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Uncovering North Korean forced labour in Africa : towards a research framework

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PEOPLE FOR PROFIT
north korean forced labour on a global scale
edited by
REMCO E. BREUKER and IMKE B.L.H. VAN GARDINGEN

PEOPLE FOR PROFIT

People for Profit

North Korean Forced Labour on a Global Scale

Edited by
Remco E. Breuker & Imke B.L.H. van Gardingen

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Edited by Remco E. Breuker and Imke B.L.H. van Gardingen

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CHAPTER IV

Uncovering North Korean Forced Labour in Africa: Towards a Research Framework

Tycho A. van der Hoog

Introduction

On the gently sloping shores of Dakar, where the red Senegalese earth and the blue Atlantic Ocean meet, stands the imposing African Renaissance Monument. Standing nearly fifty metres high, the bronze statue depicts a man, a woman, and a baby draped in simple cloth, emerging from a mountain top. Officially opened in 2010, the monument celebrates not only half a century of Senegalese independence from France, but a new era of African renaissance. At the same time, the monument is a compelling, yet controversial testimony to the fact that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has been active in the continent for decades. The African Renaissance Monument was built by Mansudae Overseas Projects (MOP), a company owned by the North Korean regime, using forced labour. The project signals a wider development within the continent.

Indeed, the footprints of North Korean influence can be found all over Africa, most clearly in the form of monuments, museums, and government buildings constructed using forced labour. Such prominent projects, which are potent symbols of African nationalism, simultaneously adopt the socialist-realist visual style that is predominant in Pyongyang, the DPRK capital. It makes them highly recognisable markers. Less visible, however, is the forced labour that precedes the joyful opening of a new monument, museum, or government building. The research team's previous report highlighted the case of North Korean forced labour in Europe; now it is time to uncover similar practices in Africa.[1]

1) Remco E. Breuker and Imke B.L.H. van Gardingen, eds., *Slaves to the System, North Korean Forced Labour in the European Union: The Polish Case* (Leiden: LeidenAsiaCentre Press, 2016).

Figure 1: The African Renaissance Monument, Wikimedia Commons.

Since the scrutiny of North Korean forced labour in Africa is at an early stage, the main purpose of this chapter is to sketch a framework for future research. First, it is vital to understand the historical context of North Korean activities in Africa. The seeds of the fruitful cooperation between the DPRK and African countries were sown during the liberation struggles that raged across the continent between the 1960s and 1990s. The subsequent section focuses on a single case study, namely Zimbabwe, to highlight this relationship. Finally, the foundations for a research framework are laid out in the third part, with special attention to methodology and sources. A number of preliminary findings serve as a conclusion.

North Korea in Africa

The roots of DPRK-Africa relations are worth exploring, because the historical context shapes these contemporary connections. In the aftermath of World War II, Africa decolonised rapidly and increasingly became the stage for the emerging Cold War. Meanwhile, the Korean War of 1950-1953 permanently divided South and North Korea, leaving both nations to venture into the world, competing in a quest for new alliances. The DPRK supported various African nationalist movements in their fight for autonomy through political support, military cooperation and establishing economic ties. In many cases, these movements now form the governments of today's independent nations.[2]

2) The transformation of (armed) liberation movements into political parties in Africa has significantly influenced cotemporary political culture. In many African countries, the liberation movements of the pre-independence era continue to dominate the national government until today. Henning Melber wrote extensively on this issue regarding the case of southern Africa. See Henning Melber, 'Southern African Liberation Movements as Governments and the Limits to Liberation', *Review of African Political Economy* 36: 121 (2009): 451-459.

There are three possible reasons for DPRK support for African nationalist movements. First, it can be seen as an investment in the future. When these movements were able to achieve their goal of an independent state, it also meant a North Korean ally taking a seat at the international table of nation states. This also brought new export markets for weapons, technology, training services, and construction opportunities. Consequently, North Korea's international position was strengthened, especially from the viewpoint of inter-Korean competition. Secondly, these efforts were compatible with DPRK foreign policy. North Korea's ambitions for a reunified Korean peninsula, removal of US forces from the territory, state recognition, and economic goals 'were more likely to be achieved with the broadest possible international support', according to Andrea Berger.[3] In addition, African independence movements and North Korea were united by their anti-imperialist struggle and shared socialist ideals.[4] Clearly, there is an ideological dimension to these forms of aid.

Thirdly, the strengthening of bilateral relations bolsters the domestic propaganda of the North Korean regime. Official North Korean news reports regularly showcase the long-standing ties with the African continent. Clearly, these international links are important to the campaign that propagandises the Kim dynasty. Reports recount how Kim Ilsŏng taught and inspired the African peoples to break the shackles of colonialism and white settler rule. State-owned media feature events in Algeria, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Namibia, Angola, Egypt, Togo, Tanzania, Guinea, Benin, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Zambia, Burkina Faso, the Seychelles, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, and Senegal. Recurring themes include the meetings between African leaders and Kim Ilsŏng and the military assistance, inspiration, and guidance offered during the struggles for independence.[5]

Information on DPRK-African relations is readily available through an eclectic mix of United Nations reports, journal articles and books, news reports, (African) archival sources and working papers of think tanks, NGOs, etc. A comprehensive and continental overview (purely focusing on African affairs) is, however, not yet available. Therefore, efforts are being made to establish an open access database on bilateral relations between African countries and North Korea. The database will cover three categories: diplomatic ties, military cooperation, and construction work executed by North Korean forced labourers. The database is currently in development and hosted by the African Studies Centre Leiden. Below, a preamble is provided for each category. Details can be found on www.northkoreainafrica.com.[6]

3) Andrea Berger, *Target markets: North Korea's military customers in the sanctions era* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 13.

4) Ibid., 13-14.

5) 'Immortal contributions to the African countries' struggle for national liberation and society building', *Pyongyang Times*, 18 April 2017, accessed 18 April 2017, https://kcnawatch.co/newstream/1492517111-357917519/immortal-contributions-to-the-african-countries%E2%80%99-struggle-for-national-liberation-and-society-building/; and 'Kim Il Sung's Feats for Human Cause of Independence Praised by World Progressives', *KCNA*, 5 July 2017, accessed 5 July 2017, https://kcnawatch.co/newstream/1499256165-675574310/kim-il-sung-s-feats-for-human-cause-of-independence-praised-by-world-progressives/. The database 'KCNA Watch' contains hundreds of articles related to Africa.

6) I particularly want to thank Harro Westra for his invaluable contribution to the development of the database. The database is currently closed, but it will become open access in due time. If you have any suggestions, or if you are interested in accessing the database in its early stage, please send an e-mail to the contact address listed on www.

Diplomatic ties

North Korea has friends all over Africa. Several of the most valuable bilateral ties were established during the various independence struggles in Africa of the second half of the twentieth century, when North Korea was in competition with South Korea for international recognition. Although many friendships are maintained to this day, it is crucial to recognise the contextual differences in time and space. During the second half of the twentieth century, the DPRK was a different state than the 'rogue, enemy state' of today. It is worth remembering that it was only in the 1990s that the DPRK system collapsed and a large-scale famine occurred. The first sanctions against the country were introduced in 2006, after the regime showcased its nuclear ambitions. The situation in the 1960s, when most relations with African nations began, was quite different.

Based on the available evidence, it can be assumed that around 25 African countries have maintained ties with the DPRK. Ordinarily, diplomatic relations were established shortly after independence of the respective African countries. However, the origins can often be found in the pre-independence foreign policies of the African nationalist movements fighting for autonomy. This chapter is therefore a plea for the introduction of African agency in the Cold War histories of the continent. Visits by African leaders to North Korea have played a significant role in fostering diplomatic ties. The DPRK developed an 'invitation diplomacy' whereby African leaders were regularly invited to Pyongyang.[7] In many cases, these African leaders were not yet independent government officials and still acted as agents

Figure 2: Sam Nujoma receives a medal of Kim Ilsŏng, Pyongyang, 1986.
Photo courtesy of the National Archives of Namibia, number 13955.

northkoreainafrica.com.

7) Sang-Seek Park, 'Africa and two Koreas: a study of African non–alignment', *African Studies Review* 21, no. 1 (1978), 73-88.

of their respective liberation movements. Nonetheless, they received a warm welcome in Pyongyang as esteemed statesmen-in-waiting. Banquets, speeches, and tours around the capital were often part of the programme and must have left a lasting impression.

Several presidents of the first generation of independent African leaders were known to have visited Pyongyang prior to and after achieving national autonomy. A fitting example is Sam Nujoma, who visited Pyongyang several times in the 1980s in his capacity as president of the South West Africa's People's Organization (SWAPO), the most visible protagonist of Namibia's independence struggle. Nujoma was accompanied by several high-ranking SWAPO members, and on one particular occasion even received a prestigious medal from Kim Ilsŏng.[8] A few years later, in 1990, Nujoma became the first president of an independent Namibia and awarded several large-scale construction projects to the North Korean company Mansudae Overseas Projects.

Seretse Khama, the first president of Botswana, is an example of a political figure who visited Pyongyang after his country became independent in 1966. Khama travelled to North Korea in 1976 (ten years after the establishment of diplomatic ties) and reportedly shocked his Asian counterparts with a provocative posture during a game of pool.[9] In other cases, successive leaders of the same country have nurtured diplomatic ties with Pyongyang. Illustrative is the Democratic Republic of Congo. Mobutu Sese Seko (the then president of Zaire, as DR Congo was named) visited North Korea in 1974. Afterwards, his rhetoric became surprisingly similar to that of the DPRK.[10] The subsequent leaders of DR Congo, even though they were rivals of Mobutu, also maintained warm diplomatic relations, expressed in the form of military cooperation and construction work involving DPRK forced labour. It shows that despite successive regime/leadership changes, the ties with North Korea remain close. The same can be observed in other countries.

As a result, North Korea has close connections to those in power in many African countries. Often, the first generation of independent African leaders held office for a long time, in some cases several decades. This has formed a solid basis for subsequent diplomatic initiatives, such as embassies, political support from international bodies such as the United Nations and aid projects. However, the two most important money-making instruments are military cooperation and the export of forced labour.

Military cooperation

Similarly, the origins of North Korea's military activity in Africa lie within the decolonisation of the continent. Berger argues that before 1990, military exports formed an important part of North Korea's foreign policy strategy. It was willing to gift or sell discounted weapons to state and non-state customers all over the world, including 'revolutionary groups across

8) Tycho A. van der Hoog, 'North Korean monuments in southern Africa: legitimizing party rule through the National Heroes' Acres of Zimbabwe and Namibia', (MA thesis, Leiden University, 2017).

9) Robert Rotberg, *Transformative political leadership: making a difference in the developing world* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 86.

10) Berger, *Target Markets*, 85.

Africa.'[11] Indeed, many liberation movements in Africa benefited from North Korean-made weaponry. SWAPO in Namibia, the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), and other liberation movements received weaponry and training.[12] The decades of decolonisation were, in the words of Berger, the 'golden era' of North Korea's arms trade.[13] Assistance was often free of costs or sold at friendly rates.[14]

With the end of the Cold War, North Korea's golden age for weapons export came to an end. However, a new market opportunity, namely selling its expertise with regard to repairing outdated weapon systems, brought new impetus. For instance, the Republic of Congo and Ethiopia bought spare parts for tanks made in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.[15] Pyongyang has few competitors in the market for its aged, communist-bloc weaponry.[16] In a similar vein, Pyongyang assists African countries, including Madagascar, Ethiopia, DRC, Namibia,[17] and possibly Uganda,[18] with establishing plants to produce small arms, light weapons, and artillery.

In Egypt, Syria, and Libya, factories for the production of short-range ballistic missiles were developed with North Korean assistance.[19] Between 2008-2009, the Republic of Congo received repair services from Pyongyang for tanks, armoured vehicles, and rocket launchers. It is believed that the contacts were established through the regional offices of the Korea Mining and Development Trading Cooperation (KOMID, see the third part of this chapter for more information on this company). Similar practices occurred in Tanzania in 2013 and Eritrea in 2011.[20] In addition, Libya and Egypt aid North Korea in the sourcing of products that support its military projects. In 2003, the Wall Street Journal reported how two people brokered supplies for North Korea with a value of around 10 million USD, which was billed to a military factory in Egypt.[21]

Another interesting aspect of these multifaceted military collaborations is the training of African soldiers and policemen by North Korean instructors. Officers from the Korean People's Army have trained forces in Syria, Egypt, Madagascar Libya, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Benin, Nigeria, DRC, Mozambique, the Seychelles, and Namibia. This is public knowledge: (former) African presidents (such as Robert Mugabe from Zimbabwe and Yoweri Museveni from Uganda) have openly praised North Korea's help. Training courses included combat operations, aircraft, small arms and tanks procedures, 'leadership protection' and 'homeland security', intelligence operations, reconnaissance, and unarmed combat.[22]

11) Ibid., 4.
12) van der Hoog, 'North Korean monuments'; and Berger, *Target Markets*, 85.
13) Berger, *Target Markets*, 33.
14) Ibid., 51.
15) Ibid., 44.
16) Ibid., 53.
17) van der Hoog, 'North Korean monuments'.
18) Berger, *Target Markets*, 45.
19) Ibid., 45.
20) Ibid., 131-137.
21) Ibid., 50.
22) Ibid., 47-49; and van der Hoog, 'North Korean monuments'.

It is clear that this kind of collaboration, which often started decades ago, retains its significance today. Since the 1970s, successive Ugandan leaders have sought North Korean help with training of military personnel; weapons sales and repair; the construction of an ammunition, firearms, and landmines factory; and the construction of housing. This is similar to the situation in the DRC, where successive regimes have maintained ties with North Korea. Despite heavy international pressure, most notably from the United States, Uganda also maintains warm diplomatic relations. As late as 2015, North Korea was training a new cadre of 400 Ugandan police officers.[23] North Korea deployed hundreds of military advisers to Ethiopia, who contributed training and supervision to troops fighting in the war against Somalia (1977-1978). Ethiopia also received battle tanks, artillery, and other weapons. In the 1980s, North Korea helped with the construction of two weapons factories. Indeed, it is suspected that North Korea has been active in Ethiopia until quite recently.[24]

Berger points out that 'the number of North Korean clients – regardless of the value of their custom – is therefore a significant metric of success for the sanctions regime as well.'[25] Despite the sanctions regime, 'a host of countries continue to find North Korea an attractive partner.'[26] Military projects are a prime example of bilateral ties between African

Figure 3:The Statue of the Unknown Soldier of the National Heroes' Acre of Namibia, built by Mansudae Overseas Projects.
The statue closely resembles the Namibian leader Sam Nujoma. Photo by author.

23) Berger, *Target Markets*, 80-85.
24) Ibid., 114–122.
25) Ibid., 3.
26) Ibid., 4.

countries and the DPRK. In some cases, military projects are coupled with construction projects and it becomes more difficult to make a distinction between the two, as the example below, about the construction of a new ammunitions factory, illustrates.

Construction work

Around 20 African governmental buildings have been attributed to Mansudae Overseas Projects, an international subdivision of the Mansudae Art Studio, which is an art institute in Pyongyang, founded in 1959, and controlled by the North Korean government. The sheer size and importance of Mansudae cannot be underestimated. Reportedly, the institute employs around 3,700 employees and is responsible for almost the entire memorial landscape of Pyongyang, including landmarks such as the Tower of the Juche Idea, the Arch of Triumph, and the Mansu Hill.[27]

At least 15 African countries have awarded contracts to Mansudae. The resulting nationalist constructions have caught the local public's attention. Angola, for example, commissioned the Memorial Tower, the Peace Park, and the Praia Park statues. Benin ordered the Statue of Béhanzin, a former king. Botswana contracted Mansudae to construct the Three Dikgosi Monument for its capital Gaborone. The Republic of Congo commissioned the Monument of Independence and a Statue of the President, while the Democratic Republic of Congo ordered a Statue of Patrice Lumumba and a Statue of Laurent Kabila, two leaders of contemporary Congo. In Equatorial Guinea, Mansudae built a stadium and conference hall. In Ethiopia, the company constructed the Tiglachin Monument, a memorial to Ethiopian and Cuban soldiers involved in the Ogaden War. The company also made the Bronze of General Abdoulaye Soumaré that stands in the Malian capital, Bamako. Visitors to Mozambique can find the Samora Machel Statue, a tribute to the country's first president. Madagascar constructed various government buildings with the help of North Korea. In Namibia, Mansudae built the National Heroes' Acre, the State House, the Independence Memorial Museum and the Military Museum. And in Senegal, the company was commissioned for the African Renaissance Monument that is mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. Finally, in Zimbabwe one can find the National Heroes' Acre and the statue of Joshua Nkomo.[28]

This is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. The aforementioned projects are well-known and catch public attention, but research in Poland shows a myriad of North Korean businesses active in different economic sectors, most notably ship building and construction work, albeit operating largely below the radar. Given that governance in many African countries can be considered weaker than in the European Union, combined with

27) Meghan Kirkwood, 'Postindependence Architecture through North Korean Modes: Namibian Commissions of the Mansudae Overseas Project', in *A Companion to Modern African Art*, eds. Gitti Salami and Monica Visonà (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 550-551; and 'UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/273', *Pyongyang Review* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1988), 118.

28) UN Security Council, Report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 1874 (2009), S/2017/150 (27 February 2017), http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4F-F96FF9%7D/s_2017_150.pdf (accessed 22 May 2018), 44.

the historically intimate ties between Africa and the DPRK, it is highly likely that there is much more North Korean forced labour in Africa than we are currently aware of.

Case study: Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country in southern Africa that became independent in 1980 after decades of British colonialism and white settler rule.[29] It has been selected as a case study due to its historical relationship with the DPRK, which, in many ways, reflects the dynamics that characterise the ties between North Korea and African countries. It is a case that illustrates the three main domains of collaboration, namely diplomatic ties, military cooperation, and construction work.

Diplomatic visits

Like so many other cases in Africa, the roots of the cooperation between the DPRK and Zimbabwe are to be found in the decolonisation struggle. In the 1970s, the DPRK supported Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), exiled to bases in Tanzania and Mozambique.[30] The fact that a significant part of Africa's liberation struggles took place in exile emphasises the importance of taking a regional (or comparative) perspective while studying these issues, as opposed to the methodological nationalism approach that currently prevails in the humanities.[31] North Korea provided the military wing of ZANU (the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army, or ZANLA) with both firearms and military training. Indeed, one group of soldiers even received training in a camp near Pyongyang.[32]

Robert Mugabe met Kim Ilsŏng for the first time in May 1978, when he travelled to Pyongyang. Although Zimbabwe was not yet an independent country, the DPRK acknowledged Mugabe as the official leader of the country.[33] Two years later, in 1980, Zimbabwe became an independent nation. Mugabe visited Pyongyang again on 10 October 1980, this time in his official role as the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe. He received a warm welcome

29) Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Patriots, Puppets, Dissidents and the Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Contemporary Zimbabwe', *Eastern Africa Social Science Research Review* 24, no. 1 (2008), 85-95.

30) Zimbabwe's liberation struggle was quite a confusing constellation of different organisations. Mugabe and others formed the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), its military force was named the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA). Joshua Nkomo and others founded the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), its military force was named the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA). ZANU (and ZANLA) and ZAPU (and ZIPRA) fought for Zimbabwean independence, but were also rival organisations. In order to form an alliance against white minority rule, the organisations formed the Patriotic Front (PF). During the first independent election campaign of 1980, the movements competed as political parties: ZANU-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and Patriotic Front-ZAP (PF-ZAPU). Mugabe's ZANU-PF won the elections. After the Gukurahundi genocide (discussed later in this chapter), which effectively wiped out the Nkomo-led ZAPU-PF opposition), a Unity Accord was brokered in 1987, resulting in a merger. Effectively, ZAPU-PF was absorbed by ZANU-PF. ZANU-PF has ruled Zimbabwe since independence in 1980.

31) Lyong Choi and Jeong, Il-Young, 'North Korea and Zimbabwe, 1978-1982: From the Strategic Alliance to the Symbolic Comradeship between Kim Il Sung and Robert Mugabe', *Cold War History* 17, no. 4 (2017), 336; and Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, 'Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences', *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002), 301-334.

32) Choi and Il-Young, 'North Korea and Zimbabwe', 336.

33) Ibid., 337.

from Kim Ilsŏng, and, in return, 'showed appreciation to North Korean leaders for their warm-hearted support' for the liberation of Zimbabwe. During his visit, Mugabe not only joined celebrations for the 35th anniversary of the foundation of the Korean Worker's Party, he also signed the Treaties of Friendship and Cooperation and asked Kim Ilsŏng to maintain his military support for Zimbabwe.[34] The two parties reached an agreement on the form this military cooperation would take in June 1981, when the DPRK Premier Ri Chongok visited Harare.[35]

Such visits, exemplary of the DPRK's invitation-based diplomacy, have played an important role in nurturing the diplomatic relationship between the two countries. North Korea's state-run newspapers joyfully reported these exchanges, which were excellent sources of domestic propaganda. They illustrated the perceived global dissemination of North Korean ideals and the might of the DPRK leadership. In January 1981, a further symbol of mutual appreciation was established with the setting up of the *Juche* Idea Study Centre at Zimbabwe University. This testified to the mutual respect between the two countries.[36] *Juche* is DPRK's official ideology of 'self-reliance'.[37] As a sign of appreciation, and perhaps mirroring China's 'panda diplomacy', Mugabe gifted two rhinos to Kim Ilsŏng in the 1980s, named Zimbo and Zimba. Unfortunately, both animals died shortly after their relocation to North Korea. In 2010, Zimbabwe sold a number of baby elephants, zebras, giraffes, and other animals to Pyongyang Zoo.[38]

As a consequence of North Korea's involvement in ZANU's liberation struggle, when the party came to power after independence, sections of Zimbabwe's national leadership has maintained close ties with the DPRK, not least Robert Mugabe, who personally benefited from DPRK support and visited Pyongyang on several occasions. Moreover even following Mugabe's forced departure, as a result of an unexpected military-led coup in 2017, a number of powerful cabinet members have kept up their personal ties with the DPRK. Since 1 December 2017, Perence Shiri has served as the Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement. Shiri, who notoriously called himself 'Black Jesus' as a result of his ability to determine whether someone lives or dies, was the commander of the Fifth Brigade (see the subsequent paragraph for details) and an important member of the ZANU-PF establishment. As the next paragraph shows, the Fifth Brigade was trained and armed by North Korean instructors. Similar to Mugabe, Piri has personal experiences with the North Korean regime.

Military Cooperation

Perhaps the foremost example of military cooperation between North Korea and Zimbabwe is the establishment of the above-mentioned Fifth Brigade, a notorious armed force that

34) Ibid., 329, 339.
35) Ibid., 340.
36) Ibid., 330.
37) Brian Reynolds Meyers, *North Korea's Juche Myth* (Busan: Sthele Press, 2015), 2-3.
38) 'Zimbabwe Restocks Pyongyang Zoo', *North Korea Economy Watch*, 14 May 2010, accessed 31 January 2018, http://www.nkeconwatch.com/2010/05/14/zimbabwe-restocks-pyongyang-zoo/; and 'Zimbabwe: Officials Defend Sale of Animals to North Korea', *The New York Times*, 20 May 2010, accessed 31 January 2018, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/20/world/africa/20briefs-Zimbabwe.html.

was loyal to Mugabe.[39] About a hundred DPRK military advisers arrived in Zimbabwe in 1981 to train the brigade, which was destined to be a special wing of the Zimbabwe National Army. While the British military trained and oversaw other Zimbabwean brigades, Mugabe specifically requested the establishment of a separate military entity, which only answered to him and was trained and armed by the DPRK.[40]

Mugabe's rival, Joshua Nkomo, warned that Mugabe 'would use the Fifth Brigade as a private army to create a one-party state – on the North Korean model.'[41] Unfortunately, he was right. In 1983, the Fifth Brigade was deployed in a viciously violent campaign in Matabeleland, a region in the west of Zimbabwe that is home to the Ndebele ethnic group, many of whom were opposed to Mugabe. Approximately 20,000 people were massacred and there were widespread atrocities such a rape and theft. This campaign was called 'Gukurahundi' in the local Shona language, which roughly translates to 'the wind that sweeps away the chaff before the spring rains.' It wiped out virtually all opposition to Mugabe in Matabeleland, strengthening his position, which until then was mainly based in the Shona speaking regions of the country. Lyong Choi and Il-young Jeong write that 'North Korea cannot be free from criticism regarding its contribution to the genocide' arguing that ultimately 'the North Koreans simply provided the methods for Mugabe's quest.'[42] By August 1983, most North Koreans had left Zimbabwe. Only a few military advisers remained to assist in firearm and tank operations.[43] It is unclear what happened to these advisors.

Construction work

Two years after Zimbabwean independence, in 1982, the National Heroes' Acre of Zimbabwe was completed. Designed and built by the North Korean institute, Mansudae Overseas Projects, the monument functions as a burial ground for Zimbabwe's heroes, mainly from the liberation struggle. The remembrance site is located a few kilometres outside of the capital, Harare, and closely resembles a similar monument in Pyongyang. The extensive site can accommodate around 5,000 people for ceremonies and national celebrations. The monument has around 170 graves and features emotive graphic murals that recount Zimbabwe's history, bronze statues of fierce soldiers, The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and a large, black obelisk. The shape of the site resembles two AK-47s, the gun that symbolised the country's liberation struggle.[44]

A more recent example of Mansudae's involvement in Zimbabwe is the erection of the statue of Joshua Nkomo, a leading figure in the national liberation struggle and long-time rival of Robert Mugabe.[45] Originally built in 2010, it took years to find a suitable spot

39) van der Hoog, 'North Korean monuments'.

40) Choi and Il-Young, 'North Korea and Zimbabwe', 140.

41) Ibid., 67, citing Paul Moorcraft, *Mugabe's War Machine: Saving or Savaging Zimbabwe?* (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books Ltd., 2011), 101.

42) Ibid., 343.

43) Ibid., 343–344.

44) For details, see van der Hoog, 'North Korean monuments', 22–23.

45) It is rumoured that Mansudae has already built two statues of Robert Mugabe, costing around 5 million USD. Since these claims are currently unproven, they should be treated cautiously. Juwŏn Chŏng (정주원), 'N. Korea Builds Statues of Zimbabwe's President: Report', *Korea Herald*, 25 March 2014, accessed 17 June 2017, http://www.koreaher-

Figure 4: The National Heroes' Acre of Zimbabwe. Seen from above, the monument resembles the shape of two AK-47's. Photo by author.

because of opposition from Nkomo's followers. Finally, in the ultimate bitter irony, the statue has been placed in Bulawayo, in the heart of Matabeleland, where, as previously mentioned, three decades ago large sections of Nkomo's base were murdered.[46]

In conclusion, the case of Zimbabwe embodies the three major facets of typical DPRK-African relations, i.e. a warm friendship, originating from the nationalist struggles for autonomy, and includes diplomatic exchanges; the training of military personnel; and the construction of monuments such as the National Heroes' Acre and the Statue of Joshua Nkomo. Even after the historical power transition of 2017, almost four decades after Zimbabwean independence, influential government figures with personal connections to the DPRK remain in power. Whether, and to what extent, forced labour is involved, is unclear and requires further research. The next section therefore explores ideas about how the phenomenon of forced DPRK labourers in Africa can be investigated.

Investigating forced labour in Africa

The primary task for scholars is to reveal the intricate business networks that facilitate North Korean forced labour in Africa. Two major companies emerge as key players in this regard.

ald.com/ view.php?ud=20140325000587&ACE_SEARCH=1; and 'Zimbabwe Signs $5m Contracts with DPRK for Statue and Museum', *North Korean Economy Watch*, 25 March 2014, accessed 31 January 2018, http://www.nkeconwatch.com/2014/03/12/zimbabwe-signs-5m-contracts-with-dprk-for-statue-and-museum/.

46) Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Wendy Williams, 'Reinvoking the Past in the Present: Changing Identities and Appropriations of Joshua Nkomo in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe', *African Identities* 8, no. 3 (2010), 181-208.

Firstly, Mansudae Overseas Projects, which, as we have seen, is relatively well-known for its monuments, museums, statues, government buildings, and other constructions throughout Africa. Secondly, the name of KOMID regularly appears in United Nations Panel of Expert reports. The panel believes that KOMID has offices in Uganda and Namibia and that Namibia is responsible for 'marketing North Korean arms and related services in southern Africa.'[47] KOMID is directed by the Second Economic Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea.[48]

The biggest challenge, however, relates to identifying and analysing the myriad of smaller companies that operate on the African continent. According to Berger, contact with African governments and businesses are made using North Korean state-owned enterprises, who often conceal their dealings using a range of brass-plate companies.[49] This makes it very difficult to identify them. DPRK companies notoriously change names and have complex paper trails. Often, the companies are assisted by embassy staff.[50] In such cases, we see hybrid forms of government-assisted companies and it becomes impossible to make a clear distinction between the two.

In terms of methodology, DPRK forced labour in Africa offers a challenging new prospect. Research on relations between North Korea and Africa is in its infancy, with a small number of published papers in the last few years, while research on the issue of forced labour is virtually non-existent. Interestingly, most research focuses on national case studies. This chapter argues for taking a comparative and regional approach, especially in the case of Africa, given that large parts of the decolonisation wars were fought in exile and contemporary North Korean companies operate from different locations.

In addition, the context of events (diplomatic actions, military deals, and construction work) is vital. There have been enormous historical changes between the golden age of Africa's independence – the period from 1945 to the 1970s – and today.[51] The independence of African countries, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the North Korean state in the 1990s, and the start of the international sanctions against the DPRK in 2006 are major milestones. Especially in the initial years following the separation of North- and South Korea, North Korea was much more developed and prosperous than the South. Moreover, it had an appealing anti-imperialist, anti-racism ideology. At this time, there were no sanctions against the DPRK. From this point of view, it is not surprising that the DPRK fostered ties with African allies. It is however interesting that, in some cases, these relations are still nurtured, despite heavy international pressure and changing conditions.

It is often said that the availability of sources is the main problem when it comes to researching North Korea. While that may be true to some extent, it ignores the fact that there are a wide variety of sources available in relation to the DPRK's activities in other

47) Berger, *Target Markets*, 60.
48) Ibid., 3.
49) Ibid., 58–60.
50) Ibid., 60.
51) Stephen Ellis, 'Africa's Wars of Liberation: Some Historiographical Reflections', in *Trajectoires de liberation en Afrique contemporaine: Hommage à Robert Buijtenhuijs*, eds. Piet Konings, Wim van Binsbergen, and Gerti Hesseling (Paris: Khartala, 2000), 73.

countries. The key to accessing these sources, however, is engaging in fieldwork. Below, a number of possible sources are discussed:

- A country's National Archives form a natural starting point for any historical research. However, it is unlikely that the state archives contain valuable information on bilateral ties with North Korea, let alone on contemporary forced labour. African archives are under severe pressure and, unfortunately, often badly maintained. In addition, ties with the DPRK are becoming increasingly pressured by other countries and international organisations, making it less likely that this kind of information is publicly available. For example, the National Archives of Namibia only holds one file on North Korea, which is not yet accessible due to legal constraints (certain files are only disclosed after 25 years).[52] It is likely, however, that some files will be released in future.[53]
- Because, in many cases, the relations between African states and the DPRK stem from North Korea's support for independence movements, it can be assumed that party archives hold much more information than state archives. Regrettably, many party archives are not accessible to the public, in some cases not even their addresses are known.
- Personal archives are much more promising than their state or party owned counterparts. Many African members of the liberation movements visited Pyongyang and recorded their memories of those days. Mose Penaani Tjitendero, a member of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), Namibia's main liberation movement, is a good example. His personal collection of books, letters, and other documents are held by the University of Namibia Archives and contain several North Korean books, a map of Pyongyang, and other interesting materials.[54] This indicates that Tjitendero visited North Korea, perhaps more than once. Ironically, he is now buried in a cemetery built by the DPRK.
- Where written documents are scarce, oral history can provide new opportunities. Interviews with African freedom fighters or defected North Korean officials can shed light on forgotten history or contemporary practices.
- News reports, especially from African media, are frequently ignored, despite containing valuable information. The main obstacle is access to the extensive but fragmented African media landscape, but digital developments offer new possibilities. The digital availability of North Korean newspapers is also increasing.

52) National Archives of Namibia (for Bilateral relations with Korea democratic people's republic of Korea; MFA 031, PE/082; accessed 17 June 2017).

53) The archives of the Republic of Korea are also worth exploring. In addition, the Wilson Center has digitalised several documents from archives all over the world, through the project: 'The Two Koreas and the Third World'. See the website: http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/146/the-two-koreas-and-the-third-world.

54) The Tjitendero Collection can be accessed at the University of Namibia Archives. An example of the archived material is: UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/273, *Pyongyang Review* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1988), 118.

- Naturally, the Chambers of Commerce in African countries will contain details on North Korean companies. Once the names of North Korean-African companies are known, the records of the local Chambers of Commerce can be consulted.
- In known cases of North Korean forced labour, the national labour inspection agencies might hold reports or other details on such practices. In the case of Poland, a labour inspection report revealed the terrible circumstances faced by North Korean forced labourers.[55]
- Names of companies or individuals associated with forced labour can be run through the Offshore Leaks Database to see if any information comes up. The database comprises data from the Panama Papers, the Offshore Leaks, the Bahamas Leaks, and Paradise Papers and covers more than 680,000 offshore companies, foundations, and trusts. It is a wealth of information awaiting scrutiny.[56]
- The public library of US diplomacy, more commonly known as the Wikileaks US Cables, amalgamate more than three million leaked diplomatic cables of the United States of America. Some cables mention DPRK activity and can lead to interesting names and trade deals.[57]
- Sanctions, either multilateral, such as those imposed by the United Nations, or bilateral, such as those of the United States, contain names of sanctioned North Korean businesses and key figures. In addition, the reports of the United Nations Panel of Experts, who monitor sanctions against the DPRK, are of great interest to researchers of North Korea. Their frequently published reports deal with several African countries in terms of military cooperation and construction work.

Conclusion

The main objective of this chapter is to provoke ideas about a framework to study North Korean forced labour in Africa, and stimulate further work in this field. A number of preliminary observations can be made: Firstly, the work of forced DPRK labourers in Africa has a different character than elsewhere (for instance, in Poland), which was researched in the previous report by the Slaves to the System project team. The North Koreans design and construct prominent government buildings, including museums, cemeteries, and monuments. This indicates that the cooperation between African states and the DPRK is not only influenced by money, but also by ideology. In other words, it is not only the bricks that are important, but the ideas that these bricks represent.

Secondly, the historical relations of the DPRK with Africa differ considerably from other places, such as Europe. The historical context of the liberation struggle has a profound influence on contemporary relations and is essential to understanding why some African countries act as a loophole in the international sanctions regime. Thirdly, it becomes clear that the financial networks of the DPRK intertwine and merge with their diplomatic networks,

55) Breuker and van Gardingen, *Slaves to the System*.

56) See 'Offshore Leaks Database', *The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists*, accessed 31 January 2018, https://offshoreleaks.icij. org/.

57) See 'Plus D: Public Library of US Diplomacy', *WikiLeaks*, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/.

resulting in hybrid entities that are especially challenging to investigate. Fourthly, we are in dire need of evidence-based researched to supplement the vague anecdotes, stereotypes, and assumptions that are prevalent in the current research field.

Fifthly, a wide array of under-utilised sources is available, a number of which are detailed in this chapter. Finally, it is highly likely that we only the tip of the iceberg of North Korean activities in Africa is visible, in the form of the public monuments built by Mansudae Overseas Projects, such as the African Renaissance Monument in Senegal, the National Heroes' Acre in Zimbabwe, and the Statue of Joshua Nkomo. It is certainly possible that DPRK labourers are involved in a range of illegal activities that occur 'under the radar'. It is our hope that these practices will be uncovered in the near future.

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