

The Baboon in the Cage:

Reading South Africa's Chemical and Biological Warfare Programme

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1. In this paper I follow one strand through the web of evidence presented at one Special Hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission -- the hearing into the Apartheid State's Chemical and Biological Warfare (CBW) Programme. The aim of this strategy is to draw out some of the tensions in the evidence given at the hearing, and to listen to the rhetoric being deployed to describe and justify actions take by the scientists complicit in the late-Apartheid State's Chemical and Biological Warfare programme. The time-period that this strand covers begins in 1985 and continues until the first years of the 1990s, 1991/1992.

2. The first mention of baboons within the Chemical and Biological Warfare Hearing was institutional: Dr Jan Lourens testified that Delta-G (one of the many cover-companies for the CBW programme, loosely referred to as "Project Coast" in its entirety) had barely, in 1985, begun to construct the complex of experimental laboratories in the

Roodeplaat Dam area around which the scientific activities of Project Coast would revolve. All that was on the site at the time was “an old farmhouse and a small lab complex and some animal cages... there was some baboon cages, even at that early stage.” Vally, the prosecuting attorney at the proceedings, left this topic for a few minutes, but returned to it almost immediately after establishing the geographic layout of the laboratory complex. “Were you ever personally witness to animal experimentations?” he asked. After describing an experiment in which rats were blown up with experimental grenades, Lourens added in his reply, “Subsequently at Roodeplaat I witnessed the exposure of baboons to a substance called CR, which is a teargas.” Vally indicated that they would come back to that.

All this takes place on the first day, in the first session, questioning the first witness. The morning had been taken up with a heated debate about what evidence was admissible, what evidence could be allowed to stay on the transcript, and what scientific formulae should be censored, for reasons of national security. The compromise resolved was that no witness should censor themselves in speech, and that the transcript would be vetted before release. Nonetheless, much of the scientific discussion proceeded to take the form of vague generalities and uncertainties, as in the next exchange where baboons re-entered the picture.

Vally asked Lourens to elaborate on the biological work of the Roodeplaat laboratories, in particular, “this research into fertility and virility, can you tell us more about that?” This was one of the areas that Lourens had indicated that biologists within the laboratories had been working on. He replied:

“I can’t tell you a great deal. What I can tell you is that the work that was done, was done by a scientist by the name of Dr Borman, Dr Riana Borman, and she was working on primates, baboons, I don’t know if the work ever moved onto the chimpanzee level, into ways in which she could influence the virility and fertility of the animal. Speculation has it that a part of this work was directed at an ethnic issue in terms of to be able possibly to manipulate ethnic virility or fertility rather, but I know of no more than that as far as that specific project is concerned . . . again, it’s one of those situations that we never discussed a project in detail. You know, for example, in this particular case I was responsible for the manufacture of a stimulator that is used to stimulate and draw sperm from the male animal and in this discussion with some of the junior scientists, you know, you discuss it vaguely, but I was never briefed formally and said this is the project, this is the extent, this is the scope, this is the objective, etc., so please accept it as speculation.”

This was in 1986/1987, approximately, according to Lourens’s testimony. Vally pressed him for some minutes about the racial aspects of this description, as well as the mechanics of the virility and fertility experiments, before returning to the subject of animal experimentation, and the Lourens’s role in the supply of equipment to the laboratories. He supplied restraint chairs “in which an adult baboon would be strapped so that experimentation can be done [on] the baboon”, as well as a gas chamber “of sufficient size that you could in actual fact move the restraint chair into the box”, and a filtration system to “be able to remove chemical and biological substances”.

Finally, Vally asked Lourens to conclude his testimony by describing the teargas experiment he had witnessed being carried out on the baboon. Lourens hesitated at first:

“It was a -- it wasn’t a fantastically scientific experiment in the sense of particular measurements or blood samples being taken, or whatever the case may be. But, I did not stay the total experiment, so they may have done it afterwards, but that was my only exposure.” When pushed to describe the experiment in more detail, he said:

“Just very briefly there was a cage, there was a baboon in the cage, this smoke grenade was chucked in the cage and it released the teargas. That really was the extent of the experiment.”¹

In the extensive cross-questioning of Lourens by the Commissioners as well as the attorneys for the other witnesses, no mention of baboons was made at all. Once Vally called the next witness to the stand, Charles van Remoortere, however, it was only a matter of time before he asked van Remoortere whether he had witnessed any similar experiments on baboons. He replied that, when he and his wife were taking a tour of the Roodeplaat facilities, they saw baboons caged, but not any experiments. But then, they “didn’t stay very long because the animal in the cage didn’t appeal to my wife at all and she decided we should leave.”² The subject of baboon was then dropped for the rest of the day.

The next day, Dr Johannes Matteus Koekemoer denied, contra to the promptings of Vally, that the experiments that he had been conducting on Narcotic Analgesics (incapacitants) were not tested on baboons: “No, no, no, not baboons, it was a mouse flick tail test which they did on rats I suppose.”³

¹ Testimony of Dr Jan Lourens, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Special Hearing into Chemical and Biological Warfare, 8 June 1998. <http://www.truth.org.za/.../cbw2.html>

² Testimony of Charles Remoortere, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Special Hearing into Chemical and Biological Warfare, 8 June 1998. <http://www.truth.org.za/.../cbw2.html>

³ Testimony of Dr Johannes Matteus Koekemoer, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Special Hearing into Chemical and Biological Warfare, 9 June 1998. <http://.../cbw3.html>

That afternoon Jerome Chaskalson took over from Vally and, in his examination of Dr Schalk van Rensburg, introduced a list of products produced by the laboratories under Project Coast that included, amongst other things, beer bottles infected with botulism and thallium; sugar infected with salmonella; poisoned cigarettes, chocolates and whiskey; and a baboon foetus.

Although the baboon foetus was temporarily neglected, baboons returned to the scene in van Rensburg's testimony: as experimental subjects in tear-gas experiments, once again, and as experimental subjects in fertility experiments, to be injected with a "vaccine" to limit fertility.⁴ Later that same day, Vally reintroduced the image of the baboon foetus in a mishearing of Mike Odendaal's statement that he had done experiments on "the Bovine Embryos . . ." "Yes, just let's stop there," Vally intervened, "you're talking about, did you say baboon embryos?" "No, Bovine," Odendaal corrected.

Vally went on to quiz Odendaal about his experiments on animals: ". . . these experiments were done on the premises? . . . With baboons?" [re E-coli experiments] "And you tested these on primates such as baboons?" [re Botulism experiments] "And all the baboons and dogs and chimpanzees . . . where [sic] they never used on those animals?" [re Anthrax experiments] In all of these cases, the answer was negative: other animals, yes, baboons, no.⁵

On June 10, the cross-examination of van Rensburg took place. Much of this cross-examination focused on the subject of his "fertility vaccine", but baboons came up the once: Van Zyl (representing Dr Swanepoel) asked, "You weren't able to test it [the

⁴ Testimony of Dr Schalk van Rensburg, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Special Hearing into Chemical and Biological Warfare, 9 June 1998. <http://.../cbw4.html>

⁵ Testimony of Mr Mike Odendaal, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Special Hearing into Chemical and Biological Warfare, 9 June 1998. <http://www.truth.org.za/.../cbw5.html>

vaccine] because you haven't [sic] had a product?" to which van Rensburg replied, "We did produce an agent which was given to baboons. . . I left before that result became available. . . ."⁶

On the June 11, Dr Adriaan Jacobus Goosen testified that one of the two visits of General Neethling to the Roodeplaat Research Laboratories complex was to examine the testing of riot-control gases on baboons. Also, he testified that the baboons at the laboratories were dying over the weekends from lack of water, and ill-care. He "was shocked."⁷

The baboons were then left alone until the last day of the hearing, and the questioning of Dr Wouter Basson. In between, the Commission had heard the testimonies of Generals Neethling, Knobel and Nieuwoudt, had focused on the distribution of poisons, riot-control technologies, and "dirty-tricks" campaigns, before recessing the hearing between June 18 and July 7, and then again between July 8 and July 29 as Basson was unavailable for testimony at any earlier stage. Much of the transcript is, in fact, taken over by squabbles regarding Basson's presence and timing in this intermediary period. As, indeed, were the first two day of the final three day hearing: July 29 and 30, resulting in Basson only being called to the stand on the final day of the hearing, July 31 1998, the final day of the Commission's mandate . . .

After beginning a line of questioning, Vally turned to the affidavit of Dr Immelman and to the "item relating to the Baboon foetus." Vally asked Basson to tell him, "Firstly did you ever request him for a baboon foetus at the end of July 1989?"

⁶ Testimony of Dr Schalk van Rensburg, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Special Hearing in into Chemical and Biological Warfare, 10 June 1998. <http://.../cbw6.html>

⁷ Testimony of Dr Adriaan Jacobus Goosen, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Special Hearing into Chemical and Biological Warfare, 11 June 1998. <http://.../cbw9.html>

Basson diverted the answer into a lengthy discussion of whether or not poisoned chocolates could be called “potential murder weapons” or not. Finally, the discussion returned to the issue of the baboon foetus. Basson stated that he had used foetuses to obtain alpha fetoproteins and that, after using the foetuses, he “threw those in garbage bin.”

At this point both the Chairman of the session and Vally were finally able to introduce the reasons why they were interested in this particular baboon foetus: the chairperson began by asking, “Just as an aside and whilst Mr Vally prepares the next question, I don’t know if you are aware that at one stage at the residence of the Archbishop, Archbishop Tutu a baboon foetus was found hung there, outside his premises...Do you know anything about that?” and Vally followed up by adding that “this baboon foetus according to this [Immelman’s] list, was delivered to Koos on the 27th of July 1989 and this baboon foetus which was found in the garden at Bishopscourt here in Cape Town when Archbishop was still Archbishop Tutu, was found in August, shortly after this.”

Basson’s reply: “I don’t know what Mr Vally is insinuating. If he wants to insinuate that this specific foetus came from Roodeplaat with the view of bringing it to Tutu’s home, this is an insult to me and Bishop Tutu, to postulate that I could think that something like that would have any influence on Bishop Tutu, except to fill him with contempt and I want to say I deny that I know anything about the baboon foetus in Bishop Tutu’s yard. I don’t even know where it was found.

“What I am trying to say is on a regular basis, I obtained these foetuses and threw them away in the garbage bins at Headquarters.”

Dr Wendy Orr, a Commissioner and medical doctor, interjected at this point: “This is perhaps an aside, but as a Doctor I immediately ask myself why the baboon foetuses weren’t incinerated if this was a properly controlled laboratory in which foetuses certainly could be potentially infectious material?”

“Because,” Basson replied, “the foetus as you know, is a sterile tissue. . . in actual fact this foetus posed no threat, no more threat than the throwing out of a medium rare steak into the garbage bin.”⁸

Most of the remainder of the session was taken up with arguments over whether Basson’s travel arrangements were as unbreakable as he claimed, or whether he could remain on the stand for longer than he had indicated. Neither baboons, nor their foetuses, returned to the debate. They did appear, however, in the Truth Commission’s final report on the Chemical and Biological Warfare Hearings, in one sentence:

“The inclusion of a baboon foetus on the list, dated late July 1989 (just prior to such a foetus being found in the garden of Archbishop Tutu's house), as well as a reference to chemical and biological operatives, indicated that the items [poisons] may well have found their way, directly or indirectly, into the hands of operatives of the Civil Co-operation Bureau (CCB).”⁹

3. So why have I followed this strand through the evidence? What is it about baboons that make these references to them so important to me that I would want to write a paper about them? There are two ways I can answer these questions, both of which

⁸ Testimony of Dr Wouter Basson, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Special Hearing into Chemical and Biological Warfare, 31 July 1998. <http://.../cbw22.html>

have moulded my choice to focus so obsessively on the way baboons were used in the scientific projects, and in the testimony itself.

The first part is simple: I have focused on baboons because there is nothing exceptional in the use to which they were put. I believe that this is an important point to make: not everything that took place under the umbrella of “Project Coast” was “weird science.” In truth, the vast majority of the scientific activities that we can be certain were taking place -- the experimentation on baboons, the manufacture and testing of tear-gas, of poisons and of biological substances -- all these were scientifically unexceptional, normal. The use of baboons (or rats, etc) as test-subjects was, and still is, part of the standard model of scientific procedure. And so, for the purposes of this paper at least, I wanted to focus on something that was not “insane”, “grotesque”, “weird,” or any one of the many adjectives that seem to be so easily slapped onto the activities of Chemical and Biological Warfare programme.

The second reason that I chose to focus on baboons, in particular, is somewhat more complicated: primates in general and baboons, in the particular South African context, have a special fascination. They are like us in many ways; we see ourselves reflected in them. Science, even more than literature or other forms of culture, has given form and content to this fascination, and, in doing so, has shaped much of our thinking about our humanness, and our bodiliness. And this, at the core of it, is why I think that the references to baboons in the context of this Truth Commission testimony is so revealing.

⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report, Volume Two, Chapter Six (c) Special Investigation into Project Coast: South Africa’s Chemical and Biological Warfare Programme.

4. In a hagiographic history of the South African Institute for Medical Research, the author of the chapter on organ transplants explained why trials conducted on baboons were so important in South Africa: “The close similarity between the baboon and man, anatomically, physiologically and immunologically, made possible the appropriate exploitation of a precious natural resource of this country, i.e. the availability of baboons.”¹⁰ Baboons are positioned as biologically comparable to humans, close enough that methods of transplantation tested on baboons were likely (almost certain) to work on humans. Baboon bodies and baboon organs stand in for human bodies and human organs in this explanation.

The same is true for the experiments conducted upon baboons under the umbrella of Project Coast: baboon bodies stood in for human bodies. Baboons were strapped into restraining chairs; baboons were exposed to tear-gas; baboons were used to test fertility “vaccinations”: only when the testimony turns to the extraction of biological substances from baboon foetuses does the substitution not seem immediately apparent. And, although there are many instances of the scientific use of baboons and other primates that fit more closely with the instance of a purely extractive use of their foetuses, there is a large body of science that depends upon and deepens this comparison.

These sciences are all semi-biological in nature. Primatology, evolutionary biology, sociobiology and a particular form of evolutionary anthropology dependent on all of these areas of research all share an obsession with the relationship between primates and humanity. It is worth noting that all these semi-biological sciences (and by this I mean sciences that share the methodologies, the objects of research and the

conceptual language of biology, but that deploy them in ways not necessarily connected to the study of physical organisms) are all direct descendants of the Darwinian revolution. None of them are conceivable without the framework of evolution and “the descent of man”.

It is with this evolutionary framework that fascination with baboons and other primates moves from the literary spheres of Western culture and into the scientific. Primates are no longer merely creatures that “ape” human features, but rather our ancestors, the seed from which we have evolved. That this picture is not strictly accurate in evolutionary terms -- in which we would say that humans and primates have evolved from common, no longer existing, ancestors in ways that best suit the ecological niches we find ourselves in -- has not been of particular relevance to these particular scientific discourses. Instead, they have internalised, to differing degrees and with differing degrees of dissent, a hierarchical notion of evolution as a ladder, as stages, as progressive and, implicitly, teleological. This rhetoric no longer appears on the surface of these disciplines, not as it did in the period of their origin, but still remains in practice.

Donna Haraway gives a prime example of the contemporary, *sotto voce*, rhetoric of hierarchy and difference that characterises these semi-biological sciences in her analysis of the National Geographic television specials made about the work of Jane Goodall, particularly *Miss Goodall and the Wild Chimpanzees* (1965). “Wild chimps flee the pale-skinned stranger invading their domain,” the voice-over narration intones. “It means that not yet can the blond stranger draw near.” And then, in a still taken from her work, an advertisement for Gulf Oil, sponsors of Goodall’s work at the time, two hands

¹⁰ J A Myburgh, “Healthy organs for diseased ones,” in A J Brink (ed), *South African Medical Research: Twenty Years of Growth*. (Owen Burgess Publishers: Pinetown: 1988) 239.

intertwine: “In a spontaneous gesture of trust, a chimpanzee in the wilds of Tanzania fold his leathery hand around that of Jane Goodall -- sufficient reward for years of Dr Goodall’s years of patience.” Haraway describes the image (repeated on the front cover of her own book): “One is white, young, with well-trimmed nails; the other, about the same size, is brown, hairy, showing signs of a harder life. Both hands are open and vulnerable.”¹¹

Gender is clearly marked: the uneasy transition from “Miss Goodall” to “Dr Goodall”, the explicit masculinity of the chimpanzee’s (“leathered” and hairy) hand. Race is even more clearly marked: “blond stranger”, “pale-skinned stranger” and even “the pale ape”. And, in contrast to the whiteness of Goodall, not the black African residents of Tanzania, but rather the brown and hairy primates of Gombe. Who are asked to grow used to a “stranger” living in their domain; who are asked to make “a spontaneous gesture of trust” toward the resident “pale ape”; who are expected to be, like the white woman waiting for them to reach out towards her, “open and vulnerable”. The history of Tanganyika/Tanzania’s colonisation is displaced onto the Gombe reserve, and onto the bodies of the chimpanzees. In a period where the scientific study of race was crumbling, the power of race as “a category marking political power through location in ‘nature’” still retained its metaphoric and political force.¹²

Goodall’s experiments with chimpanzees in the Gombe reserve did not end with the “healing touch” of trust. Soon her camp began to experiment with social organization amongst primates: setting up a feeder near the camp, from which food would come so as to observe the reactions of the chimpanzees to the food, and to each other’s possession of

¹¹ Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. (Verso: London and New York: 1989) 152, 133.

that food. This focus on social organization has blossomed since the 1970s into the (closely related) fields of sociobiology, and evolutionary anthropology: both of which seek to explain human actions and social organization through recourse to inherited biological impulses. Both use genetics and evolutionary biology to justify a broad range of contemporary issues and actions: from trust and love, to feminism and post-feminism. Although few refer as explicitly to race, all deploy notions of biological and evolutionary hierarchy and progress, sometimes contradictorily.¹³

These concepts are part of the public conceptualisation of science, in television, *National Geographic* magazines, and pop science books. They are also ingrained in the semi-biological sciences, and the uses of primates within scientific rhetoric. If we turn back to the descriptive context of the various forms of baboon experimentation that took place under the umbrella of Project Coast, we can see these concepts repeated over and over again.

When we look at the terms in which the experiments involving “fertility and virility” this conceptual pattern is most clearly articulated. Sex difference is explicit in the use of “fertility and virility” as equivalent and differentiated solely by sex: females are fertile, males are virile. Also, hierarchy is also present in the passive/active dichotomy implied by this differentiation.

And, inevitably, there is the “ethnic issue”, to use Lourens’s words. The experiments were, according to his understanding of them, intended to “manipulate ethnic virility, or fertility rather”. Race was specifically patterned on the apes bound to

¹² Haraway, *Primate Visions*. 153.

¹³ See, amongst many others, Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal: Evolutionary Psychology and Everyday Life* (Little, Brown: London: 1994); Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *The Woman That Never Evolved* (Harvard UP: Cambridge, Mas: 1981); Edward O Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Harvard UP: Cambridge, Mass: 1978)

their restraining chairs, and strapped to their “stimulators” -- baboons were in the place not simply of all humans, but of black humans in particular. Or so it was understood in the laboratory corridors and in the nets of gossip within Project Coast’s facilities. And so it was understood within the interrogatory context of the Truth Commission’s inquiry.

5. I can imagine following this argument much further, into a broader and deeper argument about the nature of race and gender in science, and the relationship between Apartheid ideology and the scientific methods used in the laboratories of Project Coast. That argument would follow this line of logic through the rest of the experiments conducted on baboons: it would look at the tear-gassing of baboons and see, clearly if speculatively, the tear-gassing of the black population of South Africa. It would look at the restraining chair, with its straps and seals, and see black men and women tied to it. It would look at the discarded baboon foetuses, and the baboon foetus displayed outside Archbishop Tutu’s official residence in 1989, the foetuses described by Basson as being like “medium rare steak” and it would see, in all these foetuses, dead black children. Possibly even the corpses of all the children who would not have been born if the “fertility vaccine” had worked. But I don’t want to do this.

Not because such an argument would be speculative and, with the evidence I’ve presented here, unprovable. Because there is more evidence out there, in the Truth Commission’s transcripts, in the context of biomedical science at the time, in the nature of State violence in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

I do not want to follow this argument to its logical, if extreme, end because I think that to do so would obscure something more difficult, more troubling, and more

complicated about the evidence upon which it is based, and about the ideas with which it deals, and which it must condemn. Because, to do so would erase at least one line of dialogue in the narrative I have presented above, one slip of the tongue that shakes this whole house of cards:

“Yes, just let’s stop there,” Vally intervened in Mike Odendaal’s statement about bovine embryos, “you’re talking about, did you say baboon embryos?”

6. If we look back at the narrative account of all references to baboons within the Special Hearing into Chemical and Biological Warfare and correlate the references to the speakers, something disturbing emerges: after the first day, the vast majority of the references to baboons were either instigated by the Commission and its representatives, or made by them. Vally’s slip in Odendaal’s statement, mishearing “baboon” for “bovine”, is simply the most obvious.

Jan Lourens made the first reference to baboons, on the morning of the first day of testimony, the second day of the Hearing. That afternoon Charles van Remortree described baboon cages, and his wife’s reaction to them. After those two testimonies, the majority of references to baboons are initiated by Hanif Vally, or one of the Commissioners: on the second day of testimony, Johannes Koekemor was prompted by Vally’s questioning to deny that he performed “mouse flick tail tests” on baboons. That same day the baboon foetus that came to play such a large role in Basson’s testimony was introduced, by Chaskalson, Vally’ stand-in. That afternoon, Vally misheard Mike Odendaal’s description of “bovine embryos” as “baboon embryos”, and then went on to quiz Odendaal about the content of his experiments: : “ . . . these experiments were done

on the premises? . . . With baboons?” “And you tested these on primates such as baboons?” And all the baboons and dogs and chimpanzees . . . where [sic] they never used on those animals?” The answers, as you will remember, were all negative. Baboons seem to be on the Commission’s brains at this stage of the testimony -- baboons are projected onto mice and cows, simply, it seems, because both involve animal experimentation. The pattern continues.

When the cross-examination of Schalk van Rensburg, the scientist directly involved in the testing of fertility “vaccines” on baboons, took place, no reference to baboons was initiated by the attorneys defending the other named scientists. The reference to baboons in this context was initiated by van Rensburg, himself.

And finally, to return to the interrogation of Wouter Basson, the Commissioners exhibited an extreme fascination with this single baboon foetus that was supposedly given to Basson days before a similar (possibly the same) foetus was hung outside Archbishop Tutu’s residence. Basson kept changing the subject away from the baboon foetus, and the Commission and Vally kept pushing him back towards it. Finally they got the answer they were looking for: Basson “threw them away in the garbage bins”.

The pattern is not perfect, of course, several of the intervening references to baboons are initiated by witness: van Rensburg and Adriaan Goosen, in particular. Nonetheless the fact that the Commission and its representative, Hanif Vally, both used the image of the baboon so overwhelmingly and so often is a cause for concern. We have attempted to establish that the use of the image of baboons in the rhetoric of the scientists implicated in Project Coast is as a stand-in for human beings and, more particularly, black-skinned humans. This certainly seems to be the context in each of their statements.

Can we extend this to the statements of the Commissioners and their representatives?

And what are the implications of this extension?

The first question is relatively clear in the documents: we have to extend the substitutive force of the baboon onto the rhetoric of the Commission, and Vally in particular. When Vally questions Lourens about the restraining chair: “And the restraining chair was used for these animals in the gas chamber as far as you're aware?” and thus prompts Lourens’s reply: “The restraint chair was used for the baboons”, he is not simply asking for a clarification, but exposing an area of possible confusion: the chair could easily be used for human bodies, from its description, its use, and its purpose. And so it must be established, within his questioning, that the baboons placed in this chair could have been humans.

And when Vally asks his list of questions about Odendaal’s animal experiments, asking him after every description of an experiment if he had carried it out on baboons, he has clearly internalised the substitutive metaphor. It is necessary to establish, in the eyes of the Commission, that these experiments took place on baboons because baboons are stand-ins for humans. Experiments conducted on rats do not have the immediacy, for the purpose of the Truth Commission’s collection of evidence, as those conducted on baboons.

And so baboons are the only animals mentioned in the Truth Commission’s final report on the Chemical and Biological Warfare Hearing. The baboon foetus is used as a form of proof, proof that there was collusion between the activities of the scientists in Project Coast and the violence of the operative of the CCB in the late 1980s and early 1990s. There is nothing in the evidence as presented to the Commission, and as outlined

in my narrative statement above, that explains this strong statement: but the metaphoric substitution of baboons for black-skinned human beings that invades and completes the rhetoric of the Truth Commission does go some ways to explaining why this coincidence was seen as so important, and so damning.

7. There is another side to the presence of this rhetoric within the language of the Truth Commission, one that needs to be made explicit before I draw any conclusions about the meaning and import of this disturbing fluidity of metaphor: and that is the ways in which the image of the substitutive baboons were used to deny that the scientists were involved in racially-based research.

Adriaan Goosen testified to the presence of baboons on the premises of the Roodeplaat Research Laboratory and then to his (and his wife's) revulsion at their maltreatment. He framed his visit to the facilities in such a way as to highlight not what he was doing there, not why he was invited, nor even how often he visited the facilities, but rather in terms of a casual visit -- with his wife, on the weekend -- where he was confronted with his own disgust at the treatment of baboons. He then left, according to his narrative, untainted by the treatment meted out to these animals. It seems clear that his testimony manipulates the substitution of baboons for humans that ran through the Truth Commission's hearing in such a way as to absolve himself from complicity in the experiments he witnessed. He was not the only one.

Wouter Basson also attempted, with less success, to make use of this same strategy when he was being pushed to state whether or not he received the baboon foetus Immelman had testified that he had, and whether or not that foetus had found its way to

Cape Town, and the Archbishop's residence. Basson said, in his eventual response, "this is an insult to me and Bishop Tutu, to postulate that I could think that something like that would have any influence on Bishop Tutu, except to fill him with contempt . . ." He is clearly aware of the significance being placed upon the baboon foetus by the Commission, and is attempting to bypass it by hinting at the unspoken metaphoric substitution of baboons for black-skinned humans and attempting to make it unsayable. It did not work, however, and the Commission continued to push, and so Basson resorted to a cruder, more visceral, denial of the substitutive use of baboons by using a reductive view of primates not as almost-humans, but as natural resources: like a "medium rare steak" thrown onto the garbage.

Both these individuals were aware of the power of the baboon metaphor that was circulating not only through the corridors of Project Coast's laboratories, but also through the spaces of the Truth Commission's Special Hearing into the Chemical and Biological Warfare Programme. They both attempted, with differing degrees of success, to manipulate this, in such a way as to distance themselves from the rumours of racially-based experiments, and from the connection between the scientific work done under Project Coast and the violent activities of the CCB (the connection drawn by the Truth Commission itself); they were both aware of this potential, and so we must also assume that the Commission was aware of the metaphor's potential, and used it.

8. But how? And why? What purpose could there have been in the Commission's adoption of a racially- and sexually-hierarchised mode of thinking? Why accept, and promote, the metaphoric substitution of baboons for black-skinned humans?

I can only speculate, and in my speculation two possible complementary answers have arisen. I can prove neither one of these, but I can observe them both operating in my own work, and believe that they may shed some light on the Commission's operation.

The first speculation revolves around the role of race in South African discourse, in general, and in the Truth Commission in particular. I would say that the categories of race-thinking are so common in our everyday discourse, newspapers, television reports, and self-important punditry, that they tend to be invisible. Like the almost invisible racialisation of baboons in the Truth Commission, we are used to thinking in terms of race. "European culture for centuries," Haraway writes, "questioned the humanity of peoples of color and assimilated them to the monkeys and apes in jokes, medicine, religious art, sexual beliefs, and zoology."¹⁴ How much more true is that for contemporary South Africa, still struggling with a more recent and more explicit history of similar cultural reduction and substitution? So, in this explanation, the ease with which the metaphor of baboons as substitutes for black-skinned humans crosses from the scientists to the Commissioners is partly the force of habit, partly laziness.

The second speculation revolves around the function of this metaphor in the Truth Commission's rhetoric. It is used to prove the racism of the scientific work of Project Coast; it is used to link the sterile halls of laboratories with the violent atrocities of the CCB, and to imply that the two are the same. Certainly, this is the image that has been picked up by the press and public opinion when they (we) label Basson "Dr Death" or "Dr Evil", or when headlines scream "SHOCKING DETAILS OF SADF'S POISON PROGRAMME REVEALED TO THE TRC".¹⁵ It is also the image I have naively

¹⁴ Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 154.

¹⁵ SAPA -- 09 June 1998.

assumed to be true in the first half of this paper, and in much of my preparatory work for my thesis.

The interrogatory nature of almost all the evidence of the Chemical and Biological Warfare programme almost inevitably constrains the range of possible conclusions that can be drawn from them; but the closeness of this set of ideas, the almost-invisibility of many of our own assumptions about race, and the almost-inevitable moral condemnation of the fruits of these researches that I share with the Commission make these constraints less obvious, and more binding than most. And perhaps that is the reason for the adoption of the implicit language of race and hierarchy inherent in the metaphorical substitution of baboons for black-skinned humans by the Commission.

Because the evidence against Basson and Project Coast is so slim, so shaky, and so constrained by the requirements of State Security, the Commission appears to rely upon the shared metaphoric force of the substitution of baboons for humans to condemn the Chemical and Biological Warfare programme. It was, after all, the slim evidence (essentially a meaningful coincidence) that the two baboon foetuses described in the Commission's hearings were the same that allowed the Commission to link Project Coast and the CCB in the Final Report. It was this substitutive metaphor that Vally used to establish the aims of the animal testing; it was this metaphor that Basson tried to avoid. It is this metaphor that underlies the reporting of the hearing, and it is this metaphor that underlies the vast remainder of the hearing's interrogation of the scientists of Project Coast. Because without it, there is little proof to suggest that what happened under Project Coast was any more significant, or any more successful, than any other government-funded research initiative.

This certainly underlies part of my focus on baboons and their metaphoric significance and, I believe, goes a long way to explain the Truth Commission's focus on them in the hearing. But where does that leave us?

9. And here, at the end of this paper, I want to return to the first reason I gave for my own focus on baboons, not just the metaphoric power, but because the use to which they were put in these experiments is not unusual, not exceptional, not "weird science". Because it is in this normality that I believe it is necessary to locate any further study of the Chemical and Biological Warfare programme, and not in its seemingly-obvious atrocities. If there is one thing that I want to have shown in this paper it is that the obviousness of the general condemnation of Project Coast's activities is over-determined and suspect. It is based on a shaky evidentiary ground, and a series of powerful, pervasive and almost-invisible metaphors of race and hierarchy. And yet, still, the study of it is vital, and urgent, if we are to understand not only how science in the late Apartheid era operated, but also how our contemporary perspective on the period is being shaped now, by the Truth Commission, the judiciary, and our own easy assumptions about the past.