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North Korea and the liberation of Southern Africa, 1960-2020

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INTRODUCTION

COMRADES BEYOND THE COLD WAR

It was 1982 and Kim Il Sung was the centre of attention at his birthday party. The founding president of North Korea had invited his closest friends for an evening of luxury and delight. Dozens of people gathered in a large, festive hall to enjoy an abundance of gifts, exquisite food, and entertainment. Suddenly, the founding president of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, stepped forward and serenaded the Great Leader. Kaunda was a central figure of the Frontline States in Africa, a coalition of independent nations that supported Southern African liberation movements in their fight for freedom. Kim Il Sung, seated in a large chair and surrounded by half-empty glasses of wine, smiled while he listened to Kaunda's rendition of *Tiyende Pamodzi*, the legendary song of Zambia's liberation struggle. At the climax of the song, Kaunda shouted the national slogan of his country: 'One Zambia, One Nation!' And then, to Kim's great joy, he added: 'One Korea, One Nation!'¹¹ In a birthday speech, the Great Leader said he was 'deeply moved' by the support from his 'brothers and comrades-in-arms'. He vowed that this was 'the age of indendence' and that North Korea would make 'every effort to strengthen unity and solidarity among the independent forces of the world'.¹²

Kaunda stands in a long line of African visitors to Pyongyang. During the Cold War, virtually all leaders of liberation movements and governments in Southern Africa travelled to North Korea in search of support. Footage of Kaunda's 1982 journey can be found on YouTube, taped from North Korean television. The North Korean government used these visits for domestic propaganda, as it reminded the local population of their important role in global affairs.

In 2012, precisely thirty years after Kaunda's visit to Pyongyang, a busload of North Korean labourers arrived in Windhoek. They entered the capital city of Namibia to construct a museum that commemorates the history of Namibia's liberation struggle.¹³ I stumbled upon this building by accident, shortly after it opened its doors to the public, and wondered why African history was displayed through North Korean aesthetics.¹⁴ So much of Namibia's postcolonial landscape is designed by North Korea – other examples include the presidential palace, the defence headquarters, and a cemetery for national heroes – that Windhoek's city centre might as well be nicknamed Little Pyongyang.¹⁵

Namibia is a remarkable case, but far from unique. In recent years, similar-looking monuments of power have emerged in and around the former Frontline States, including in Angola, Botswana, Congo, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and other countries.¹⁶ African governments use these monuments for domestic propaganda, as it reminds their citizens of their important role in the struggle for independence.

The juxtaposition between these two events provides an intriguing contrast. An African song in North Korea and a North Korean museum in Africa – separated by thirty years' time but connected through the common theme of liberation.

This book explores North Korea's influential role in the liberation of Southern Africa and describes how African states repay this historical aid today. Specifically, it examines the question of how political elites in Southern Africa benefitted from North Korean support, from 1960 until 2020. Contrary to existing scholarship, I argue that the end of the Cold War did not terminate the fraternal ties between both parties, but merely changed the nature of the African–

¹¹ The footage is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tda0e-M76a8>.

¹² Kim 1991, p. 131-133.

¹³ Williams and Mazarire 2019.

¹⁴ Van der Hoog 2019b.

¹⁵ Van der Hoog 2023.

¹⁶ Van der Hoog 2019a.

North Korean alliance. Hence, African and North Korean elites remain comrades beyond the Cold War.

A Revolutionary Alliance

The brotherhood between African and North Korean revolutionaries emerged from the ruins of World War II. The establishment of the United Nations system in 1945 marked the beginning of a new global order, which was heavily contested by two powerful developments from the outset: first, the ideological competition between the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc, and second, the campaigns for self-determination that led to the emancipation of new nation states. The Cold War and decolonisation were two major tectonic plates that shifted global politics – and Southern Africa was a region heavily impacted by the ensuing ruptures.

While, in the 1960s, most of the African continent was liberated from colonialism, Southern Africa remained largely under the yoke of colonial and settler governments.¹⁷ National liberation movements led the resistance against white minority rule, but these organizations were heavily repressed and pushed into exile, often in the Frontline States. The region was only fully liberated when the first democratic elections in South Africa were held, in 1994. Until then, dozens of liberation movements negotiated and fought for freedom.

Julius Nyerere, the founding president of Tanzania, identified two routes to independence for African liberation movements. Like Zambia, Tanzania was a Frontline State that harboured exiled revolutionaries from neighbouring countries.¹⁸ Nyerere's nickname was *Mwalimu*, a Swahili word for teacher, and the words of this towering figure in the struggle for freedom carried weight. The teacher instructed African nationalists that majority rule could either be obtained from 'a conference or out of a battlefield'.¹⁹ For both routes, diplomacy or war, African liberation movements depended on the support of international allies.²⁰

In an entirely different part of the globe, another kind of struggle was taking place in East Asia. The conclusion of World War II led to the end of Japanese colonial rule over Korea, but immediately resulted in the division of the peninsula. The Republic of Korea (South Korea) was supported by the United States and most of the Western world, while the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) was backed by Soviet Union and China.²¹ The Korean War (1950–1953) ended in a stalemate that only reinforced the original division.²² Both Koreas desired recognition as the sole legitimate government on the peninsula and therefore needed allies beyond the superpowers. This resulted in a vigorous diplomatic competition for support that spanned the entire globe, but perhaps became most intense in Africa.

The decolonisation of the African continent presented an unequalled opportunity for inter-Korean rivalry. The division of the Korean peninsula coincided with an African 'moment of seeming national possibility ... when at times new states were recognised every week'.²³ The two Koreas understood that each new African state was a potential new ally and deployed different strategies to gain a foothold in the continent. North Korea, in contrast to its southern rival, supported African liberation movements in the years before independence – and this aid arrived at a time when these movements needed it the most.

North Korea offered African liberation movements support for both paths to power identified by Nyerere: the conference and the battlefield. Through diplomacy, doctrine, and development aid, Africans and North Koreans actively sought to change the global order. In

¹⁷ Ellis 2000.

¹⁸ Roberts 2021.

¹⁹ [NAN] CCO 39/12/1/3/2.

²⁰ Alexander et al. 2017.

²¹ Wada 2013.

²² Oberdorfer and Carlin 2013.

²³ Walker 2019.

addition, North Korea armed and trained African freedom fighters in African states, particularly in the field of presidential security. This book is organised with Nyerere's words in mind, as the first part examines the diplomatic dimension and the second part discusses the military dimension of African–North Korean relations.

Conventional histories view the conclusion of the Cold War as the end of an era. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, a financial benefactor of Pyongyang, plunged North Korea into a crisis. A large-scale famine, known as the Arduous March, crushed the economic and social structures of the state.²⁴ Kim Il Sung passed away in 1994, and his successor and son, Kim Jong Il, no longer had the money to bankroll elaborate programmes in the African continent. Since 2006, North Korea has been heavily sanctioned by the United Nations. From that perspective, the end of the Cold War severely disrupted African–North Korean relations.

However, the construction of North Korean monuments all over Africa during the twenty-first century reveals that African–North Korean interactions are ongoing. By hiring North Korean art studios, African governments pay back the aid that North Korea had offered in the previous century – this contemporary connection is examined in the third part of this book. Despite the largest UN sanctions regime in history, North Korean diplomats continue to engage in a wide range of illicit activities in Africa, from selling forced labour and military hardware to the highest bidder, to smuggling gold and ivory. This historical study is therefore relevant to understanding contemporary African–North Korean relations.

The main argument of this book is that *liberation* (and not the Cold War) is the leitmotif for African–North Korean relations, as the transition from anticolonial struggles to postcolonial politics is characterised by continuity not change. My approach is based on three assumptions that underpin the analysis of this book.

First, political culture in Southern Africa transcends national boundaries, which is a legacy of the exile dimension of the struggle for liberation. Most Southern African ruling parties are rooted in anticolonial movements that operated in a regional system of politics. In that sense, this book builds upon the work of Jan-Bart Gewald, who argues that Southern Africa must be viewed as a single whole on account of its deep economic and social entanglements.²⁵ It is therefore imperative to view African–North Korean ties through a transnational lens, rather than maintaining the methodological convention of using bilateral case studies.

Second, we must shift our lens from states to regimes. Today, the majority of states in Southern Africa are ruled by political regimes that are rooted in liberation movements. As a general rule, when independence was finally secured, the victorious liberation movements were transformed into political parties and elected to office. Inspired by the work of Henning Melber, this book conceptualises these 'liberation governments' as the main unit of analysis.²⁶ Liberation governments continue to govern Angola (MPLA), Mozambique (FRELIMO), Namibia (SWAPO), South Africa (ANC), Tanzania (CCM), and Zimbabwe (ZANU-PF), while they governed Malawi (MCP) and Zambia (UNIP) for the first thirty years of independence.²⁷ During and after the Cold War, North Korea primarily offered support to the political elites of these liberation governments. I argue that it therefore makes much more sense to analyse ZANU–North Korean relations instead of Zimbabwean–North Korean relations, and the same goes for the majority of states in Southern Africa.

²⁴ Kwon and Chung 2012, p. 162.

²⁵ Gewald 2014.

²⁶ Melber 2002

²⁷ Southall 2013.

Third, the standard periodisation of African history and the Cold War distorts a proper understanding of African–North Korean interactions. The distinction between colonial and postcolonial eras is relatively irrelevant for the study of liberation governments, which underlines Stephen Ellis’ critique of the standard periodisation of African history as artificial.²⁸ Moreover, a Cold War lens obscures the existence of contemporary African–North Korean exchanges.²⁹ In short, the liberation struggle in Southern Africa is not a thing of the past – it is very much an ongoing process. Today, African governments are under increasing internal and external opposition and use North Korean aesthetics and military expertise to legitimise and defend their enduring rule.

African Agency

During the Cold War, a burgeoning field of research was devoted to communist engagements with Africa. This scholarship was primarily motivated by the fear of a communist revolution in the rapidly decolonising African continent, which would lead to the inevitable marginalisation of the ‘Free World’. This corpus targets the big three of the Communist Bloc – China, the Soviet Union, and, to a lesser extent, Cuba. The fact that North Korea hardly features in these accounts gives the false impression that there were few North Korean–African interactions.³⁰

While there is another strand of literature that describes North Korean foreign policy during the Cold War, most studies gloss over Africa and focus instead on inter-Korean relations or general East–West rivalry.³¹ Only a handful of publications explicitly consider North Korean relations with African states.³² Published between 1978 and 1991, these authors naturally embrace a Cold War perspective.

In recent years, benefitting from the availability of new archival material, the study of North Korean foreign policy has made a revival. This line of inquiry is mainly published from the United States and is based on a number of implicit assumptions. Most of this research covers North Korea’s relations with the entire globe; it is primarily based on Western diplomatic sources; and it remains firmly rooted within a Cold War time frame. As a consequence, Africa again features little or is dealt with rather superficially.

Charles Armstrong’s landmark study on North Korea’s international relations, *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World* (2013), only devotes four pages to Africa, with a small case study of Ethiopia.³³ *Tyranny of the Weak* is no longer suitable for teaching since it was discovered that Armstrong plagiarised the work of Balazs Szalontai, and Cornell University Press has subsequently taken the book out of print.³⁴ In contrast, Benjamin Young’s *Guns, Guerrillas, and the Great Leader: North Korea and the Third World* (2021) provides a compelling and useful analysis of North Korea’s foreign policy. Yet, Young’s global scope, over-reliance on Western sources, and Cold War time frame obscures both African agency and contemporary developments in African–North Korean engagements.³⁵

A niche in the study of North Korean foreign policy is strongly related to an American-infused security paradigm of terrorism. Focused specifically on the military relations of North Korea, this body of works adopts a global scope. Alongside Asia and Latin America, the

²⁸ Ellis 2000; Ellis 2002.

²⁹ Raymond Suttner argued that also in the case of ANC history, there is a need to rethink the standard periodisation by dates. ‘History needs to be seen in a more fluid way without rigid separations between phases’. Suttner 2008, p. 17.

³⁰ Lessing 1962; Brzezinski and Dallin 1963; De Villiers et al. 1975; Greig 1977; Henriksen 1981; Gann 1983.

³¹ Koh 1969; Kwak et al. 1983; Koh 1984; Scalapino and Lee 1986; Clough 1987.

³² Park 1978; Park 1987; Owoeye 1991.

³³ Armstrong 2015.

³⁴ Myers 2015.

³⁵ Young 2021a.

examination of North Korea's military export regularly features the African continent.³⁶ However, North Korean motives are, again, central to such analyses. The fact that a landmark study repeatedly describes the leader of Mozambique as 'President Michael' instead of President Machel does not inspire much confidence in the ability of this subfield to grasp local African contexts.³⁷

In addition, North Korea's contemporary involvement in Africa has led to the publication of several policy papers that detail its illicit engagements with the continent. In contrast to the aforementioned scholarship, which is situated in the Cold War time frame, this strand of work draws attention to the ways that North Korean diplomats today abuse their diplomatic privileges by facilitating a wide array of criminal activities.³⁸ Although these papers provide fascinating insights, they deal with the present and hardly consider the past.

The question therefore remains how the former strand of historically informed scholarship (which focuses on the Cold War) can be connected to the strand of contemporary policy analysis (which focuses on recent developments). Moreover, the study of North Korean foreign policy is obsessed by North Korean motives for cooperation. The main problem with this approach is that it ignores African agency.

Most literature of African–North Korean interactions reduces the African continent to a chessboard of geopolitics, where African nations are mere pawns in a global game for influence. According to a 1975 book about the communist influence in Africa, South Africa is a 'coveted prize for communist imperialists and their leftist collaborators' because of its strategic position. The authors literally describe South Africa as 'a key piece on the global chessboard of power'.³⁹ This is a fitting illustration of a persistent trend in which African actors are rendered voiceless. As the North Korea-centred approach dominates the scholarship of the past forty years, we know little of how African actors shape their interactions with the DPRK. It is time we reconsider this.

This book is consciously centred around African agency. Far too often, Africa's role in international relations has been viewed from the perspective of external actors, which reduces 'Africa as a supplicant actor' in global politics.⁴⁰ Solomon Dersso, for example, argues that the Cold War turned Africa into 'an object of manipulation, a theatre in which the countries in the West prosecuted their ideological and geo-strategic battles against the Soviet'.⁴¹ As such, the agency of African states and Africans has often been overlooked or diminished.⁴² 'It is high time that we approach Africa's international relations from a different perspective', argue William Brown and Sophie Harman.⁴³

The point of departure throughout this book is the question how ruling elites in Southern Africa benefitted from their connections with North Korea. In contrast to the existing body of scholarship that revolves around North Korean motives for cooperation, this book takes a different approach with regard to focus, sources, and time frame. First, instead of a broad focus of the 'Third World' or 'Global South' (or even worse, the 'Majority World'), this book zooms in on Africa, in particular the liberation governments of Southern Africa. Second, African primary source material takes centre stage. Third and last, the scope of this book consciously

³⁶ Michishita 2010; Berger 2016a; Bechtol 2018.

³⁷ Bermudez 1990.

³⁸ Du Pre et al. 2016; Rademeyer 2017; Mallory 2021; The Sentry 2020; The Sentry 2021; Ko 2022.

³⁹ De Villiers et al. 1975.

⁴⁰ Chipaike and Knowledge, 2018; Blaauw 2015; Brown 2012.

⁴¹ Dersso 2012, p. 14.

⁴² Fisher 2018.

⁴³ Brown and Harman 2013, p. 1.

cuts through the Cold War time frame and connects the past to the present. This is why the third part of this book is important: the presence of North Korean monuments in Africa signifies the continuing relevance of African–North Korean relations.

A Global Paper Trail

A transnational history requires a transnational approach. I have spent a combined total of about a year travelling across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the United States, trudging around archives and libraries. The research for this book was significantly influenced by COVID-19, which erupted at the start of my project. The pandemic forced me to complement fieldwork with alternative modes of research, including the use of digital repositories, swapping archival data with fellow researchers, and collaborating with research assistants.⁴⁴ With the help of many people, this book draws on novel declassified material from 32 different archives from four continents. These primary sources are supplemented by secondary literature, a select number of interviews, and open-source data.

The global paper trail that I doggedly pursued throughout my studies stopped at the borders of North Korea. Researchers have no chance of gaining unfettered access to people and archives in North Korea. Nevertheless, plenty of esteemed colleagues within Korean Studies travel to Pyongyang on guided tours, accompanied by government minders. Personally, I have strong moral objections to the Disneyfication of a country that maintains concentration camps. Moreover, security issues are a real risk. I saw this up close when the head of a research project on North Korean forced labour, which I participated in as a project researcher, was threatened by Kim Jong Un's regime.⁴⁵ For foreigner visitors, the problem is not so much entering Pyongyang, but leaving Pyongyang – on your own accord.

Nevertheless, the refusal to travel to North Korea does not necessarily mean that academic research is impossible. The absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence. Most notably, interviewing North Korean exiles and utilising open-source data can yield tremendous insights and compensates for a lack of engagement with the North Korean state. The remainder of this section discusses three categories of source material and three related limitations of my research.

The first pillar of this book is archival research. The majority of my empirical analysis is based on recently declassified archival sources that have hardly been featured elsewhere, if at all. This includes African source material (scattered across party archives, university archives, and exiled archives, where research is a laborious but rewarding challenge), Korean source material (primarily from the Diplomatic Archives in South Korea, which provides a fascinating insight into the inter-Korean competition Africa during the Cold War), and Western source material (primarily from national archives of the United Kingdom and the United States, whose embassies in Africa closely monitored North Korean activities). At the end of the book, I have included a more technical discussion of the primary source material that I have found in the archives.

The benefit of a multi-archival approach is not only a richness in data, but also the triangulation of certain events. For example, the description of the Pyongyang Conference of 1987 in Chapter 2 is based on source material from two African, a South Korean, and British and American archives. The limitation of my approach is a lack of engagement with primary sources from Lusophone Africa. Although I found original MPLA sources in the Nordic Africa Institute, in Sweden, and FRELIMO sources in the University of the Western Cape, in South Africa, practical reasons related to time and funding prevented me from conducting extensive research in Portuguese-language archives.

⁴⁴ Van der Hoog 2020.

⁴⁵ Van der Hoog 2018.

Interviews were originally intended as the second major pillar of this research project, alongside archival data. The memories of African freedom fighters who had encountered North Koreans during their years of exile and thereafter would have been a useful addition to the written record. North Korea is a sensitive issue in Southern Africa and finding participants would have required long stints of dedicated fieldwork and trust-making. Unfortunately, the border closures, travel bans, and infection risks that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic ruled out an ambitious oral history project.

Nevertheless, this book benefits from lengthy conversations with two former diplomats who have experienced the inner workings of Pyongyang. James Hoare joined the East Asian Desk of the British Foreign Office in 1969 and subsequently worked the East Asian Desk. Throughout his career, he was stationed in Seoul, Beijing, and Pyongyang. In addition, a defected North Korean diplomat, who requested anonymity, told me the most remarkable stories about his travels through Africa during the 1980s as we sat in a little café in downtown Seoul. His deep knowledge of the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs was remarkable. The testimonies of both men provide greater insights into the politics of Cold War.

The third pillar of this book is a creative approach to the physical and digital footprints of North Korea in Africa. The aforementioned North Korean monuments in Africa can be viewed as source material in their own right. Tangible heritage sites are not only evidence of North Korea's presence in foreign lands, but also contain a narrative that presents certain stories and forgets others. The third part of this book provides a meta-analysis of North Korean heritage in Africa based on a reading of these monumental narratives.

In addition to physical footprints in Africa, North Korea also leaves digital footprints on the internet: North Korean art studios and military companies publish their catalogues online, while North Korean operatives in Africa are active on Facebook. Open-source intelligence techniques (OSINT) present contemporary historians with new ideas to locate and analyse digital source material. Such tools are pioneered by non-governmental organisations and investigative reporters and have yet to find their way into the toolbox of ordinary historians, who are accustomed to paper archives.⁴⁶ However, OSINT can be highly useful for the study of the recent past: the third part of this book partly relies on it.

The main limitation of this final approach is an overreliance on North Korea's 'outside track' of information. State-produced propaganda does not reveal much about the inner workings of the government. Moreover, the focus on elites obscures the experiences of ordinary people.

About the Book

This book describes sixty years of engagement between Southern Africa and North Korea through a thematic, three-pronged approach. The first part, organised around the theme of 'Blood', considers the diplomatic ties between African and North Korean elites that emerged at the nexus of African decolonisation and the Cold War. Part Two, organised around the theme of 'Bullets', highlights how African elites benefitted from North Korean military support before, during, and after the victory of independence. The third part, organised around the theme of 'Bronze', explores the cultural heritage of the liberation struggle by discussing the North Korean monuments that have emerged in Southern Africa in recent years.

Readers may detect a deliberate sequence throughout the book. Diplomatic ties, as described in the first part, led to military cooperation, as described in the second part. The themes of 'Blood' and 'Bullets' symbolise the two routes Nyerere identified for African liberation movements that desired independence: diplomacy and warfare. North Korea offered support for both options. Throughout the twentieth century, in meeting halls and on the

⁴⁶ Higgings 2021.

battlefield, anti-imperialist forces in Africa and Korea were collaborating to bend the course of history in their favour. The final and third part, which is primarily set in the twenty-first century, looks back at this bygone era. The North Korean memorials in Africa are a direct outcome of the diplomatic friendship between North Korean and African leaders, and often celebrate the wars for independence.

The first part of the book, Chapters 1 through 5, examines how African freedom fighters forged intimate connections with a hereditary regime in the northern half of the Korean peninsula. The first two chapters introduce the main characters of this book. Chapter 1 sets the scene in Southern Africa, the last part of the continent to be liberated from colonialism and white settler-rule. African liberation movements were often pushed into exile and became dependent on the solidarity of foreign sponsors. Chapter 2 pivots to the Korean peninsula and considers the competition between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea for international recognition as the true Korea. Both Koreas launched elaborate diplomatic campaigns in Africa to garner support among newly independent nations.

Chapters 3 through 5 cover the practical outcomes of the African–North Korean diplomatic ties that were forged in the 1960s. Chapter 3 is centred around the successful invitation diplomacy of North Korea and analyses the journeys of several first-generation Southern African presidents to Pyongyang. A significant number of African elites flocked to Pyongyang in search of support, education, and training. Chapter 4 describes the establishment of North Korean ideological centres in Africa. The state ideology of North Korea, Juche, made the country distinct from the major communist powers and therefore appealing to non-aligned African nations. Juche Study Centres allowed ordinary Africans to learn about the wonders of North Korea through books, films, exhibitions, and discussions. Chapter 5 explores the largely unknown history of North Korean development aid in Africa. In the spirit of South–South cooperation, North Korean experts established experimental Juche farms in Africa; in return, African leaders praised North Korea's plans for reunification of the peninsula.

The main impact of North Korea's activities in Africa was not the establishment of farms, but the proliferation of arms. The second part of this book, Chapters 6 through 10, therefore revolves around military cooperation. Chapter 6 describes the liberation wars that defined Southern Africa in the twentieth century. When peaceful campaigns for independence were repressed by minority governments, some African liberation movements turned to violent revolution. As most Western countries refused to offer them weapons and training, many organisations looked East for support. Chapter 7 describes how North Korea, with its colonial history and anti-imperialist credentials, positioned itself as a natural ally for African freedom fighters. Military exports became a key component of North Korea's foreign policy, and the country became a major player in the global arms market.

Chapters 8 to 10 narrate the story of how Africans benefitted from North Korean military support. Chapter 8 examines how exiled liberation movements received support in the years leading up to independence. African guerrilla fighters underwent basic training in North Korean camps in the Frontline States, while advanced training was offered to talented cadres in North Korea. Chapter 9 subsequently describes what happened after the victory of independence, when North Korea offered internal regime support for newly established governments. The best documented example is the notorious Fifth Brigade in Zimbabwe, but this chapter uncovers how virtually all neighbouring states were trained in the dark arts of presidential security. Chapter 10 brings us to the present, at a time when the governments of Southern African states and North Korea are desperately clinging to power. Despite United Nations sanctions

prohibiting military cooperation, trade is ongoing and African armies continue to depend on North Korean services.

The third part, Chapters 11 through 15, is centred around heritage. Despite its current isolated position in global affairs, North Korea is hired by African governments to design and construct some of the most eye-catching public buildings in Africa, including a 120-metre-tall memorial, a cemetery in the shape of two AK-47s, and a history museum. Chapter 11 describes how African liberation governments turned the narratives of liberation into myths that glorify their status as revolutionaries. It is a model of African patriotic history that is well suited to North Korean visual aesthetics.

The next three chapters explore what the import of North Korean aesthetics means for the display of African history. What stories are revealed or concealed through these monuments? Chapter 12 analyses how nations are defined in party-centric terms that are organised around the notion of family: the leaders are the fathers of the nation; the citizens are their children; and counter-voices become outcasts. Chapter 13 considers the role of violence in the memorialisation of the struggle. North Korean monuments emphasise the need for continuous revolution that protects the gains from early colonial and late colonial warfare. Chapter 14 is centred around heroism and scrutinises the gendered dimensions of African–North Korean memorial culture.

Chapter 15 discusses the economic dimension of African–North Korean relations. Similar to military trade, African heritage is a profitable business model for North Korea. Monuments justify the enduring rule of African liberation governments, but also signify the importance of foreign currency for North Korea's government. Economic activities in Africa are a lifeline for the increasingly isolated elites in Pyongyang. The monuments therefore symbolise the strategies of survival for both African and North Korean regimes.