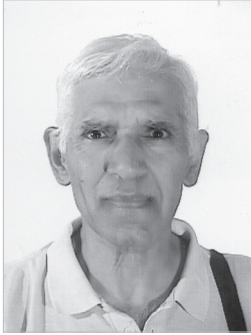


The SOMAFCO Collection



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The ANC's Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) Archival Collection based at the University of Fort Hare is a unique, rich and large set of documents and artefacts of an exile educational and community project during the South African Liberation Struggle. The SOMAFCO Collection covers 14 years of an educational experiment, established by the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa. This article is based on a speech given at a Nordic Africa Institute workshop in September 2004.

What was SOMAFCO?

Between 1978 and 1992, the ANC established the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in Tanzania, following the outflow of many young people from South Africa after the Soweto Uprising of 1976. The institution bears the name of Solomon Mahlangu, a young ANC guerrilla who was executed by the South African regime in 1979.

The Government of Tanzania gave the ANC two large tracts of land at Mazimbu and Dakawa near Morogoro. Facilities were built for schooling at secondary, primary, nursery and adult education levels, for health care, farming and horticulture, for small industries, furniture-making, clothing and leather-goods production, vehicle

repairs, sports and administration. The two areas were electrified, provided with sewage facilities, roads and a piped water supply.

Between 1978 and 1992 several thousand young exiles studied, trained and worked at Mazimbu/Dakawa. After graduating, secondary students were sent around the world for further and tertiary education and some were given vocational training at Dakawa.

SOMAFCO was of enormous significance in the struggle against Apartheid. In the first instance, it was a site of struggle within the liberation movement, involving contending educational philosophies and ideologies. SOMAFCO also featured strongly in the international campaign against Apartheid, creating “an exceptionally wide support base, which in turn promoted the image and assisted the funding of the movement (ANC) as a whole”. (S. Morrow, B. Maaba and L. Pulumani, *Education in Exile: SOMAFCO, the ANC School in Tanzania, 1978 to 1992*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2004.)



In July 1992, the then President of the ANC, Oliver R. Tambo, handed over SOMAFCO to the Government of Tanzania, which continues to utilise the facilities of Mazimbu and Dakawa for educational and training purposes.

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In 1992, important documents and some artefacts from SOMAFCO were shipped to the University of Fort Hare in South Africa where the archives of the ANC are lodged. Apart from over 700 boxes of documents, the collection also has artefacts – paintings, ceramics, musical instruments, the school bell, teaching aids and items from the health and agricultural sectors at SOMAFCO.

Traditionally, archives comprise documentation per se. The SOMAFCO Collection is unique in that it contains artefacts, which convey a story and give added life to SOMAFCO as an institution and community project. Artefacts are usually kept in a museum whereas at Fort Hare they are an integral part of the archives, thus making the collection a unique one.

The collection records the sacrifices and resilience of South African exiles but also those of many international activists and supporters. It also explores the many aspects of cooperation and links between the Nordic states and the ANC between 1978 and 1992.

The Nordic–South African dimension

The Nordic states, Tanzania and certain other countries in Africa, Europe, Asia and North America, played an important role in the physical development of the Mazimbu and Dakawa Settlements, as well as in the teaching and training corps at SOMAFCO. The teachers, technicians and other experts, known as volunteers, and the Anti-Apartheid support groups in their respective countries left a legacy of solidarity and co-operation that informs much of the bilateral relations that pertain today between South Africa and the countries concerned.

The SOMAFCO Archives, as part of the broader ANC Archives, complement Nordic archives of the liberation period and together they can be used to deepen the history of liberation.

What next?

SOMAFCO was a microcosm of the New South Africa. The same social and educational challenges we faced then are now the challenges in the country. Curriculum change and implementation, the quality and quantity of teachers, inclusive education and corporal punishment being some of them. Writing about SOMAFCO, Professor Kader Asmal, the former Minister of Education in South Africa states in the book, *Education in Exile* (Ibid): “Though the scale and context are different, we need to think carefully about how the lessons of this brave and exciting experiment could be utilised in the context of educational planning and change in contemporary South Africa.”

There is scope for much more research by historians, political scientists and others to delve into various aspects of the SOMAFCO experience. Possible areas for research could be the experience of volunteers and the solidarity links that were forged during the liberation period and the formation of links today. ■

Study Scholarships

Students at Nordic universities and colleges, authors of textbooks and journalists resident in the Nordic countries can apply for study grants, which enable them to spend one month in Uppsala using the Institute’s library resources.

Nordic Guest Researchers’ Scholarships

This programme is aimed at researchers with doctoral degrees or the equivalent who are attached to Nordic universities or research institutions. The programme offers those awarded the grants opportunities to pursue their own research projects, which should be related to contemporary Africa.

Application deadline: 1 October. More information at www.nai.uu.se