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

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IMAGES



North Korean stamp commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Bandung Conference.
[Korean Central News Agency]



Seretse Khama and Ruth Khama in North Korea, for some reason surrounded by accordion players, 1976. [Botswana Information Services]



Julius Nyerere and Kim Il Sung, 1968. [Korean Central News Agency]



Julius Nyerere and Kim Il Sung, 1981. [Korean Central News Agency]



Samora Machel with Kim Il Sung, 1971. [Korean Central News Agency]



Samora Machel with Kim Il Sung, celebrating Mozambican independence, 1975. [Korean Central News Agency]



Agostinho Neto with Kim Il Sung, [Korean Central News Agency]



Kim Il Sung in Algeria, 1975. [Korean Central News Agency]



Sam Nujoma and Kim Il Sung, 1975. [Korean Central News Agency]



Sam Nujoma received a medal from Kim Il Sung, 1986. [National Archives of Namibia]



Kenneth Kaunda presents a gift to Kim Il Sung, 1982. [Korean Central News Agency]



Zambian delegation in Pyongyang, 1987. [Korean Central News Agency]



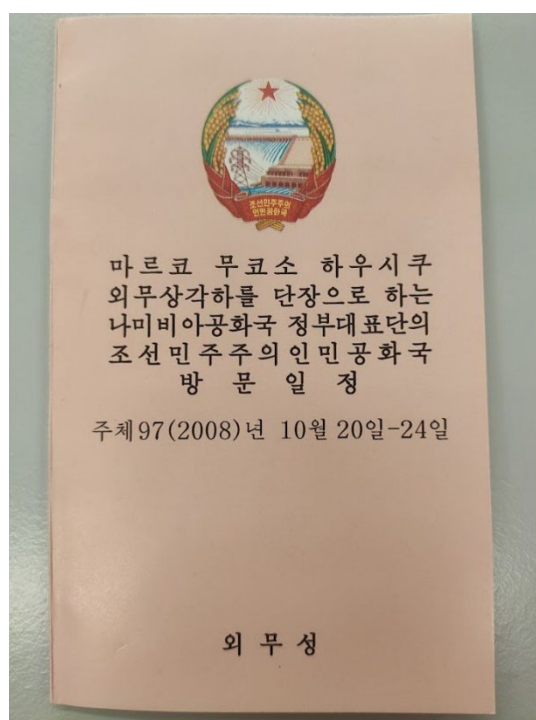
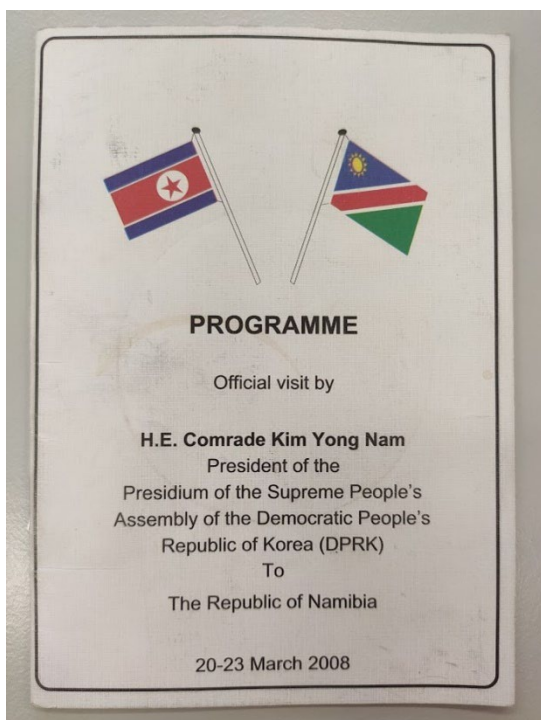
Robert Mugabe and Kim Il Sung, 1993. [Korean Central News Agency]



Kim Jong Il, Robert Mugabe, Kim Il Sung, and Julius Nyerere in Pyongyang, 1989. [Daily News]



Monica Mácias in North Korea. [Monica Mácias]



Programs of diplomatic visits between Namibia and North Korea, 2008. [Basler Afrika Bibliographien, photo by Tycho van der Hoog]



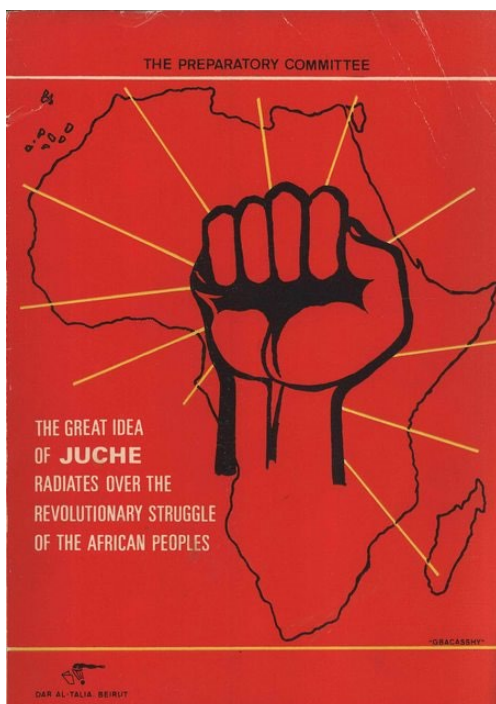
Kim Il Sung at the April Spring Festival in Pyongyang, accompanied by Sékou Touré and Kenneth Kaunda, 1982. [Korean Central News Agency]



80th birthday anniversary of Kim Il Sung, 1992. [Wikimedia Commons]



Kim Il Sung, African leaders, and Juche. [Pyongyang: Literature and Art Press]



Book cover of 'The great idea of Juche radiates over the revolutionary struggle of the African peoples', 1973. [Dar Al-Talia]



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The Kim Il Sung Agricultural Research Centre in Kilissi, Guinea.[Guinean Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock]



A North Korean instructor at the inauguration of the Fifth Brigade in Zimbabwe. [National Archives of Zimbabwe]



Karate demonstration of the Fifth Brigade in Zimbabwe, 1984. [CNBC]



Robert Mugabe and Li Jong Ok (Ri Chong'ok) inspect 20 armored personal carriers, a gift from North Korea to Zimbabwe, 1985. [The People's Weekly]



Visit of Zimbabwean military delegation to North Korea, 2008. [Zimbabwe Independent]

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(모잠비크공화국 상주)

THIRD ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL SECRETARY
THE EMBASSY OF THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA
IN THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
(RESIDENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOZAMBIQUE)

학술원출판부 / *Hyunmyeong sa* (Hakkye)

此書佳

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

24/10/2004

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Abstract

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N. HWANG/IAE

電話 043-234-1111 (東京・池袋)

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19 SEP 2017

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이탈산염: *nitrate*의 부정확성

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

劉世奇

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Designated North Korean diplomat, employed as the Third Economic and Commercial Secretary at the North Korean embassy in South Africa. As a Haegumgang Trading Corporation representative he was responsible for military cooperation with Mozambique. [United Nations Panel of Experts]



African Renaissance Monument, Senegal. [The African Times]



Statue in Benin. [The Times]



The Independence Memorial Museum in Namibia. [Wikimedia Commons]



Interior of the Independence Memorial Museum in Namibia, with a prominent role for Sam Nujoma. [Roslyn Russel]



Neto Mausoleum, Angola. [Miguel Cardina]



Interior of the Neto Mausoleum in Angola. [Vasco Martins]



National Heroes' Acre of Namibia. [Tycho van der Hoog]



National Heroes' Acre of Zimbabwe. [Tycho van der Hoog]



National Heroes' Acre of Zimbabwe. [Tycho van der Hoog]



Mural of the National Heroes' Acre of Zimbabwe, with a prominent role for Robert Mugabe.
[Tycho van der Hoog]



Samora Machel Statue, Mozambique. [Wikimedia Commons]

NOTE ON ARCHIVES

While historians need enormous amounts of source material to write a book, most of the letters, telegrams, and reports that flow through our hands in the archives never feature in the finished manuscript. Nevertheless, this material informs our thinking and is essential for the generation of new ideas. Extensive fieldwork is therefore indispensable, especially for the pursuit of global history. During the years that I spent researching this book, I had the good fortune of consulting dozens of repositories. As a result, this book is primarily based on insights gathered from declassified primary sources, some of which have now been used in scholarship for the first time.

One of my key takeaways is that truth is often stranger than fiction. If I were to write a thriller about the Korean crisis during the Cold War, and my cast of characters included an American General Bonesteel (sporting a scary eyepatch), an English diplomat who went by the name of Mr. England, and a Russian counterpart called Mr. Smirnov, it would be completely unbelievable. Yet, I encountered each of these figures while I rummaged through dusty archival boxes in Seoul, London, Cape Town, Washington D.C., and other places. From these dry pages in near-abandoned reading rooms leapt a colourful cast of characters who have kindly accompanied me throughout my archival research. Their contributions were informative, often witty, and, above all, useful for understanding the diplomatic arrangements of the time.

However, I was mainly interested in the voices of African actors, such as Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, and Samora Machel, as I pondered the question how they viewed and utilised the Korean competition for influence. I am grateful that they feature prominently in my book, thanks to a year's worth of archival research.

Another takeaway is the realisation that there is a wealth of data on African–North Korean relations that awaits further scrutiny. This book deliberately omits West Africa, East Africa, and North Africa, but the archival record is perhaps even richer for these regions than for Southern Africa. As diplomatic archives usually contain records of independent countries, the delayed independence of Southern Africa may have resulted in relatively fewer files compared to the rest of the continent. There are, therefore, tremendous opportunities for research on African–North Korean ties beyond Southern Africa.

The declassification of government materials merits special consideration. For this project, I have submitted an information request to the Stasi Records Archive in Germany, because I suspect that the Stasi archives might contain information about African–North Korean relations. The Ministry of State Security of the German Democratic Republic had a formal cooperation agreement with the Ministry of State Security of North Korea.¹¹⁸¹ These records are closed to the public but can be accessed upon request. While my endeavour has, to date, not yielded significant surprises, it illustrates another way forward in the search for sources. It is a time-consuming process with uncertain results, as I found out when I submitted a FOIA request to the national archives of the United States (which was ultimately not granted). Nevertheless, future FOIA requests in the case of the United States, FOI requests at the national archives of the United Kingdom, and perhaps PAIA requests with the Department of Defence archives in South Africa, could generate new insights.¹¹⁸²

Archives are vulnerable institutions that are increasingly threatened by political pressure, underfunding, and climatological hazards. In Southern Africa, the space for researchers to move around and gain access to source material appears to be decreasing. Over the course of my research, the national archives of Namibia and South Africa were temporarily closed because of dangerous working conditions.¹¹⁸³ In neighbouring countries, such as in Zimbabwe,

¹¹⁸¹ [SRA] MfS – Sekr. Mittag. Nr. 98

¹¹⁸² Marmon 2022.

¹¹⁸³ Van der Hoog 2022a; Breckenridge 2014.

historians have difficulty obtaining research permits and are therefore barred from entering archives in the first place.¹¹⁸⁴ Yet, I should stress that the deterioration of archives is not a purely African phenomenon: the national archives of the United States are equally imperilled by a shrinking budget, which has led to falling standards.¹¹⁸⁵ This research project has made me more aware of the trend in which our world is being darkened by an authoritarian turn – a process that, I fear, is connected to how nations treat their memory.

This book is based on the contents of 32 different archives, located across four continents, with sources in Afrikaans, Dutch, English, French, German, Korean (both Hangul and Hanja), Portuguese, Swahili, and Swedish. I am extremely grateful for the support of the African Studies Centre Leiden for supporting my archival research. The sections below discuss the most important African, Korean, and Western repositories that I have used in the course of my work.

African Sources

It is challenging to find African primary sources that shed light on the ties that bind liberation governments to North Korea. National archives in Africa proved to be largely irrelevant for my study. Colonial records deliberately marginalised the perspectives of African liberation movements, while postcolonial records are often not yet accessible to the public. The relatively recent independence dates of many Southern African countries, combined with long embargo-periods for state records (often thirty years) means that historians have to practice patience. For example, the records of the first years of the SWAPO government in Namibia remained closed until the early 2020s, as Namibia became independent in 1990.¹¹⁸⁶

In spite of these hurdles, I managed to locate two collections within African national archives that contain postcolonial records about North Korea. The Botswana Notes and Archives Records Services holds a fascinating file on Seretse Khama's interactions with North Korea, mainly covering the 1970s.¹¹⁸⁷ The National Archives of Namibia has recently released two files on the SWAPO government's dealings with North Korea and South Korea in the 1990s.¹¹⁸⁸

Given that the aim of this book is to shift the lens from states to regimes, it made sense to focus on the party archives of liberation governments rather than state archives. Unfortunately, the records of ruling parties in Southern Africa are generally inaccessible.¹¹⁸⁹ Notable exceptions are ANC collections of the Mayibuye Archives and the Fort Hare Archives in South Africa, and the UNIP archives in Zambia; but it must be acknowledged that these repositories have been cleaned by party officials and do not feature sensitive files related to intelligence and finances.¹¹⁹⁰

Two viable alternatives for historians of African decolonisation are private collections in African university archives and exiled collections in Europe.¹¹⁹¹ While the SWAPO party in Namibia hides its institutional archive from public view, the University of Namibia archives hold two private collections of high-ranking SWAPO officials, which contain useful material on the liberation movement (the Tjitendero Collection and the Katjavivi Collection). In addition, several European repositories preserve extensive records of liberation movements in Southern

¹¹⁸⁴ Pritchard 2019.

¹¹⁸⁵ The Washington Post, 7 May 2019.

¹¹⁸⁶ Van der Hoog 2022a. See for example [NAN] MFA, PE/082; MFA, PE/083.

¹¹⁸⁷ [BNARS] OP.1375.

¹¹⁸⁸ [NAN] MFA PE/082; [NAN] MFA PE/083.

¹¹⁸⁹ Alexander et al. 2017, p. 3.

¹¹⁹⁰ The UNIP Archives are now digitised through the Endangered Archives Programme with the British Library, but I also visited the physical archives in Lusaka (Zambia), in 2014.

¹¹⁹¹ Alexander et al. 2020, p. 823.

Africa. To stick with the Namibian example, Basler Afrika Bibliographien in Switzerland has a wonderful SWAPO collection.¹¹⁹²

For anticolonial organisations more generally, the International Institute of Social History in the Netherlands and the Nordic Africa Institute in Sweden are stunning resources that feature African material. In particular, the latter's Pamphlet Collection was incredibly useful, with over seven hundred boxes of primary sources, spanning the period from the 1960s until the 1980s.¹¹⁹³ I spent a month in Uppsala working my way through the Southern African material, a moment that significantly altered the shape and contents of this book.

The transnational nature of African national liberation movements, in which exile and solidarity were key components, is reflected in the global scattering of their publications.¹¹⁹⁴ Inspired by Brian Myers' typology of North Korean propaganda, we can make a distinction between the 'outside track' and the 'inside track' of the data produced by African liberation movements. To rally their bases and secure foreign support, liberation movements churned out publications on a regular basis. Crucially, this is the 'outside track' of the information produced by the bureaucracies of liberation movements.¹¹⁹⁵ Spread across numerous archives and even continents, this research project utilised speeches, bulletins, war communiques, messages of solidarity, conference documents, political programmes, press statements, brochures and informational booklets, photos, and posters that were published by a wide variety of African anticolonial organisations. This laborious process yielded numerous references to interactions between Africans and North Korea. Most party bulletins, for example, include a brief 'international support' section – occasionally, North Korea would be featured through descriptions of meetings or photographs of visits.

However, the 'inside track' of liberation movements remains largely inaccessible as party archives are either closed or cleaned. As a result, the internal correspondence, policy making, and funding structures remain rather elusive.

Korean Sources

What about Korean source material? The closest I could get to Pyongyang was Seoul. The Diplomatic Archives, located south of the Han River in the boisterous capital city of South Korea, proved to be an invaluable collection of primary sources. Throughout the Cold War, South Korean diplomats feverishly monitored the business of their northern rivals and reported any activity back home. The Diplomatic Archives constitute a unique perspective on the Global Cold War, as it provides a Korean perspective on the division of the Korean peninsula, which was one of the most decisive issues of the twentieth century.

As the African continent was an important theatre of inter-Korean competition, the Diplomatic Archives are a treasure trove of information about North Korea's charm offensive in Africa. The collection holds dozens and dozens of files related to African–Korean affairs. Because my translation progress is slow, I estimate that I have used only 20% of the files that I found in 2021. As there are many more relevant files available, and new ones are being released continuously, I expect that future diplomatic historians will find the contents extremely valuable.

The Diplomatic Archives comes with its own set of challenges. South Korean diplomats sometimes spelled the names of African countries in various ways, which makes working through the catalogue a labour-intensive process. Botswana, for instance, is spelled as both 보츠나와 and 보츠와나 in different files.¹¹⁹⁶ A command of Korean is necessary in order to use the material, as they are mainly written in Hangul (older material is oftentimes written in

¹¹⁹² [BAB] AA.3.

¹¹⁹³ Van der Hoog 2022e.

¹¹⁹⁴ Van der Hoog and Moore 2022.

¹¹⁹⁵ Myers 2015.

¹¹⁹⁶ [DARK] 8186; [DARK] 7013.

Hanja). This likely explains why these sources have never been used by Africanists. I was lucky to have been allowed the chance to follow intensive Korean language lessons at the Korean Studies department at Leiden University.

In my particular case, negotiating access to the archives was difficult because I travelled to Seoul in 2021, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the South Korean government had imposed strict regulations on Seoul. In normal circumstances, the archives should be readily accessible. The records are digitised but only physically available in the reading room in Seoul, where they are stored on CD-ROMs and microfilm. While a copy of the entire archive is available in the library of Seoul National University, it is recommended to visit the Diplomatic Archives. Digitisation efforts are ongoing and historians are likely to find the most complete collections at the latter location.

Western Sources

Finally, this book utilises material with a distinct Western perspective. The United Kingdom and the United States were not directly involved in African–North Korean relations but had a vested interest in the African continent. These ‘third-party archives’ are thus useful to determine factual details about developments that occurred within Africa, including North Korea’s campaign to win support. British embassies in Africa monitored the political situation in their former colonies and reported this back to Whitehall. Although it often appears that 80% of the correspondence within the National Archives of the United Kingdom consists of colonial officers politely thanking each other for the received correspondence, the remaining material includes fascinating details about African–North Korean relations. The Foreign Office records in London are among the best-organised archives in the world and include dozens of dossiers related to this study that are easily accessible.

While the National Archives and Records Administration of the United States holds an equally impressive amount of relevant source material on African–North Korean relations, these archives are much harder to navigate. The Cold War era records of the State Department are divided between three completely different systems. The 1963–73 diplomatic cables are organised in the Subject Numeric Files while the 1973–79 records are stored in the Access to Archival Databases. The records from 1980 onwards are not yet disclosed but researchers can submit FOIA requests, which, in my experience, is a useless exercise. During my time in Washington D.C., I found the Subject Numeric Files in Record Group 59 the most valuable sub-collection, in contrast to the records of the Bureau of African Affairs, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. It should be noted that policy files on North Korea are likely stored in presidential archives rather than in the National Archives.

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