

the struggle against apartheid also provide an alternative viewpoint to the obsession of many researchers and scholars with the ideological impact of Soviet support on the ANC's strategy and tactics. The Zambian government never allowed the ANC to establish military camps within its borders, and the urban life-style of Lusaka and relative openness of Zambian society are some of the factors that, in Macmillan's view, made the ANC's experience in this country distinctive from that in others. The author argues that ultimately this legacy was on the whole a positive one, as its 'most obvious features ... from Zambia anyway, were not so much secrecy, paranoia or ferocious discipline, as caution, moderation and scepticism about utopian experiments' (p. 291).

One of the key contributions of *The Lusaka Years* is that it problematizes the notion of exile, which has tended to be treated as 'an abstract and timeless space' (p. 8) in much of the literature on the liberation struggle. By locating the story of the ANC in exile in the Zambian context, Macmillan shows that there was no single culture of exile but rather a multiplicity of experiences that need to be understood as specific to both time and place. More situated studies of this kind are needed if we are to understand this period in the history of the ANC in all of its complexity and its present significance.

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IRINA FILATOVA and APOLLON DAVIDSON, *The Hidden Thread: Russia and South Africa in the Soviet era*. Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers (pb £21.50 – 978 1 86842 499 3). 2013, 568 pp.

Every year, dozens of books on the history of South Africa are published worldwide. Many of them are concerned with foreign influence on the origins and development of the country's state structure, politics and culture. Great Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Portugal and China immediately come to mind. Yet few people know what a huge role one other country – the Soviet Union – played in the events that make up the history of South Africa in the twentieth century. Irina Filatova and Apollon Davidson's book *The Hidden Thread: Russia and South Africa in the Soviet era* opens hitherto unknown pages documenting the relations between South Africa and Soviet Russia and offers the reader a fresh look at the recent history of these countries.

Filatova and Davidson have studied the history of South Africa for many years and have produced many books on this subject both in Russian and in English. Among these are the two-volume *South Africa and the Communist International: a documentary history*, and two recently published books in Russian: *Russia and South Africa: three centuries of contacts* (2010) and *Russia and South Africa: building bridges* (2012). Their most recent book is a unique study of the history of ties between South Africa and Russia. It starts in the seventeenth century, with the first mention of 'Moscovy' in the journal of Jan van Riebeeck, the founder of the Cape Colony, and ends in the twenty-first century,

when South Africa and Russia both became members of the BRICS countries. But, of course, as is indicated by the title, the authors pay special attention to the Soviet era – from the 1917 revolution to the break-up of the USSR. Despite the fact that for most of this period there were no diplomatic relations between the two countries, it was during this time, the authors tell us, that Russia's influence on South Africa was most significant. It is not really surprising, since the Soviet Union was right at the centre of the struggle against apartheid.

The early chapters of the book describe the reactions of South African communists to the Russian revolution. In the Soviet ideals of equality between classes, nations and races, many of them saw an ideology that was the exact opposite of the official principles of their government. On the basis of unique archival material that has only recently become available to researchers, Davidson and Filatova recount the unlikely history of the activities of the Communist International in South Africa. It will be a revelation for many readers to find out that the Communist Party of South Africa (predecessor of the present South African Communist Party) was in fact a branch of the Comintern.

The authors pay much attention to the huge and wide-ranging influence of the Soviet Union on the ANC. The official policy of the ANC and the views of many of its leaders were connected with, and even based on, Soviet ideology to a great extent. Without downplaying the ideological side of the relationship between the ANC and the USSR, the authors stress the fact that the decisive element in this relationship was Soviet military support for the ANC's armed struggle. The ANC's methods of waging guerrilla war, its organization and propaganda, particularly in the 1980s, were in many ways modelled on the course in military combat work that thousands of ANC fighters were taught in the Soviet Union or in Angola by Soviet military advisers. Without this influence, the kind of armed struggle that was waged in South Africa in the late 1980s would have been impossible, and the ANC would not have been able to create its image of being the main, if not the only, organization fighting apartheid inside the country.

Historians have long disputed whether Nelson Mandela was a member of the SACP. The authors here demonstrate that Mandela was not only a member but was also on the central committee that took the decision to begin the guerrilla war. Another surprising discovery is the direct link between the Soviet KGB and South Africa's National Intelligence Service (NIS). This led to a visit by two Soviet intelligence officers to South Africa in 1987. The NIS hosted the visit and organized the Russians' meeting with P. W. Botha. This revelation comes from several former NIS officials, whom the authors were able to interview.

From the late 1980s, the Soviet partnership with the ANC came under stress. Many among the Soviet elite began to lean towards establishing relations with the National Party, which caused unease in the ANC. The final chapters of the book are devoted to political and diplomatic relations between South Africa and Russia in the 1990s and 2000s. The authors also discuss the reasons for the negligible trade between the two countries and their slowly developing economic ties. They also throw some light on Russian-associated crime in South Africa, which will doubtless be of interest to many readers.

The Hidden Thread will undoubtedly give rise to arguments. This applies both to the facts quoted by the authors and to the interpretation they offer. Readers may disagree with their judgements on the Soviet role in South Africa's twentieth-century history; the events described in the book are recent and people still feel

passionately about them. Many archives in Russia and South Africa remain closed to this day, so there is still room for re-evaluation. But, for now, Filatova and Davidson's remarkable study is unique in both its depth and scope and is bound to remain so for a long while.

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