hearings. The hearings conducted by the TRC, focused on very particular instances of the violence of the apartheid state. The period that is being recalled by those giving testimony, in the film is 1960s South Africa, a period of

severe repression and the implementation of high apartheid. The black-and-white visuals depicting Verwoerd's stabbing, his speeches, his funeral, the people standing in the streets reading about the assassination in the newspaper, the people listening to broadcasts of the event with ears close to their radios, the scenes outside the court room, the visuals of a colonial Lourenzo Marques during Portuguese rule - these are all powerfully evocative of an era that is no more. These visuals of a bygone era frame the testimonies of those who are interviewed for the film.

The film is also a self-conscious work of archival excavation. Drawing on the primary archival record, its archival impulse is shaped by the TRC's memory work. It is a record of historical consciousness of individuals whose personal lives were directly affected by the assassination, and indeed by Demitrios Tsafendas' life experience of racial discrimination, not because he was Black or White but because he was neither one nor the other. The film then is a testimonial document of the psychic violence of apartheid, and shows how this kind of violence is as important, perhaps inseparable, from the violence that is played out on a more public historical stage.



It is a powerful reminder of an event that was, as soon as it was over, relegated to the margins of South African historical consciousness, both from the political right and left. The assassination was ignoble from the perspective of the liberation movement as well as the apartheid government. The latter, as soon as Verwoerd's assassin was shut away on death row moved on and so did the liberation movement. In the minds of the South African public, Tsafendas became no more than a phantom. What the film does is bring that phantom back to life, and with that the impact of the assassination on individual and collective memory.

The film also provides direct oral testimony of how Tsafendas was ill-treated in prison. The apartheid government went to extraordinary lengths to deny the charge that Tsafendas was ill-treated. In his testimony on film, Tsafendas himself recalls how he was abused by prison warders while on death row.

It was very bad in prison. They used to hang people there next to my cell, half a dozen at a time ... six a week, mostly Coloureds from the Cape ... The warders ... they used to take me into a disguised locker of clothes ... and they used to put a straight jacket on me and then they used to punch me until I fell unconscious to the floor.

Breyten Breytenbach was in solitary confinement on death row when Tsafendas was held there. He confirms that the warders, some of whom took Verwoerd's death personally, abused Tsafendas both physically and psychologically.

Under those circumstances ... one is extremely sensitive to the slightest change in regime ... When you get your food late, when you get your food cold ... when they come to tip over your bed and you have to do it all over again ... And they used to do things like that all the time to him, throw out his food, throw it on the floor, walk in it, have him clean it up ... er, throw a bucket of water on the floor ... get him to dry it ... pour water on his bed ... And this seems to be a continuing and ongoing sport among the warders ... they were really egging one another on to see who could be the most awful. Some of them felt that they personally had to take it out on him for having killed Verwoerd. He had to be punished day after day ... 'you killed our leader' kind of thing, although they themselves had never known Verwoerd, they were too much too young to be concerned with that ... but there was this kind of revenge ... generally using him as a punching bag.

It is interesting to compare the original interview with Breytenbach with the extracts that were included in the film. Breytenbach was not merely testifying on Tsafendas' behalf. He was also testifying about his own experience, not only of prison, but the impact of solitary confinement and being on death row. His memories reveal the degree to which the prisoner becomes so dependent on the rhythms of prison life, because these familiar routines come to stand for 'marks of sanity' when 'Your mind is roaming outside and is hallucinating intensely.'

In the footage concerning Tsafendas' experience on death row that Key chose not to include in the film, Tsafendas does not come across as coherent. In fact, it is clearer from the excluded material that when he recalls his period on death row, his response suggests what Jacqueline Rose refers to as 'a loss of psychic ground'. When Key asked 'Do you feel sorry that you killed Dr. Verwoerd?', he responds in an incoherent way.

I was confused ... I was confused ... I was confused ... They took me inside the prison in Cape Town. Brigadier Aucamp and ... took me in an aeroplane from Cape Town to Voortrekkerhoogte ... from Voortrekkerhoogte to Central Prison ... Brigadier Aucamp was complaining that they are shooting people in Portugal out of the windows ... He was very upset.

Here he mixes events and people. His experiences during the war, in prison, in Portugal and South Africa are all scrambled up. When Key repeats the question, he simply says 'Not right away', and then continues talking about Brigadier Aucamp.

Another interesting omission is the material from the interview with Gavin van den Bergh, the son of the passport control officer who issued Tsafendas with his temporary permit in Lourenco Marques that led to his entry into South Africa (see Chapter 2). It is not generally known what happened to J.M. van den Bergh. His son gives moving testimony to how his father was punished for what happened. First, his father was taken from his home by security police without the family being told where they were taking him and for how long he would be away from home. Van den Bergh was ten years old at the time and had a six year old brother and an eight year old sister. While in detention, his father was severely tortured, in a manner that recalls the treatment of Steve Biko. According to van den Bergh the security police accused his father of being part of a conspiracy and tried to 'break him in jail' by

beating him, ...for days on end he was not allowed to sleep, use the toilet and was interrogated non-stop... he was kicked till his ribs were broken ..they made him stand naked for day on end in his own urine and feaces...he came home delicate and broken...

When he was finally released, he was unable to find regular employment and the family ended up living in the garage of a relative. His father was forced to 'move from job to job' and the children 'from school to school'.

Key presumably chose to exclude this footage in the film, perhaps because it would detract from the main story of Tsafendas and the construction of him as the figure of sympathy. It is possible that Gavin van den Bergh could have asked her not to

include the footage, as he broke down emotionally while he was telling the story of his father. In the footage he also recalled how his father wanted to testify about his treatment to the TRC, but his mother was unwilling to dredge up this traumatic period in the family's history. Key was possibly asked by the family as a whole not to include the footage. I would argue that the story of what happened to Mr Van den Bergh and his family is an integral part of the story of Tsafendas' killing of Verwoerd. The 'secret' of Mr van den Bergh's torture shows how the apartheid state was able to cloak the political violence inherent in its very constitution.

### **Conclusion**

Liza Key did not focus her inquiry on a narrative of trauma as experienced between perpetrator and victim, as so many of the TRC hearings did, and as did most of the documentary films arising from the work of the TRC. Rather, she explored apartheid as a system that produced long-term trauma embedded in the psychic interior lives of individuals. She does not attempt to integrate Tsafendas' actions into 'struggle' or anti-apartheid resistance narrative. *A question of Madness* is not the story of a hero/freedom fighter who killed Verwoerd in the name of freedom. But it does attempt to restore a sense of dignity to his actions by portraying him as someone motivated by, if not a conventional political motive, a powerful sense of injustice.

While the film does provide ample testimony of the suffering and abuse he endured while on death row, Tsafendas is not simply reduced to a victim. As with Wiseman's documentaries, the viewer is not provided with a character consistency, a coherent whole with which he or she can identify. But, like Wiseman, her role as editor has a strong manipulative aspect. The Tsafendas we see in the final product is a very different Tsafendas that we see in the film rushes, the preparatory footage from which the final film was eventually cut.



## Chapter 6:

### Theatre, Archives and History: Four Plays about Tsafendas

#### Introduction

In a recent commentary on the literary archive on Tsafendas and Verwoerd, Sue Marais remarks:

Though it has been claimed that Tsafendas himself was largely forgotten in the years after 1966 until the emergence of a democratic dispensation in South Africa in the early nineties, and that Key's documentary film and Van Woerden's amanuensis were groundbreaking as artistic and/or documentary reworkings of his life-history, particularly from the post-apartheid present, in fact Tsafendas and his tape worm have had a consistent hold on the literary imagination.<sup>1</sup>

She observes that no fewer than four plays have been written about Tsafendas. Two of these, William Tanner's *Tsafendas* (1976) and Matthew Krouse and Robert Colman's *Famous Dead Man* (1986) were written in the midst of periods of extreme repression in South Africa. Both periods have been fertile grounds for the historical imagination, leading to extensive revising of liberal and Marxist historical paradigms. Tsafendas remained largely unacknowledged by historians who were concerned with debates around the relevance of race, class and agency in the making of South African history. Political assassination or political assassins were 'the stuff of crime thrillers and movies'. What these plays reveal, however, is the enduring hold Verwoerd's assassination has had on individual memory as well as collective historical memory in South Africa. As Matthew Krouse, co-author of one of the plays discussed in this chapter, has observed, 'All South Africans over 35 have a memory of that fateful day, September 6 in 1966, when the parliamentary messenger Tsafendas stabbed Verwoerd.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. Marais, 'Tsafendas' Tapeworm: 'Meaningless Creature', 'Undesirable Inhabitant', or 'The Prophet of a Multi-Racial Future?', 7. No citation details given, except her email address, s.marais@ru.ac.za.

<sup>2</sup> M. Krouse, 'The Key to Tsafendas'. Mail and Guardian Online. <http://mg.co.za/article/1999-06-25>. Accessed 18 May 2011, 1.

What these plays reveal is the power that the event has had on the imagination of ordinary South Africans. It is that imagination that has led to the production of these works that, in their turn, have reshaped historical memory and knowledge of Tsafendas. These works have all drawn heavily on the extant archival record, as well as on each other. For two later plays produced in the post-apartheid period, Anton Krueger's *Living in Strange Lands* (2001) and Anthony Sher's *I.D.* (2003), Van Woerden's book and Key's documentary have been pivotal as additional influences.

William Tanner's play works with the inherent drama of the events and the chaotic madness of Tsafendas' character. Matthew Krouse and Robert Colman's play is more concerned with Verwoerd than Tsafendas and also provides a commentary on a South Africa under P.W. Botha's regime. Here Verwoerd's madness becomes a vehicle for pointing to the madness in a country in the grip of a state of emergency. Sher and Krueger's plays, produced in the more optimistic post-apartheid period, focus on the inner psychic dimensions of race and madness, making us wonder how much of that psychic remainder of the madness of apartheid lies in each of us. The sections that follow provide a more detailed reading of each of these texts and attempt to locate them within the politics of the periods in which they were produced and in relation to the motivations and creative work of each of their authors. I also make an attempt to explore audience and public reactions to these creative works.

**William Tanner, *'Tsafendas' or An Enquiry into the Circumstances of the Death of the Late Dr. the Honourable Hendrik French Verwoerd* (1976)**

In 1974 John Nankin, a figure closely associated with 'avant-garde and experimental theatre'<sup>3</sup> in Cape Town in the 1970s, was asked by a London playwright William Tanner to do research for a play he was planning to write about Demitrios Tsafendas. Tanner was busy with a series of works on schizophrenia and had chosen Tsafendas as the

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<sup>3</sup> 'Drawing the Curtain on Dada'. <http://www.prohelvetia.org.za/index.php?id=90>. Accessed on 31 March 2011.

subject for a South African play.<sup>4</sup> Nankin was a key figure, along with Brian Astbury, Athol Fugard and Yvonne Bryceland, in the early history of the Space Theatre in Cape Town. The writing was completed in 1976, and in February of the same year a play entitled '*Tsafendas' or An Enquiry into the Circumstances of the Death of the Late Dr. the Honourable Hemdrik French Verwoerd*' was staged in London with South African actor Bill Flynn in the lead role.<sup>5</sup> In South Africa the play was performed as the last piece at the old Space Theatre before it moved to its new venue at the YMCY building in Long Street. At the end of the performance Astbury 'got the audience to take their chairs around the corner to the new theatre.'<sup>6</sup>

The script of Tanner's play is based on the Report of the Commission of Enquiry and the Summary Trial, and on certain episodes in Tsafendas' life that were widely reported in the press at the time. It dramatizes the following sections of the Report of the Commission: the summary of events on the 6 September in the House of Assembly, the autopsy report, the testimony of Mr Burger the chief messenger who interviewed Tsafendas for the job of temporary messenger, Tsafendas's arrival and stay at the Daniels' home in Bellville South, his movements between a number of boarding houses after he was asked to leave the Daniels' home, his relationship and dealings with the crew of the Eleni, his statement to the police on the 11 September in which he details events from the date of his appointment as temporary messenger in the House of Assembly, as well as the testimony of Mr J.D. van der Berg, the passport control officer who was responsible for the granting of the permit for temporary sojourn on 2 November 1963.

From the Summary Trial the play uses extracts from the evidence of the four psychiatrists who testified for the defence: Dr Harold Cooper, Dr I. Sakinofsky, Dr Zabow and Dr McGregor, as well as the final judgement delivered on the 20th of

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<sup>4</sup> 'Tsafendas Kom Dalk', *Die Vaderland*, 4 February 1976.

<sup>5</sup> 'Tsafendas kom Dalk', *Die Vaderland*, 4 February 1976.

<sup>6</sup> L. Marx, 'Theatre Out of Nothing'. <http://mg.co.za/article/1997-03-14-theatre-out-of-nothing>.

October 1966. The play is virtually a verbatim reproduction of parts of the text of the Report of the Commission, and the Summary Trial. It is a close factual interpretation, though Tanner, in a note at the end of the script, states that while the play is 'built entirely from material publicly available', it is not a 'documentary'. He also claims that,

The characters are in no way meant to represent actual persons, living or dead. Likewise the dialogue in the trial scene is no mere verbatim reconstruction of what passed between the erudite and painstaking men who appeared, and does not reflect their individual professional contributions. While there is nothing in the text that is not drawn from an 'actual' source, dramatic context may render events or speeches unfamiliar. This is intentional.<sup>7</sup>

The play is divided into two parts. Part One begins with the Chairman as a character introducing the play with a detailed narration of the events on the day of the assassination, including a report of the autopsy conducted on Verwoerd's corpse. The content of this narration is a verbatim reproduction of the report. The next scene introduces Mr. Burger as character as he appears before the Commission. His testimony is converted into a theatrical form with the Tsafendas character acting out parts of the testimony directly referring to interactions between himself and Mr Burger. Once again the words spoken by the characters playing the role of the Chairman, Mr. Burger and Tsafendas, are taken verbatim from the text of the Commission's Report. This scene is followed by Tsafendas' arrival in Cape Town from Durban, at the home of the Daniels family in Bellville South. Here, as with the shipboard scenes on the Eleni, the conversations that take place between the various characters are an 'amalgam' of references from actual testimonies given by Mr Daniels, Mrs Daniels, and Tsafendas in their own statements as recorded in the court transcript.

Part Two of the play deals with Tsafendas' movements between different residences after he leaves the Daniels' home and the events leading up to the assassination. The last two scenes dramatise a section of the summary trial in which the character of Mr

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<sup>7</sup> W.G .Tanner, *'Tsafendas' or An Enquiry into the Circumstances of the Death of the Late Dr. the Honourable Hendrik French Verwoerd*. Note at the end of the play script. No page number.

Polakov, a psychiatrist, provides expert testimony to show that Tsafendas 'is at present mentally disordered' and was so 'at the time of the death of Dr Hendrik Verwoerd'. Dr Polakov as a character represents all four psychiatrists who testified for the defense, and his testimony is an amalgamation of sections of their individual testimonies. It corresponds most closely with the 73 page testimony of Dr Harold Cooper presented at the summary trial. As the first of the four psychiatrists called by the defense, Dr Cooper took the brunt of criticism from a recalcitrant judge who strongly resisted the defense's attempt to prove that Tsafendas' murder of Verwoerd was the act of a schizophrenic.

While the text of the play makes use of original records in verbatim form, this does not necessarily detract from the theatrical quality of the script. The playwright has worked with the inherently dramatic nature of the events (an assassination and a trial) as well as the theatrical character of the ritual proceedings of a Commission of Enquiry. and a court trial. While this observation has been applied in a rich recent literature on the post-apartheid South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission,<sup>8</sup> Ashforth's work on the South African Native Commissions (see Chapter Two) demonstrates how such bounded sets of rules and rituals were played out in a genealogy of Commissions of Enquiry in the early-mid twentieth century in South Africa.(see chapter Two) .<sup>9</sup>

Tanner's play could be read as an example of what Ann Stoler terms 'reading along the grain'(see Introduction). Where revisionist historians of the 1970s and 1980s typically saw themselves as reading against the grain in order to document narratives of resistance and the agency of those hidden from history, Stoler proposes that reading along the grain can offer equally rich insights into the construction of power and knowledge.<sup>10</sup> In this sense Tanner's play is an example of a creative attempt to work with textual reproductions, selections, adaptations and syntheses by running along the

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<sup>8</sup> See F.C. Ross, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), and especially C.M. Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission: Stages of Transition* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>10</sup> See Introduction and Chapter 2.

archival grain. Tsafendas as character and historical person remains the focus of the play throughout and the 'real life' events that the play dramatises provide the audience with a strong sense of an individual caught in the trap of a racialised complex of power and knowledge.

### **Matthew Krouse and Robert Colman, *Famous Dead Man* (1986)**

Matthew Krouse and Robert Colman wrote, directed and acted in a play called *Famous Dead Man* in 1986. Their play was a musical satire on the life of Hendrik Verwoerd presented in the form of a cabaret. It contained explicit sexual scenes and language, for example, featuring sexual acts between Verwoerd's parents. After a successful run of three months at Johannesburg's Black Sun, the play was taken to Durban. The posters advertising the play prominently featured the slogan: 'Sex, Jokes, Filth and Verwoerd' as a subtitle. The cabaret was a full frontal assault by 'two angry youths'<sup>11</sup> whose conception of their performance was 'one more act of insolence'.<sup>12</sup> It was not only the swearing and the sex that was transgressive, but the behaviour of the two angry young men as 'they smoked the national flower, the protea, they rolled the South African flag into a joint and smoked that too. They poked their fingers through a pair of panties made from the flag.'<sup>13</sup> The play caught the attention a member of an Afrikaner rightwing organization in Durban, who alerted the daughter of Verwoerd, Anna Boshoff. Angered by its degree of transgression Boshoff used her influence to pressure Stoffel Botha, the Minister of Home Affairs, to place an immediate banning order on *Famous Dead Man*. Krouse and Colman's appeal against the banning order was

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<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Davis and Anne Fuchs(eds.), *Theatre and Change in South Africa* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), 104.

<sup>12</sup> M. Krouse, 'The Key to Tsafendas'. Mail and Guardian Online. <http://mg.co.za/article/1999-06-25>. Accessed 18 May 2011, 1.

<sup>13</sup> D. Zucchini, 'Killing "Dead Man"', *Bowing to Pressure: South African Censors Ban a Political Play*, *Inquirer*, 29 November 1986. [http://articles.philly.com/1986-11-29/news/26090824\\_1\\_apartheid](http://articles.philly.com/1986-11-29/news/26090824_1_apartheid). Accessed 1 Sept, 2011.

supported by high profile anti-apartheid activists from Edwin Cameron, who represented them at the hearing, to Des Lindberg and Pieter-Dirk Uys who appeared in their defense. Their appeal failed.

In the play Matthew Krouse played Tsafendas, who was portrayed as 'angry, coloured and deranged'.<sup>14</sup> In a review of Key's *A Question of Madness* written in 1999, Krouse recalls the events around *Famous Dead Man* with comic hindsight but in ways that reveal the painful politics of resistance theatre in the eighties. 'I know what it feels like to kill Hendrik Verwoerd. I killed him often in 1985, when I acted as Dimitri Tsafendas.' He reflected on how they had used Hendrik Verwoerd as a target for the authoritarian South African Prime Minister of 'the gritty eighties', P.W. Botha. He commented that *Famous Dead Man* 'made newspaper headlines, sending its somewhat effete young creators into hiding - fleeing from hitmen of a vengeful rightwing' and that they were devastated when their appeal to have the ban lifted failed. 'It's too hard to try and joke about it. I think we've lost our sense of humour.'

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In the politically charged atmosphere of mid-1980s South Africa, the play could be situated within a tradition of 'in your face' protest theatre. The portrayal of Tsafendas as 'angry and deranged' is a reflection of its times, when P.W. Botha was president and South Africa was in the throes of a national revolt led by young people of Krouse and Colman's age. When Liza Key began work on her documentary film, Krouse recalls that she asked him to send her 'all the press and transcripts of my *Famous Dead Man Ordeal*', though in the end she made little use of the materials from this historic satire.

### **Anton Krueger, *Living in Strange Lands* (2001)**

The play *Living in Strange Lands*, written by Anton Robert Krueger, was first staged at the Wits Theatre in Johannesburg in 2001. It was staged at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town in 2004 under the title *Tsafendas*. Both versions of the play received critical

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<sup>14</sup> M. Krouse, 'The Key to Tsafendas'.

acclaim and praise from South African reviewers. Subsequent to its staging inside the country, it was also taken to Argentina. Reno Nicos Spanoudes played the lead role of Tsafendas in the all the performances of the play in South Africa and abroad.

This is a one-man play that portrays a character who remains a perpetual outsider, a casualty of a system that has no place for someone who has 'something of everything, but not a lot of anything'. Krueger based the play on information gathered during a year of archival research at the National Archives in Pretoria. He also conducted interviews with individuals associated with Tsafendas in prison. The play takes its title from a letter that Tsafendas wrote to the South African Embassy in one of his many applications for South African residence. The performance is set inside a prison cell with two characters, Tsafendas himself and his prison guard. Tsafendas is also in the position of narrator. It is September 1966, and Tsafendas has just been arrested for the murder of Verwoerd. From the dialogue however, it is clear that the play is overlaying events that could only have taken place when Tsafendas was already in 'Beverly Hills' onto the period when he was interrogated by Major Roussouw in Caledon Square in Cape Town immediately after the assassination. The play, for example, superimposes the ill-treatment that Tsafendas endured while on Death Row onto the period he was held in Caledon Square.

The play draws on three previous texts: Willam Tanner's play, Liza Key's film and Van Woerden's book. In the play, Tsafendas discusses certain key events in his life: how he learned of his mother's mixed identity; the first appearance of the tapeworm; his experience at school in Middleburg; his unsuccessful courtship of Helen Daniels; the Wolraad Woltemade episode; his application for reclassification as a coloured; his moment of epiphany when he decided to kill Verwoerd. It ends with Tsafendas on Death Row reflecting on his deed and on why he was declared insane.



Spanoudes and Krueger have, in their performance and writing, taken quite a bit of fictive and dramatic license with historical and personal detail, but this has enhanced rather than lessened the power of their work. They have restaged an event for audiences that might have relegated its memory to the margins of their consciousness as a result of a concerted state initiative to repress all public memory of Tsafendas. What the work achieves is to let Tsafendas speak, not so much for himself, but to let him *speak* himself. As a one man drama, the play is able to focus exclusively on Tsafendas, and what emerges is a very personal portrait. This personal focus distinguishes the play from the protest theatre genre, and is a reflection of a post-apartheid sensitivity to the portrayal of issues of a more intimate and private nature.

Reno Spanoudes, who has played the lead role of Tsafendas in all performances of the play, identifies strongly with Tsafendas. He is himself a Greek South African. His own experience of discrimination as a member an ethnic minority that did not quite fit the desirable qualities of whiteness in pre-apartheid and apartheid South Africa has shaped his own fractured sense of identity. He recalls vividly as a boy of six, the impact of the assassination on his community.

I remember being told at school, in Grade 1, that the Prime Minister had been killed and that we had to go home early. My parents' 'Greek café on the corner' was, like all businesses, to be immediately closed and the country was in mourning. 'The Cedar of Lebanon had been cut down' ... The ensuing days and weeks were riddled with threats and accusations leveled against 'the Greeks'. Accompanying the vandalism to the proverbial 'tearooms', 'cafés' and 'grocery stores', was verbal abuse.

'You people are foreigners. You must go back to Greasy Greece where you came from.'

'You Griekies murdered our Prime Minister.'<sup>15</sup>

The boy of six experienced a serious identity crisis, asking himself, 'Am I Greek? Am I South African? Am I Greek South African? Am I Greek-Cypriot South African?' The result of this 'endless pondering' was an enduring obsession with Tsafendas. His

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<sup>15</sup>R. Spanoudes, 'Reflections on the Process of Writing the Biographical Fragment, 'Assassin - Dimitri Tsafendas', *Botsoto*, 13, 1. <http://www.botsotso.org.za/index.php>. Accessed 1 September 2011.

experiences later in life, long after the memory of Tsafendas had faded from public consciousness, fuelled rather than diminished this obsession. He reflected at length on his repeated personal experience of racial discrimination and stereotyping. Given their relevance to the play and the life of Tsafendas, his recollections bear quotation in full:

In my life, and it's not in my head, I have been prejudiced against and stereotyped and 'boxed'. And I am not for a moment suggesting that my experiences are unique or that they are in any way to the same damaging and debilitating extremes of apartheid disadvantages. What I am claiming is the fact that as the son of immigrant parents with the olive-coloured skin of the Mediterranean (ironic that I use racist sounding terminology), I have felt discriminated against. I have experienced prejudice. I have been asked to leave a Durban hotel (1977) because the manager thought I was an 'Indian' and had to point out that I was not allowed in the 'Whites-Only Bar'. I was to 'leave quietly' as he did not want any trouble. The 'Indians like to cause problems'.

I was told when registering for my Bachelor of Arts in Education at Wits in 1978 that I was 'perhaps aspiring too high for a café owner's son'. At school, on more than one occasion, I was told that I was 'growing a moustache to look like my mother'; that I couldn't play soccer because every time I went into the corner, I would 'open up a café'; that I shouldn't worry because the 'Porras' (Portuguese) could be seen from a mile off because 'of the flies around their armpits' and 'in any case, they also couldn't play soccer because they're always fighting the 'Lebs' (Lebanese) and wanted to open up the 'fruit and vegetable shops to sell pattash ent tamaatsh (potatoes and tomatoes)'. And, let's not forget the 'stingy "shnora" Jews' who were very rich and were no longer the suffering nation of pedlars and tailors - they were lawyers and doctors and owned property and got an education, and the 'coolies' who drank themselves 'suip', the 'callimunchas' with whom you could bargain at the Oriental Plaza and came from a background of suffering - tailors, peddlers ...<sup>16</sup>

According to Spanoudes, the Immorality Act and the Group Areas Act were applied with equal ferocity to immigrants of questionable white pedigree. Reflecting on the process of trying to write on Tsafendas, he describes how 'many Greeks, Cypriots, Portuguese, Italians and Egyptians joined their fellow Chinese and Japanese detainees under the Group Areas and Immorality Acts':

They would be lined up and one by one they would undergo the 'Committee's' tests. One by one they would enter the room. These were 'citizens' of indeterminable race and hence 'requiring further physical examination'. They would be seated in front of the

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<sup>16</sup> Spanoudes, 'Reflections', p. 2.

boardroom table and an intense spotlight would shine on them, encircling their head and shoulders. If the light was 'not suitably' reflected off their skin, they were classified 'Coloured', given an Identity Document to that effect, and told to stay away from all 'White' areas and amenities – irrespective of the fact that they had families who were 'White' or 'European'. If the light was 'suitably' reflected off their skin, they were classified 'White' and were warned not to venture into the 'suburbs of the uncivilized "Blacks" and "Coloureds" – the "bastards"'.

If the reflection of the light on their skin was not a 'clear indicator', then the 'pencil test' was administered. A pencil would be placed in the 'suspect's' hair. If it 'stuck', then 'it' was 'coloured'. If it did not and fell to the floor, 'it' was classified 'White'. There are stories of 'Coloured' grandmothers rubbing their 'suspect' grandchildren's skin (hands and feet and face) with shoe polish so that they would appear darker and not be in danger of being arrested in the 'Coloured' township when they came to visit from the 'White' area. The horror; the horror.<sup>17</sup>

It was Spanoudes who put to Krueger the idea of writing a play about Tsafendas. When he saw Liza Key's documentary, he 'was riveted'. At the time he himself was writing about 'being Greek and living in South Africa' and being White', but not altogether 'White'.<sup>18</sup> Spanoudes came from an ethnic minority whose history in South Africa had already been marked by outbursts of collective violence against itself. In 1917, the Greek Monarch decided to side with Imperial Germany in the course of the First World War. This led to an outburst of spontaneous violence directed against the Greek community, during which Greek owned businesses and shops were looted and burned, in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban.

The play draws heavily on both Van Woerden's book and Key's documentary, dramatising scenes in the book while incorporating words spoken by Tsafendas himself in interviews with Liza Key. Dramatic license is taken with the dates of certain events and Tsafendas' age when these events take place. One example is Tsafendas' discovery of his mother's identity. In Van Woerden's book, Tsafendas is 17 years old when he discovers that his mother is black. It is 1935. His family is still in Mozambique and he has already left school. Tsafendas enters Mrs. Sideris' house, going straight for the gramophone without the 'customary greeting in Greek'. Mrs. Sideris retorts in anger

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<sup>17</sup> Spanoudes, 'Reflections', p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Spanoudes, 'Reflections', 3.

that 'he is just like his mother' and reveals that she is a mulatto.<sup>19</sup> In the play he is 13 or 14 years old when he hears of his mother's mixed identity. There are other more minor changes in this scene. Mrs Sideris becomes Mrs Takalous; the gramophone becomes a guitar.

The play then moves back to his school years in Middleburg where he discovers the true meaning of the word mulatto, when a group of children hearing him singing and dancing in Greek, stop to listen and clap. One of them, Benny Cohen, insults him, calling him a 'stinking coloured' and then beats him up, breaking his nose. After this Tsafendas decides to take up boxing so that he can defend himself. His boxing career, however, is cut short by the first appearance of the tapeworm. Tsafendas relates the story of 'the worm inside which was making me thin.' 'Then this doctor gave me medicine and then I squatted down, it came out - a long thin worm, about two, three feet long.' His stepmother then flushed it away. Tsafendas throws a tantrum. 'He rushed into the kitchen and began hammering on the cupboard with his fist - hammering and hammering.'<sup>20</sup> Here the play takes quite a lot of dramatic license. In Van Woerden's book the tapeworm only appears after he has left school in Middleburg and his boxing lessons begin, not in Middleburg which was a boarding school, but long after.<sup>21</sup>

There are many other details that involve selection and creative reworkings. Of the many psychiatrists that interviewed Tsafendas, Dr Aubrey Zabow is the one singled out in the play. It is not exactly clear why. Major Roussouw is the only policeman that features in the play,<sup>22</sup> perhaps because he personally interrogated Tsafendas. In another incident common to the play and the book, Tsafendas relives his encounter on a diamond ship while working for the Marine Diamond Corporation, when he pretended

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<sup>19</sup> See chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of this pivotal moment in Van Woerden's narrative.

<sup>20</sup> Kreuger, *Living in Strange Lands*, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Van Woerden, *The Assassin*, p. 47.

<sup>22</sup> Kreuger, *Living in Strange Lands*, p. 14.

to be Wolraad Woltemade.<sup>23</sup> The Helen Daniels story is given a very romantic inflection in the play. Tsafendas is portrayed as a love-sick and heartbroken because he was not able to marry her. Their story is portrayed as a tragic love story that was impossible to consummate because of the Immorality Act, which forbade marriage across the colour line. A similar romanticisation is evident in the words of Nancy Meckler who directed Anthony's Sher's play, *ID* (2003). On her visit to South Africa in preparation for the play, she wrote in the *Guardian*:

I visit the gardens by the parliament, where Tsafendas would have met his beloved Helen. He was classified white and she was classified coloured. Apartheid was in full force and they would not have been allowed to share a bench. The penalties would have been terrifying.<sup>24</sup>

In fact, Helen Daniels took a dislike to Tsafendas the moment she met him in person. While he stayed at their home, the two quickly lost interest in each other. According to Tsafendas, she was too 'snooty' or 'fussy'. Helen Daniels told her father that 'Demitrio does not come up to the standards I am looking for in a man.'<sup>25</sup> The fact that she was repulsed by him, while observing his behaviour in their home, was widely reported in the press at the time.

### **Anthony Sher, *I.D.* (2003)**

Anthony Sher's play *I.D.* was completed in 2003 and performed in London in the same year at the revamped Almeida Theatre. A BBC filmed version of the play was screened on SABC3 on the 6 July 2004. The play focuses on both Verwoerd and Tsafendas, and on the demons that link them. Tsafendas' tapeworm is given the status of a third character, Lintwurm, a demonic alter ego who embodies the madness of apartheid and urges on the madness that is growing inside Tafendas. Sher himself played the role of Tsafendas with Marius Weyers in the role of Verwoerd and Alex Fern as Lintwurm. Tsafendas'

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<sup>23</sup> Kreuger, *Living in Strange Lands*, p. 16; Van Woerden, *The Assassin*, p. 102.

<sup>24</sup> N. Meckler, *The Guardian*, **reference needed**.

<sup>25</sup> *Post*, 18 September 1966, p. 1.

motives are explored through the format of a murder mystery. Sher's play was inspired by his reading of Van Woerden's book. He originally conceived of it as a staging of *A Mouthful of Glass*, but realized that for the book 'to work as a drama, it needed the other half of the story, *Verwoerd*'.<sup>26</sup> He also drew on the work of two documentary filmmakers, Liza Key's *Furiosius* and Guy Spiller's *The Liberal and the Pirate*, a film about David Beresford Pratt. Jan Botha's *Verwoerd is Dead* was another book that Sher found 'very useful' in the writing of the play.<sup>27</sup> The final script was a product of several collaborations with colleagues, including director Nancy Meckler, Sue Higginson and several members of the cast.

Sher is a renowned actor in the U.K., both for his Shakespearean roles and other plays, as well as his work in film and television. He has won numerous awards, including the Laurence Olivier Best Actor Award, which he won twice, for his role as Richard III and Stanley in *Torch Song Trilogy*. *I.D.* marks his debut as a playwright, and it is indeed very interesting that it was Tsafendas' story that inspired this renowned actor to write his first play script. The question of identity has been an unsettling one for Anthony Sher throughout his life. Born in 1949, he grew up in apartheid South Africa in Sea Point in Cape Town. He came of age in 1960s South Africa, where to be gay and Jewish was to inhabit two orders of already radically othered states. His sexual awakening as a young gay man took place in conservative apartheid South Africa. Being Jewish offered no respite as 'there was a strong sense that it [homosexuality] was made diseased by my religion'.<sup>28</sup> His Jewish identity was further complicated by the fact that his father, born Jewish, was raised as an Afrikaner, and grew up speaking Afrikaans as a first language.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> A. Sher, *I.D.*, (London: Nick Hem, 2003). Sher, *I.D.* 'Author's Note', p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Sher, *I.D.* 'Author's Note', p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> J. Naish, 'The Art of Darkness: Sir Anthony Sher', *The Times*, 30 August 2008. <http://ad.uk.doubleclick.net/adj/women.timesonline.co.uk>. Accessed 30 September 2011.

<sup>29</sup> A. Seeff, 'Titus Andronicus: South Africa's Shakespeare', *Borrowers and Lenders: A Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation*, 4(1), Fall/Winter 2008 -9, 2. <http://www.borrowers.uga.edu/cocoon/borrowers/pdf>. Accessed 27 September 2011.

After completing his military service, he left for London where, over a number of years, he established himself as a leading Shakespearean actor. When he arrived in London in 1968, he made the disquieting discovery that South Africa and, in particular white South Africans, were international pariahs. Being gay, Jewish and a white South African, Sher found himself as the bearer of three orders of alterity. Discussing his role as Arthur Gellburg and his affinity for the main character in Arthur Miller's *Broken Glass*, he describes how he responded at the time by hiding all three aspects of his identity.

My own search for Gellburg benefitted enormously from an identity crisis I had as a young man. I wasn't open about being gay, I kept stumm about being Jewish, and I was ashamed of being a white South African. I ended up in so many closets I didn't know which key was which. Those early attempts to flee from being Antony Sher were useful when it came to being Gellburg, a man uncomfortable in his own skin.<sup>30</sup>

*Broken Glass* also resonated on another level: the play recalls a period of atrocious oppression - Nazi Germany in the 1930s is the background of the play. These 'early attempts to flee from being Antony Sher' were certainly influential in shaping his acting career. Drawn to characters who in their own contexts represented the outsider, such as Richard the III, Macbeth, and Shylock in the Merchant of Venice, his work with the Royal Shakespeare Company contributed to his reinvention as Sir Anthony Sher with all traces of his African accent gone. This reinvention led to a curious paradox. On the one hand, Sher came to epitomise a very particular kind of 'Britishness' for English-speaking white South Africans, one that equated Shakespeare with the highest form of civilised culture. On the other hand, the South Africa he left behind in 1968 became ossified in his consciousness, as the debate around the staging of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* by Sher and his partner Greg Doran in South Africa in 1995 was to reveal. South African theatre audiences expected a performance of 'high' Shakespearean culture with which they had identified Sir Anthony Sher. Instead they were offered a

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<sup>30</sup> J. Haynes, 'Anthony Sher: Broken Glass and My Identity Struggle', *The Guardian*, 12 September 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2011/sep/12/broken-glass-sher-arthur-miller>. Accessed 27 September 2011.

South Africanised *Titus Andronicus*, one of Shakespeare's most viscerally violent plays, as a mirror to the endemic violence of South African society.<sup>31</sup> The conflict between the Romans and the Goths was restaged as a conflict between white and black, with the Roman characters speaking in heavy 'guttural Afrikaans accented English' and the Goths speaking in 'Tsotsitaal'.<sup>32</sup>

Sher criticized the lukewarm reception of the play by South African audiences, seeing it as the product of cultural isolation. In a discussion of audience responses to the play, Adele Seeff points out that Sher himself was one of the major activists in the cultural boycott against apartheid South Africa. His return to South Africa, newly minted as post-apartheid in 1994/5, was not 'the triumphant return of the distinguished exile'. He left amongst a string of bitter exchanges involving accusations and counteraccusations of cultural indifference and cultural colonisation.<sup>33</sup> Sher was not to return to the stage in South Africa for many years. He starred as Prospero in *The Tempest* at the Baxter in 2008.

In the meantime he did stage another kind of return to South Africa through the writing and staging of *I.D.* Through the play he revisited the society and culture that shaped him as a young man. Like so many of his generation, his memory of Verwoerd's assassination was indelibly etched in his consciousness. In the 'Author's Note' to the play, he writes,

I was in my last year of high school in Cape Town when, on Tuesday 6th September 1966, the Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd was assassinated. The event was intensely dramatic in every sense ... the assassin was a temporary parliamentary messenger - Demetrios Tsafendas, who claimed he'd been driven to do the deed by a giant tapeworm that lived inside him of him. He was declared mad, unfit to stand trial, and vanished from sight. But the strangeness and anarchy of the event made a huge impact on me; briefly upturning everything that seemed so solid and indestructible about the South Africa of my youth ... By chance I found my old South African I.D. card the other day.

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<sup>31</sup> Adele Seeff, *Titus Andronicus*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Adele Seeff, *Titus Andronicus*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Seeff, 4-5.



It's dated 1965, just a year before Tsafendas walked over to Verwoerd on the floor of the house and drew out a dagger. As I stare at the face of the card – quite apart from a feeling of disbelief that I looked so innocent – I am reminded again of that boy called Sher A. Thirty-seven years later that boy, now deep inside me, is watching goggle-eyed again as we prepare to retell this story as a play.<sup>34</sup>

The play consists of two acts. There are fifteen scenes in Act One, which cover some aspects of Tsafendas' life before he arrives in South Africa, but mostly dwell on South Africa of the 1960s. It opens with Tsafendas in Sterkfontein Hospital in 1999. He is being attended to by a male nurse, Siphon. From there it shifts to 1965 when Tsafendas arrives at the Daniels' home. Successive scenes then dramatise the first attempt on Verwoerd's life by David Pratt in 1960, Tsafendas' first discovery of his tapeworm in 1935 in Lourenco Marques, his travels between 1942 and 1960 when he finds himself in Trafalgar Square in London, and his application for reclassification as a coloured in 1965.

The Second Act, consisting of ten scenes, deals mostly with the events immediately before and after the assassination, Tsafendas' imprisonment on Death Row and his eventual 'release' into Sterkfontein Hospital in 1994. Lintwurm as a character is activated to undertake the transition through time with the words, 'We're falling through the years folks ... ten, twenty, thirty years.'<sup>35</sup> Lintwurm is Tsafendas' tapeworm and is given the status of a separate personality, almost mimicking the role that secondary personalities are accorded in the psychological condition described as multiple personality disorder. Tsafendas as a character is stripped from all unpleasant and obnoxious elements. Lintwurm is the exact opposite. He is crude, rude, raw and full of venom, saying the unthinkable. Where Tsafendas hesitates, Lintwurm urges him to act with decisiveness; when Tsafendas is polite, he is blatantly rude. But he is also there to help Tsafendas through difficult moments, advising on the courtship of Helen

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<sup>34</sup>Sher, I.D., 'Author's Note', 7-8.

<sup>35</sup> Sher, ID, 15.

Daniels, or speaking out at his abuse at the hands of immigration officials at South Africa House.

Sher's two hour long play is not just an attempt to tell the story of Tsafendas, but also that of Verwoerd, and the historical context that binds the two men together. Tsafendas is presented as a blundering, awkward type of character, almost dimwitted, forced to move constantly, trailing his suitcases filled with dirty washing, pots, pans and builder's tools. Verwoerd, on the other hand is portrayed as a sinisterly benign patriarch, but there is no doubt that he is equally mad. His is a sinister madness, a cold intelligence that takes rationality to its ultimate illusion: that human beings can be made to behave as one wishes given proper behavioural training. Verwoerd's madness consists in believing that it is possible to apply this philosophy not only to the individual, but also at the level of the nation. The power of Verwoerd's madness is demonstrated in his encounter with David Pratt, a third madman in the cast. After his recovery from Pratt's shooting, Verwoerd visits him in the Bloemfontein Asylum. His speech to Pratt comes across as the product of a mind deluded and disordered by religious fanaticism and political obsession.

'David, you are living proof of the existence of Satan. But far more powerfully, you prove the existence of God. Your two bullets went deep into my head. Just a fraction this way or that ... just touch the facial nerve, or the joint between upper or lower jaws - oh I've become an expert on facial anatomy, David - just puncture the carotid artery, directly in the path of one bullet, and I'd have bled to death before reaching the hospital. Yet your bullets missed every single spot ... The doctors called it a miracle. So did my wife and I, except we weren't using a figure of speech. And the miracle grew. Enemies in my path, Afrikaners who have scorned me because I am not bone and marrow one of them, they are now converted ... And the miracle grew. Messages of goodwill from every corner of this land, even the liberal press, even the non-White peoples, messages which I now can show to the world and say. 'At last do you see how South Africa is working! So do *you* see, David? You not only prove the existence of God, but more wonderfully you prove His relationship with me. (Holds back emotion). Thank you for this talk. It was important for both of us, I think.'

Verwoerd exits suddenly. Pratt thrashes wildly, giving an agonized silent scream. (Lintwurm, in the voice of a radio broadcaster, announces that Pratt has committed suicide).<sup>36</sup>

In a memorable exchange between Dr Gavronsky and Verwoerd in his office, the psychiatrist tries to explain to Verwoerd that Pratt's case was not simply a question of madness. He had expressed a very clear political motive when he explained his actions.

Gavronsky: ... to sum up Prime Minister, I would have to report that Pratt is an extremely well-educated, articulate ...

Verwoerd: Pratt is mad.

Gavronsky: That's not altogether what I found, Prime Minister.

Verwoerd: Then you haven't looked hard enough. I trained in Psychology, doctor. I know my madmen.

Gavronsky: Yes Prime Minister.

Verwoerd: This one shows clear signs of megalomania. He sees himself as a political prophet, a saviour. He thinks he knows what's best for South Africa. What could be madder than that?

Gavronsky stares at Verwoerd, unable to answer: Luckily Vorster hurries in now....

The implication is clear: that Verwoerd is projecting his own symptoms of megalomania, his own savior-complex onto his would-be assassin.

Some reviewers argued that Verwoerd is too easily portrayed as a stereotype and too glibly compared with Hitler. For example, Richard Brent argued that the portrayal of the apartheid era in the play 'may occasionally be in danger of being crudely oversimplified'.<sup>37</sup> Janine Stephen noted the 'tendency to present the Afrikaans characters as thuggish or stupid'.<sup>38</sup> Here the critics refer to the scenes in Pretoria Central's Death Row when warders are urinating in Tsafendas' food.

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<sup>36</sup> Sher, *ID*, 41-42.

<sup>37</sup> R. Brent, 'A Mad World Spawning Madmen'. Litnet Archive.

<http://www.oulitnet.co.za/teater/idsher.asp#top>. Accessed 8 September 2011.

<sup>38</sup> J. Stephen, 'Return of the Killer Worm', *Mail & Guardian Online*. 12 September 2003.

Sher is, however, on solid ground regarding such details. He is drawing on Liza Key's documentary footage where she presents clear evidence of the details of Tsafendas' illtreatment while on Death Row. In Sher's novel *Cheap Lives*, published in 1995, one of the main characters is on Death Row and is a witness to, and participant in, the abuses committed against Tsafendas who makes a number of brief, but important appearances in the text.<sup>39</sup> Here Sher must have drawn on information that was already in the public domain and that was well-known amongst prisoners who had served time in Pretoria Central. Sher himself also interviewed a number of individuals who had been on death row, as part of his research for the novel. Amongst those he interviewed were Paula and Robert McBride, Zonga Mokgatle, a member of the Uppington 14, and Oupa Seheri.<sup>40</sup> Brent and Stephen agree that the character of Lintwurm is one of the strongest features of the play, addressing a contemporary South African audience in the role of 'voice of the devil' narrator.

## Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the production of four plays, each one providing audiences with very different perceptions of Tsafendas. In Tanner's play, a close textual interpretation allows him to expose the absurdity of the Commission's enquiry (as in the example of (Mr Burger's testimony). Here the madness of Tsafendas is the point of focus with strong theatrical weight given to psychiatric testimony. In fact, in an important sense this was a play before its time, one that acknowledged intertextuality and worked with notions of textual translation in its techniques of quotation and amalgamation. Krouse and Colman's *Famous Dead Men*, written and performed a decade later, targets the authoritarian figure of the then South African Prime Minister P.W. Botha. Botha was a much lampooned figure at the time, and the focus on

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<sup>39</sup> A. Sher, *Cheap Lives* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1995). Tsafendas appears on pages 62 -6, 81-4 and 98-9. Sher also conducted

<sup>40</sup> Sher, *Cheap Lives*, 'Acknowledgements'.

Verwoerd allows them to suggest the degree of similarity between Botha and the grand architect of apartheid.

The two post-apartheid plays deal in more detail and primarily with the question of identity. Tsafendas life is an occasion to reflect on identity in the South African context, where race has complicated what it means to be gay, Jewish or Greek. I have focused considerably on the biographical narrations, as in the case of Van Woerden's novel (see Chapter 4). I am interested in the intersections between biography and autobiography. Spanoudes and Sher are both from communities which have been heavily discriminated against. At the same time they both occupied a position of other, inside and outside their communal culture of origin, leading to a strong identification with Tsafendas.



## Conclusion:

### Identity, Race and Madness

When Demitrios Tsafendas died on 7 October 1999 the South African government tried to impose an unofficial news embargo. According to Henk Van Woerden, the hospital superintendent contacted a welfare worker of the Greek Orthodox Church to ask them to inform the family and make funeral arrangements. Everything was to be done 'with the utmost discretion' and with 'as little publicity as possible'.<sup>1</sup> Despite the unofficial state clampdown on media publicity, the news leaked out and most newspapers published reports of Tsafendas' death. At his funeral, Van Woerden made the observation that 'the handful of mourners were outnumbered by members of the press corps, who in their turn were outnumbered by plainclothes and uniformed police, accompanied by several large search dogs'.<sup>2</sup>

The attempt to impose a veil of silence on the death of the 'obscure white messenger', as Tsafendas is described in Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*,<sup>3</sup> takes us back to the observation made in the introduction to this thesis. The spectacular staging of Verwoerd's funeral, I suggested, was an attempt to re/place the memory of his public and bloody death in the consciousness of individuals. For this to take effect, his assassin had to be, as far as was possible, consigned to oblivion. We might ask the question: why was it so important for the post-apartheid government to let Tsafendas die as quietly as possible? After all, it was this government that 'released' him into the care of Sterkfontein hospital in 1994 as a result of numerous appeals made on his behalf. That it was important to the post-apartheid government to keep Tsafendas' funeral a quiet affair is evidenced by the extent of efforts to contain the possibility of a politicisation of Tsafendas' funeral. Traditionally, political funerals in South Africa are important public occasions where biographical narrations of the

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<sup>1</sup>Henk Van Woerden, *The Assassin*, 159.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 161.

<sup>3</sup> Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Boston: Little Brown, 1996), 512.

deceased and a celebration of their important achievements form an important part of the ritual.

I believe the answer lies somewhere in the deluge of newspaper articles recalling Verwoerd's assassination in the wake of Tsafendas' death. If Tsafendas' funeral was a quiet affair, with less than ten mourners present, his dying was not. In most newspapers, the reports of his death and funeral two days later were accompanied by lengthy obituaries and biographical narrations of Tsafendas. Recollections of the assassination and details of its 'bloodiness' were written by veteran journalists, some of whom were actually in the press gallery on the day of the assassination. Others chased up eyewitnesses of the event to add to the veracity to their accounts. Tsafendas' death and funeral was also widely reported in the foreign media. The bloody and violent death of Verwoerd suddenly erupted from the hidden recesses of private memory into the realm of public memory.

These accounts were now read by a different generation of readers who had been exposed to the public broadcasting of the TRC hearings on television and radio. By 1999 the general public were much better informed about the nature and extent of apartheid's hidden violence against political activists. It was not inconceivable that Tsafendas funeral might have turned into a considerable show of support for Verwoerd's assassin. A month earlier, the SABC had planned to screen Liza Key's documentary to coincide with the anniversary of Verwoerd's assassination on 6 September. At the last minute the SABC decided to screen it on Reconciliation Day instead. It was eventually screened in early 2000. In March of the same year, Van Woerden's book was also released in South Africa, and a number of reviews appeared in local newspapers.

The TRC discourse, Suren Pillay has argued, separated apartheid and violence, with the result that the secret violence committed in its name came to be construed as exceptional, and external to its very constitution as a form of rationality of government. The violence executed outside the law became examples of the 'gross

violation of human rights', instead of acts of political violence.<sup>4</sup> Its focus therefore was on the individual as victim and the individual as perpetrator. Pillay shows how Matthew Goniwe, Sparrow Mkhonto, Fort Calata and Sicelo Mhlawuli were under surveillance and marked for elimination, not as individuals, but because they 'had become [the] symptomatic figure of the political ...of the absolute enemy, but importantly, not *the* absolute enemy [but] its chimerical double'.<sup>5</sup> The TRC, he argues, drawing on a long tradition of liberal legal discourse on rights, individualised the Cradock Four as victims who died not as a result of the inherent violence of apartheid as 'a technology of colonial rule',<sup>6</sup> but because of the actions of 'seven individuals' who were guilty of gross human rights violations.<sup>7</sup>

If Tsafendas had been constructed as a victim in this discourse, his imprisonment would have to be acknowledged as a 'gross violation of human rights'. This, in turn, would have opened a can of worms about how the TRC would interpret Verwoerd's assassination. Was it justifiable? Was it a political act? If his actions were recognized as political, how does it recast the TRC's mandate? Was Tsafendas a perpetrator? Was Verwoerd a victim? These were questions that could lead to a serious derailment of its reconciliation imperative. The TRC's construction of truth, according to Pillay, depended on an account of the past that would contribute to a birthing in the future. But the 'possibility of a birth' he writes, also held out the 'danger of a miscarriage,' - if its narrative undermined the political compromise reached at CODESA.<sup>8</sup> Tsafendas, it seemed, would remain, for the time being, a threatening and insoluble puzzle, a figure of 'troubled identification' for those who were part of the official liberation movement of South Africa.

This thesis has argued that the apartheid state exercised both sovereign and disciplinary power. The bifurcated nature of the state led to a series of contradictions in the way that this power was experienced by individuals. Traditional historical

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<sup>4</sup> Suren Pillay, 'The Partisan's Violence, Law and Apartheid: The Assassination of Matthew Goniwe and the Cradock Four' (PhD Dissertation; Columbia University, 2011), 52-3.

<sup>5</sup> Suren Pillay, 'The Partisan's Violence', 284.

<sup>6</sup> Pillay, 'The Partisan's Violence', 69.

<sup>7</sup> Pillay, 'The Partisan's Violence', 44.

<sup>8</sup> Pillay, 'The Partisan's Violence', 49.



scholarship of the apartheid era tended to focus on the instrumentalist aspect of the apartheid state. Recent scholarship has begun to address the nature of apartheid as a particular form of rationality of government, or to use Michel Foucault's analytic, its governmentality.<sup>9</sup>

The first three chapters of this thesis examined the apartheid archive on Tsafendas and what it reveals of the bifurcated nature of its power. Chapter One examined how one of the most bloody and violent political acts in South African history was represented in a section of South African media. What was different about Tsafendas' actions from those of political partisans was that while they often carried out their actions in secret, Tsafendas committed his act in public- the apartheid's regime's sovereign violence against the majority of its population was turned against its own sovereign. If Tsafendas was to be hung for his actions, he would become a political martyr. This chapter traced how a combination of psychiatric and legal experts displaced this act of 'public violence' on the part of Tsafendas from the sphere of the political into the sphere of madness.

What was also at stake was how Tsafendas as a mad man and a half-caste managed to gain entry into the country. His success pointed to the fault-lines of apartheid's immigration system that was designed to keep out precisely people like him, madmen and half-castes - as well as 'idiots, epileptics, deaf and dumb, blind and deaf'.<sup>10</sup> Once inside the country, not only did he succeed in gaining permanent residence, but he also obtained employment in parliament. He had subverted the system of racial rationalism designed to mask the fragile and unstable nature of whiteness. If David Beresford Pratt's attempted assassination of Verwoerd in 1960 drew attention to the delusions that resided in those that ruled the country, the Commission of Enquiry that was set up to investigate 'the circumstances' of Verwoerd's death, exposed the paranoia at the centre of those delusions. The system

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<sup>9</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College De France, 1977-1978* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2009). Chapters Four and Five deal with governmentality.

<sup>10</sup> Sally Perbudy, *Selecting Immigrants*, 52.

had to be perfected, albeit at the cost of undermining the power of the disciplinary technology of psychiatry. Chapter Two shows how the work of the Commission of Enquiry exposed the fault lines of a bureaucratic apparatus overburdened by processes designed to shore up an insecure whiteness that was installed at its centre. The *Report* of the Commission constructed a narrative of an assassin who was bereft of any consequence, - a man who was 'a complete failure, a maladjusted feckless rolling stone'.

Tsafendas' trial and imprisonment demonstrated how the apartheid regime resolved contradictions between its two technologies of power. It showed how these two technologies operated in tandem, the one acting as a screen for the other. The application of civilised justice to a madman required that he not be tried, but cared for as a ward by the state. A mad man, according to the rules of disciplinary power was a sick man, and therefore not responsible for his crime. This injunction allowed the state to place him in solitary confinement in the most secreted section of the apartheid prison system. There, under the cover of humanitarian treatment of the insane, the political violence of sovereign power was deployed with impunity.

Chapter Three has showed how the tension between these two technologies of power on a national level played itself out in the day to day functioning of the prison. The chapter tried to engage Tsafendas on the terms of his own discourse through a detailed and lengthy discussion of the letters he wrote while in prison. Here we are reminded of Jonathan Sadowsky 's observation (see Introduction) that it is precisely because of their anomalous and ambiguous status in society that the mad challenge our own perceptions of reality. The letters show that the tension between the two technologies of power produced an uneasy balance of power, and allowed Tsafendas to exploit his status '*as iemand baie [wat] belangrik is*', and to win some concessions not only regarding his conditions of imprisonment, but also reckoning with his madness and reason. The irony of Tsafendas being kept on death row was that it was also the section of the prison that often housed the most politically conscious prisoners. Although he never came into contact with any of them, they

were well aware of the abuse that warders committed against him. News of Tsafendas' treatment leaked out on numerous occasions, and the prison authorities were forced to put measures in place to contain the violence against Tsafendas.

Chapters Four, Five and Six addressed itself to an archive of a very different kind. The creative works of Henk Van Woerden, Liza Key, Anthony Sher, Reno Spanoudes and Anton Krueger deal with the return of the repressed memory of Tsafendas' assassination of Verwoerd. Here we are dealing with the psychic archive of individuals profoundly affected by the event. The form of this archive has relied on the imprint the event has made on the human imagination. The visual images of Tsafendas' violence in the House of Assembly were destroyed immediately, and readers of newspapers at the time had to rely on their imagination to picture the scene of the assassination as they read a detailed written account in the media. Both the apartheid and post-apartheid governments preferred him, in the case of the former, to fade away into oblivion and in the case of the latter, to die in obscurity. This kind of repression, as both Freud and Derrida have shown, leaves an 'imprint' on the psyche and the works of Van Woerden, Liza Key, Anthony Sher, Krouse and Spanoudes explore the nature of the imprint the event has made on them. These works are, in turn, a record of their own impression or signature, *on* the event. In that sense, collectively, their works can be regarded as a secondary archive on Tsafendas.

The identification with Tsafendas by *these particular* individuals is reflected in their own histories of 'troubled identifications' (see Butler below). It is the question of identity that they fore-ground in their work. In South Africa the question of individual social/cultural/religious identity were (and still are) racialised, so that the individual's sense of self, while located in a specific communal culture, is also shaped in a very profound way by the politics of race. The psychological raw material in the formation of identity in the life cycle of the individual is entangled with race, religion and culture. Tsafendas was a complex character and his '*waansin*' was not just about race. Van Woerden's account of Tsafendas life situates him as a

person not just subject to apartheid's racial laws, but to an international biopolitics of race and madness - a key technology of which was immigration policies of nation states. These works, as a collective, place on the historical agenda questions of the psyche and its relationship to identity construction. In the next section I discuss different perspectives on this relationship through an exploration of a tension between Foucault's theory of subjectification and the concept of the unconscious as 'troubling' that subjectification process.

### **Identity, Subjectification and the Psyche**

At precisely the age when young people experienced what the psychoanalyst Erik Erikson described as an 'identity crisis' as part of the normative life cycle of the individual, Tsafendas made a profound discovery about himself. According to Erikson this is not necessarily a 'catastrophe', but 'a necessary turning point, a crucial moment when development must move one way or another, marshalling resources of growth, recovery and further differentiation'.<sup>11</sup> The terms 'identity' and 'identity crisis' was first used by Erikson and his colleagues in the treatment of war veterans at the Mount Zion Veterans' Rehabilitation Clinic in the 1940s. Erikson and his co-workers concluded that their patients were not 'shell-shocked', but 'had through exigencies of war lost a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity'.<sup>12</sup> He also described them in terms of 'a loss of ego identity', as they were 'impaired in that central control over themselves for which...only the inner agency of the ego could be held responsible'.<sup>13</sup>

Writing in the 1960s, twenty years after the term identity crisis was first used, Erikson reflected on how 'identity crisis' had been taken up in different contexts. By then, the terms identity and identity crisis had become part of popular parlance. America in the 1960s was in the throes of a youth rebellion, and young people embraced the terms identity and identity crisis as part of their armory of rebellion. Commenting on this, he says

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<sup>11</sup> Erik Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), 16.

<sup>12</sup> Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 17.

These clinical terms are taken over by a whole age group who echo our very terms and flamboyantly display a conflict which we once regarded as silent, inner and unconscious. Today the term more often than not refers to something noisily demonstrative, to a more or less desperate quest or to an almost deliberately confused search.<sup>14</sup>

While Erikson was by no means unsupportive of the uprising of a generation of young people against the Vietnam War, he nevertheless felt the need to remind us of the original rigour with which these concepts had been used when they first emerged in a psychoanalytic context. Identity is never 'established' as an 'achievement' in the form of a personality armor, or of anything static and unchangeable...the process is always changing and developing'.<sup>15</sup> While insisting that it is a process largely unconscious and 'located in the core of the individual', it is also located 'in the core of his communal culture...we cannot separate personal growth from communal change, nor can we separate the identity crisis in individual life and contemporary historical development.'<sup>16</sup>

The concepts of identity and identity crisis have also been taken up in scholarly and academic circles to apply to social and historical crises. The concept of 'identity' in particular has a long history as debates around the question of identity have been waged at a far remove from the original clinical context associated with the concept. Identity has been theorised from a number of perspectives, ranging from Derridean deconstruction, Foucauldian analysis of the process of subjectification, as well as different psychoanalytically influenced theorizations of the role of the unconscious in the formation of the subject.<sup>17</sup> These different approaches have shaped discussions of identity within philosophy, history, sociology and literary theory. Within this complex and varied conversation there is general agreement that identity can no longer be regarded as a stable, unitary or timeless phenomenon. Although there is

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<sup>14</sup> Erikson, *Identity*, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Erikson, *Identity*, 22-24.

<sup>16</sup> Erikson, 23.

<sup>17</sup> Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman(editors), *Identity: A Reader*(London: Sage Publicaions, 2000). See General Introduction.

consensus regarding its unstable character, differences have emerged regarding the relationship between the subject, the individual and the person.<sup>18</sup>

Stuart Hall described the deconstructive approach as 'putting concepts under erasure', meaning that in their old form they are no longer useful in analysis., but are still necessary for 'thinking with'. In their deconstructed form, and estranged from the paradigmatic context within which they arose, they allow for 'thinking at the limit', that is thinking in the interval between reversal and emergence, 'an idea which cannot be thought in the old way but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all...identity is such a concept'.<sup>19</sup>

The reconceptualising of identity as fragmentary and incomplete raises a different set of theoretical problems. For while deconstruction insists that identities are constructed through difference,

...it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constituent outside* that the positive meaning of any term – and its 'identity' – can be constructed...identities function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, leave out, to render 'outside', abjected. Every identity has at its margins an excess...<sup>20</sup>

This excess at its margins is the source of a continual threat of decentering or destabilizing identity. How then, Hall asks, do we understand its emergence? For Hall identities are 'points of temporary attachments to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us.'<sup>21</sup> He describes identity as a point of suture 'between on the one hand, discourses and practices which...hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be spoken'.<sup>22</sup> An effective suturing requires not only that the subject is hailed, but that there is

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<sup>18</sup> du Gay, et al, *Identity: A Reader*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Who Needs Identity?' in du Gay, et al, *Identity: A Reader*, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Hall, 'Who Needs Identity', 16.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 19

investment in the subject position. This raises the issue of identification and the 'symbolic function of the role of ideology in the constitution of subjects'.<sup>23</sup>

In a discussion of Althusser's notion of interpellation, Hall draws attention to the lack of a conversation between the concept of ideology and the unconscious. Althusser drew on Lacanian psychoanalysis to temper the reductionist role that classical Marxism ascribed to ideology as simply upholding a particular mode of production. He introduced the symbolic role that ideology played, but did not succeed in bridging the gap between discursive and the psychic. Can one explain the effectiveness of ideology merely at the level of discursivity? What is the role of the unconscious and the psychic dimension in the constitution of subjectivity?

It is here that the question of identity begins to trouble the somewhat formalistic relationship between subject formation and discourse enunciated in Foucauldian theory. According to Hall, Foucault's theory of the subject and discourse leaves little room for the interior psychic processes to 'negotiate' or resist the interpellation of the subject. What is needed, he argues,

...is a theory of what the mechanisms are by which individuals as subjects identify (or do not identify) with the 'positions' to which they are summoned; as well as how they fashion, stylize, produce and perform these positions, and why they never do so completely, for once and all time, and some never do, or in a constant, agonistic process of struggling with, resisting, negotiating and accommodating the normative or regulative rules with which they confront and regulate themselves.<sup>24</sup>

It is in Judith Butler's work that there is an attempt to bridge the gap between the discursive and the psychic, or, as she puts it, between 'Freud and Foucault'. She begins her discussion by identifying the opposition between the Foucauldian concept of the subject and subjectification process, and the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious. Butler identifies an inversion of the role of the body and the soul in Foucault. For Foucault it is the soul that is 'the seat of the internalization of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Hall, 27.

subjection'.<sup>25</sup> The soul as a psychic identity is the prison of the body and is identified with normalization. For Foucault there is no body outside power relations, the body is its very materialization.

In psychoanalysis, Butler argues, it is the psyche that represents the interiority of the subject, the space of residue for that which is outside of consciousness, harbouring that which returns to trouble our identifications, that which is repressed in order for the subject to be 'installed within language and hence within available schemes of intelligibility'. The formation of the subject depends on the exclusion of the unconscious.<sup>26</sup> Butler argues that according to psychoanalysis,

the psyche is precisely that which exceeds the imprisoning effects of the discursive demand to inhabit coherent identity, to become a coherent subject.....Every ritual of conformity to the injunction of civilization is at a cost, and a certain unharnessed and unsocialised remainder is thereby produced, contesting the appearance of the law-abiding subject ...This is the psychic remainder which signifies the limits of normalization.<sup>27</sup>

For her the problem lies in bringing these two positions in conversation with each other and reformulating both Freud and Foucault. The resistance to the injunction of normalization is not identical to 'dismantling the injunction'; it is a resistance that has no power to re-articulate the terms of subjection. For Foucault resistance to subjection does not involve 'discovering what we are, but to refuse what we are'. For Butler this poses the question of what makes possible this refusal? How can we account for what she terms 'the passionate attachment to subjection?' The answer for her lies in the fact that it is only through becoming a subject that a dissolution into psychosis is avoided.<sup>28</sup> Any resistance will therefore take 'subjection as its resource' and that it is the very fact that the subject is tied to 'an injurious interpellation' that identity is 'constituted through injury'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Judith Butler, 'Subjection, Resistance, Resignification: Between Freud and Foucault'. In John Rajchman(ed) *The Identity in Question* (New York:Routledge, 1995), 230.

<sup>26</sup> Judith Butler, 'Subjection, Resistance, Resignification,' 231-2.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 232.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 244.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid,246.



Wendy Brown also takes issue with the disavowal of psychic processes in the work of Foucault. She draws attention to his 'arrested reading' of Nietzsche whose elaboration of the 'will to power', gives far more credence to the role of the psychological.<sup>30</sup> She is interested, not in the ontological fictions of identity, but in what constitutes its desire. For her the question of what identity 'is' needs to be reformulated in terms of what it 'wants'.<sup>31</sup> What she means is that to whom and to what does a politicised identity address itself to? The answer is that which it is excluded from - the 'we' of the universal liberal subject. It addresses its resentments, it formulates its injuries and hurts in relation to this 'we' as the object of desire. Its politics is one of proclaiming its lack in relation to a hegemonic object of desire. Its claims to injury, what she calls its 'logics of pain',<sup>32</sup> is based precisely on the desire, 'to be harbored within the terms of that universalism'.<sup>33</sup>

Tsafendas' personal sense of identity was profoundly shaped by the racial politics of colonial Mozambique and South Africa in its colonial and apartheid periods. His life experience as a child and young adult was already complicated by race and nationality before he was consciously aware of it. When his father decided to marry he was aware that his young new bride might not want to take care of a baby that was firstly, not hers, and secondly, a half-caste. Tsafendas was sent at the age of one year, accompanied by complete strangers, on a lengthy ship journey from Lourenco Marques in Mozambique to Alexandria in Egypt. There, he was raised by his Greek grandmother until he was seven. In Alexandria, which had a flourishing and well to do Greek community, he blended in with local surroundings, speaking both Greek and Arabic. At seven years of age he is sent back to Mozambique to a family and an environment to which he had great difficulty adapting. When it became clear to his father that the young boy was not getting along with the family, or with anybody else at school, and was prone to uncontrollable rages, he decided to send Tsafendas to a boarding school in Middelburg, Transvaal. There, in the predominantly white

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<sup>30</sup> Wendy Brown, 'Wounded Attachments: Late Modern Oppositional Political Formations'. In John Rajchman(ed) *The Identity in Question* (New York:Routledge, 1995), 211.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, , 209.

<sup>32</sup> Brown, 'Wounded Attachments', 202.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, 'Wounded Attachments', 213.

English speaking middle-class school, Portuguese and Greek speaking pupils were regarded with disdain by other pupils, because of their Mediterranean complexion and their 'backwardness' in English. Because of their difficulty with English, they were usually kept a year behind, and placed in the same hostel.

At seventeen years of age he discovered that his mother was a 'mulatto', a 'coloured' when a Greek neighbour .Mrs Sideris, scolded his behaviour, by calling out 'You are just like your mother'. In the case of Demitrios Tsafendas, the question of race also became a question of nationality: to which country did he belong? In Southern Africa, the politics of immigration was an extension of the politics of race. In his early youth, he was refused entry into South Africa while the rest of his family (father, stepmother, and four siblings) was successfully established as permanent residents. It is ironic that the country that refused him citizenship a total of eight times, and had one of the most racially discriminating regimes, endured for him as his notion of a home country during his twenty years away from Southern Africa.

In terms of Butler's analysis this would constitute his 'passionate attachment to subjection', but this attachment also constitutes, in her reformulation of Freud and Foucault, the psychic resources for resistance. In September 1964 Tsafendas applied to be reclassified coloured to enable him to 'get married to a Non-European'. In a letter in which he describes the course of events leading up to the assassination, he explains that he was getting old and had difficulty finding a wife due to 'being away for so long'. Although classified white, 'it was impossible to find a European girl in my poor economic condition'.

In apartheid South Africa to classify oneself, 'downward' was an exceptionally transgressive act. This application placed him once again in the net of official bureaucracy - that eventually led to a deportation order issued by the Ministry of the Interior. It had taken him almost twenty years to obtain resident status in South Africa. During this time he had been forced to drift from country to country, deported and expelled from more countries than was possible to imagine. Yet in the

very moment that he was installed within the dominant racial category, he chooses to decline it. He treated the racial classification system in South Africa in the same way that he treated the borders of nationality: they can be crossed at will, if necessary.

Butler argues, following Freud, because the ego is 'composed of identifications, and identifications is the resolution of desire, ...the ego is the residue of desire...the effect of incorporations which trace a lineage of attachment to loss'<sup>34</sup>, that subject formation is *sustained* by the 'passionate attachment subjection'. How does one understand Tsafendas' psychosis? His incapacity to obey the borders of nationality as well as race seems to suggest an absence of the 'sustaining' effects of 'a passionate attachment to subjection'. Is this why, we might ask, he experienced frequent episodes of psychosis? If the unconscious harbours that 'psychic remainder' which undermines normalization, then Tsafendas' madness consists in precisely the incapacity to obey the 'rituals of conformity' necessary for the subject to be installed.

It is perhaps appropriate at this point to remind ourselves of the questions that inspired Foucault's study on madness and civilisation. What can madness tell us about reason? How, he asks, did it come about that insanity came to be viewed as an illness? When were 'madmen' removed from society and from what point on did the exchange between reason and unreason cease? <sup>35</sup> In an eleven-page statement that Demitrios Tsafendas made to the police and transcribed verbatim by Major Rossouw, he provides ample evidence of his madness and his reason. The Commission's final *Report* focuses on his madness. Below is an extract of this statement that provided a sense of his reason(s) for the assassination of Verwoerd.

Tsafendas is explaining that this attendance at political gatherings at Trafalgar Square in London had nothing to do with killing Verwoerd:

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<sup>34</sup> Judith Butler, 'Subjection, Resistance, Resignification, 244.

<sup>35</sup> M. Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in an Age of Reason* Preface, vi-vii.

In England...I did take part in a protest and propaganda meeting at Trafalgar Square. It was anti-colonial protests...I was holding the posters up but did not speak at these meetings. I was never approached to become a member of the Communist Party. I was anti-colonial, against slavery and in favour of all colonies that were controlled by Belgium, France and Portugal to be afforded self-government. I was against apartheid because it separated the people of different races and brought a big barrier amongst them which[sic] is difficult to describe. It brought wrong ideas among the people, causing the different races to hate one another. It caused misunderstanding and suspicion amongst the different races and made them afraid to talk to each other.

People in buses did not know where to sit...All the apartheid laws made things confusing...especially the laws applying to mixed marriages...This is what I call oppression....If there was freedom there would be no restrictions and there would be evolution and so eventually there would be one race. That is what I mean by evolution...

It is true that I mixed with South African people in London who were leftists...In private conversations with some of these people it was said that the South African Prime Minister deserves to be shot...I sometimes agreed with them...I did believe that with the disappearance of the of the South African Prime Minister a change of policy would take place...It was my own idea to kill him. No one ever asked me to kill him. No one offered me any reward for doing so...<sup>36</sup>

This thesis, in combining an examination of conventional archival sources, with works of the imagination hopes to contribute to a reopening of 'the dialogue between reason and unreason' in South African history.

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<sup>36</sup> 'Demetrio Tsafendakis @Tsafendas States'. K150, Volume 3: Suid Afrikaanse Polisie, Subfile, 1/5, Aanhangsel B.

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