

# Viewing ‘the other’ over a hundred and a score more years: South Africa and Russia (1890–2010)

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## Abstract

Whether novel is history or history is novel, is a tantalising point. “The novel is no longer a work, a thing to make last, to connect the past with the future but (only) one current event among many, a gesture with no tomorrow” Kundera (1988:19). One does not have to agree with Kundera to find that social sciences, as historiography holds a story, a human narrative to be shared when focused on a case or cases. In this case, relations between peoples over more than a century are discussed. At the same time, what is known as *broader casing* in qualitative studies enters the picture. The relations between the governments and the peoples of South Africa and Russia (including the Soviet Union), sometimes in conflict or peace and sometimes at variance are discussed. Past and present communalities and differences between two national entities within a changing international or global context deserve attention while moments of auto-ethnography compliment the study. References are made to the international political economy in the context of the relations between these countries.

**Keywords:** Soviet Union, South Africa, Total Onslaught, United Party, Friends of the Soviet Union, ideological conflict (South Africa), Russians (and the Anglo-Boer War), racial capitalism, apartheid, communism/Trotskyism (in South Africa), broader casing (qualitative research)

**Subject fields:** political science, sociology, (military) history, international political economy, social anthropology, international relations, conflict studies

## Introduction

The abstract above calls up the importance of “‘transnational’ and ‘transboundary’ theories and perspectives” and the relevance of the statement that,

*Worldwide, the rigid boundaries that once separated disciplines have become less circumscribed; they are no longer judged by the static conventions of yesteryear* (Editorial, *Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 2009: iii-iv).

Such developments in the human sciences have potential to expand our horizons of knowledge.

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The terms 'viewing' and 'the other' call up contending and complementary world views. These terms relate to ideology, political socialisation, conflicts, peacemaking, past memories, international relations and projected futures. Such discourse also calls up social identities and political dynamics – concepts deployed in various social science disciplines. And in this case, also involves long standing relations between two peoples and their governments. Tapping into social sciences such as sociology, political science, international political economic insights and qualitative approaches, this contribution is interdisciplinary in nature. Terms such as *power elite*, *mobilised societies*, *symbolic politics*, *ideologies*, *groupthink*, and the phenomena of *stereotyping* and *labelling* play a role. *Contending paradigms* of economic thinking (international political economic interests) also enters the picture.

In South Africa and Russia (previously the Soviet Union), viewing 'the Other' preceded and outlasted the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), the 1917 overthrow of Tsarist rule, two world wars, demise of the Berlin Wall, the 'border war', the fall of minority rule in South Africa and beyond. Russia saw the departure of the last Tsar, a communist revolution and the rise of new authoritarianism, its decline and a relatively failed attempt to establish liberal democracy.

Both countries saw regime changes, mutation of political structures and evolving ideologies. South Africa experienced the demise of the Boer Republics, the becoming of a union, the apex and decline of the British Empire, the rise of a whites-only republic with a unique brand of authoritarian rule and transition to a dominant party system under a negotiated constitution in an attempt to establish a (liberal-) democratic system. In 2010 while South Africa hosted the FIFA World Soccer Cup, Namibia commemorated its 20<sup>th</sup> year of independence from South African dominance after an election won by the South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO) which some claim would not have happened if it were not for Soviet support. Others argue it came about by the voluntary withdrawal of apartheid forces from first Angola, then Namibia.

A century and a score more are not an arbitrary choice. South Africa became a union in 1910, and Russia was shaken by two revolutions in 1917. Amongst the Englishmen who visited Russia in 1897/1898 was John Hammond, an American Rhodes admirer who was involved in the unsuccessful anti-Boer conspiracy in Johannesburg in 1895. Two years after the Jameson raid Hammond was a guest of the Russian minister of finance, Sergei Julievitch Witte (Davidson, 2003: 27–28). In 1895, Hammond described Rhodes as "undoubtedly the greatest Englishman of the century" (Davidson, 2003: 28). In contrast, Lenin mentioned Rhodes as an example of how the ravenous British bourgeois viewed the economic advantages of naked imperialism (Davidson, 2003: 29), while Jan Smuts and Olive Schreiner became staunch critics of Rhodes before the turn of the previous century (Spies and Natrass, 1999:14). International (strategic) views influenced developments. The political elite, what C. Wright Mills, sociologist, calls the *power elite*, in both societies were at odds at times.

There are no recent contributions by South African academics from an interdisciplinary perspective who investigate relations between the two powers over the past century. This article addresses the topic.

### **A methodology rather than 'The Methodology'**

The permanent flux of social developments and political dynamics frequently introduce a level of analysis that makes *objective* writing problematic. In sociology, anthropology, political science and (lately) history and theology (most) approaches are paradigmatic. Multiple research

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approaches can add to insights by providing a more fluid *digm*. The interdisciplinary scholar contributes to *intersubjectivity* rather than objectivity (read: “Objectivity”). Historiography plays a role but other subject disciplines provide the feeding grounds.

Jan Romijn reminded us that the writing of any/all history should not and could not be divorced from the subjectivity of the author – perhaps for the better. Wright Mills in turn pointed out that a researcher cannot divorce him or her from their work and pretend to be all-knowing (Wright Mills, 1977: 18, 184ff, 223). In human understanding and action in context (*vrijheid als historie*), existence as the temporary (*de tijdelijkheid existeert*) and the links to history in a strict sense (*historie in strikte zin*) the author as human subject enters a discussion with others in view of the others and him-/herself. It then stands to reason that:

*Zo treed hij (the author) voortdurend in gesprek met zijn medemensen, so blijft het verleden leven in de heden en wordt het geprojecteerd naar een toekomst. De mens is nooit ‘af en zijn/de wereld is nooit ‘af ...”* (Luijpen, 1980: 226). Ad Peperzak in his work *Vrijheid* echoes this view (1977).<sup>1</sup>

In this contribution, the author argues for *intersubjectivity* and dialogue rather than the static truths of objectivity or subject disciplinary constraints in this contribution when reading the relations between the two countries.

The research utilises an ongoing literature review and qualitative research approaches. It combines insights borne out of various social science disciplines. Research reflects secondary and primary reading, and since 1987 contact with Soviet/Russian citizens as well as South African cadres and students trained in the Soviet Union/Russia. The latter represents a measure of qualitative research. Personal perspectives and experiences of the author or auto-ethnographic moments observed or participated in also inform this contribution.

As a qualitative research approach the strength of auto-ethnography is that it provides a collage to context and experience at a particular moment in time (Bryman, 2004:301, 315; Ellis and Bochner, 2000:733–734, 739; Schwandt, 2001:13). Some criticise the auto-ethnographic approach as limited, and those not well-disposed to auto-ethnographic approaches may argue that it is “personalistic” (Liebenberg, 2008: 63ff). Despite criticism against it, the auto-ethnographic angle adds value to other research approaches and complements available data such as archival sources, literature studies and comparative approaches, while contextualising it within human and personal experience and interaction with other social agents (Schwandt, 2001: 13; Quelette, 2003: 13ff; Ellis, 2004: 31–32; Sparks, 2002: 2–5; Bryman, 2001: 299ff). Such added value justifies the use of auto-ethnography to complement other approaches in a contribution such as this.

Auto-ethnography as qualitative research angle provides a view rich in data about an era, personal experiences, social interaction and observations in a particular context (Etherington, 2006:141; Josselson, Lieblich and McAdams, 2003). It throws a unique light on socio-political developments and outcomes in combination with other sources of data (Blenkinsop, 2006; Crang and Cook, 2007:13; Philaterou and Allen, 2006:65,67ff). For this reason, auto-ethnography is combined with other human science discipline insights.

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<sup>1</sup>. This contribution, while valuing the work of Peter Gay, *Freud voor historici* (1987) does not take its views on history or social sciences as far as Gay.

## Review of literature and sources

Archival sources played a role within identified areas. In addition, personal archives collected by the author over more than twenty years were utilised.

The United Party Archives housed at the University of South Africa (Unisa) were more than useful. So did consulting the Archival Group: Communist Party and Russia, 1922–1975 at Unisa. Documents in this group include pamphlets, correspondence and press cuttings donated by Prof. W.A. Kleynhans to the Unisa Archives.

A number of other earlier historical sources were also used. These consisted of publications to which could be referred as historical Afrikaans and English works (*Africana*). The author used these for illustrative purposes, as such works relate the atmosphere of the time so closely, albeit not objectively.

The monthly newsletter of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), *Democracy in Action*, as well as occasional papers brought out by IDASA between 1987 and 1992 were valuable.<sup>2</sup> The work of IDASA<sup>3</sup> as a democracy advocating body and advancing the notion of a negotiated settlement in a deeply divided South Africa touched on internal as well as external relations in its workshops, international exchanges and its publications. IDASA publications covering such initiatives, where applicable, to relations between South Africa and the Soviet Union contributed to the literature review.

The Russian embassy kindly provided useful documentation and archival photographic material during April/May 2005.<sup>4</sup> Issues of *Die Matie*, a student newspaper of the University of Stellenbosch, between 1980 and 1990 and available in the media *compendium* in the Kosie Gericke Library, proved relevant. Valued colleagues and friends in the Soviet Union and Russia and inside South Africa made their contribution in sharing solicited and unsolicited documents and experiences.

To an extent, the author also drew on insights gained from interviews done in the course of his *D Litt et Phil* studies (2005–2008) and ongoing interviews for a project on the war in Angola.

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<sup>2</sup>. The author of this article joined IDASA in 1987 and served as regional and student coordinator, research consultant and later Director of Research (1986–1990) which provided for some auto-ethnographic moments related here.

<sup>3</sup>. The Institute for Democracy in South Africa, initially known as the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (IDASA), was established in late 1986. Following the resignation of the leader of the official opposition, the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) in the white chamber of the parliamentary system, IDASA was born. Van Zyl Slabbert, as opposition leader, resigned in order to pursue an agenda that would bring extra-parliamentary organisations such as the United Democratic Front (UDF), the exiled African National Congress (ANC) and South African Communist Party (SACP) into the mainstream discourse of transition from authoritarian rule to democracy. Alex Boraine, a leading member of the PFP, followed Slabbert's example.

<sup>4</sup>. The author owes gratitude to Andrey Sharashkin (Councillor) and Fiodosiy Vladyeshevskiy (Attaché) of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Pretoria/Tshwane (2004/2005) for assistance.

### **Strengths and limitations of the contribution**

Relations between South Africa and Russia have been studied before. Currently few South Africans are researching the relations between Russia (then Soviet Union) and South Africa. Where current research takes place, it is mostly published in Russian and not English or Afrikaans. Current research does not combine insights from various social sciences in this area or provide an overview of the period in question. This is done in this contribution.

This contribution is exploratory. It adds to the work of Russian academics in the field of social-historical studies such as Apollon Davidson, Irina Filatova, Vladimir Shubin, Andrei Pritvorov and Andrei Ignatenko and work done in South Africa in the 1980s. A younger generation of Russian researchers such as Gennady Shubin, Veronika Usyachova and others are also noteworthy. The historical works of Elisaveta Kandyba-Foxcroft (then at Unisa) and others were pioneering and cannot be ignored. More recent work relates to linguistic and cultural studies by Irina Garmashova-Du Plessis at the University of South Africa (Unisa) during 2002–2007.

An obvious limitation of the article is that the author is not Russian-speaking and had to rely on English, Afrikaans and in some cases German sources.

### **On authors, auto-ethnography and being participant-observer**

The 1990s are seen as the “end of communism” and minority rule/apartheid in South Africa. In witty quips, some observed that *Pretoriastroika* followed the example of *Perestroika*. These societies parted with authoritarian rule in an attempted transition to democracy, as transition theorists refer to it. Large segments of the power elite of both societies aspire currently to the ideal world of liberal capitalism or the stage in history that apologists for capitalism such as Francis Fukuyama call “the end of history”; victory for the free market. Others seem more critical (see current debates between the trade union Cosatu and members of the SACP in South Africa, *Sunday Independent*, 22 August 2010: 15). In discussing South Africa and Russia, one cannot speak about relations between the two countries without discussing South Africa’s peculiar transition to democracy. Some of these observations should perhaps be confined to the reflections of a participant-observer or of auto-ethnographic reflections. For example, how did the author experience some political developments in South Africa?

Divisions between South Africans deepened substantially during the 1980s. Children born in the 1960s were to hear at a young age over South African radio that a revolutionary (the term to equal “terrorist” or “anarchist”), Che Guevara, was gunned down in a far-off Latin American country called Bolivia. They would hear that South Africa’s northern neighbour Rhodesia was under threat from a communist and terrorist onslaught. Portuguese colonies were under threat from the same evil forces, they heard. So was *Suidwes-Afrika* (South West Africa – later Namibia) where SWAPO, a terrorist movement backed by the Soviet Union, fought the order and stability that white rule and Christianity brought to that backward region and its irreconcilable tribes. It was said that the state of Israel fought valiantly against the Egyptians and the Syrians who had massive “Soviet support”. Less was said about massive US support for Israel, or US and French/Belgium support for Mobutu of Zaire, or apartheid South Africa and Israeli defence cooperation (*Sunday Independent Life*, 22 August 2010:16). Little was said about economic exploitation, neo-colonialism, nationalist movements as driving sources of liberation struggles or that the UN general assembly resolved way back in 1948 (when the apartheid state was born) that Palestinians deserve their own independent state. The message was *ad nauseam* repeated that

Communist China and the Soviet Union were aiming at total control of Africa with the help of puppet states, and that these evil forces aimed at the destruction of Western civilisation. Cuban people deployed in Arica (also Angola) ostensibly had no mind or strategy or loyalty to African people. They were simply mindless puppets of a godless state in Moscow.

If they were white and male, South African children were “registered” at the age of sixteen through the help of the apartheid Department of Education for military service (Afrikaans: *Nasionale Diensplig*). Apart from conscription of whites, the cadet system at school prepared young men (boys) for military life. More than 600 cadet units were established and functioned countrywide. Two years after registration, white males were conscripted – since 1979 for two years and further years for part-time call-ups. Should any of these (young) men refuse military service they were liable for prison sentences of six years.

At a symposium at the University of Pretoria held in 1977, one of the speakers, Prof. John Ericson, had, amongst others, to say that Russian influence is growing in Africa as part of a “pincher movement” and classic ‘satellisation’ (*Armed Forces*, 1977: 20). Prof. G.C. Olivier at the same symposium argued that

*(M)any Communist states pursue with vigour both domestic and foreign propaganda programmes (sic), something that democratic states do not pursue as vigorously (See Armed Forces, 1977: 20).*

At the same time, others were called up for such ideas to occupy Namibia and destabilise Angola.

Many of the apartheid conscripts were from white working class families drafted directly from school and thereafter returned to working class jobs. Strangely, neither the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) nor the new post-apartheid government recognised that such people were thereby drafted permanently into workers class status and yet, frequently they are still counted as “privileged whites”. Some of these ex-conscripts are psychologically scarred and can be seen wandering in South African streets reduced to begging, like many other South Africans. At the same time, President Thabo Mbeki and his elite followers insisted rather fleetingly that there are two “nations” in South Africa: a rich white one and a poor black exploited one. The implication was that all whites are rich and as past oppressors still racist, and all black people are poor and non-racist in their attitudes. Such attitudes can perhaps be termed “post-apartheid nation building through discrimination and stereotyping”.<sup>5</sup>

During the 1980s, military units were established at universities and technical colleges. In the case of the university where the author studied, the University of Stellenbosch Military Unit (USME) was established to retain and redeploy those who finished their first two years of conscription. Critique against the system was vilified and speakers from, amongst others, the Angolan rebel movement Unita were organised to speak on the Stellenbosch campus (*PSA Bulletin*, 1986: 9). Students were told that terrorism should be unmasked, that Bishop Tutu,

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<sup>5</sup>. Not only white ex-conscripts are discriminated against. The new democratic government in its first years failed largely in the compensation and re-integration of ex-cadres and guerrillas into civil society while rationalising out scarce skills because of colour/race (Liebenberg, Roefs and Ferreira, 2000). Conscript veterans tired of generals talking on their behalf, after years of silence are now increasingly writing against the madness and manipulative nature of their then political leaders and political generals (See Batley, 2007).



Alan Boesak and the South African Council of Churches were Communist, that the SACP controlled the ANC and that

*Unita was making a lasting contribution to Angola's future" (PSA Bulletin, 1986: 2, 3, 7 and 8).*

As an infantry officer in the SADF, before the author objected to further military service, he was to hear from a company commander that Scandinavian nurses in northern Namibia where SWAPO and that the SADF were at odds were "Finnish whores". At a command information session in Oshivelo in 1979, a major suggested that those who supported SWAPO and Communism were "slegte kaffers" (bad caffirs). Those who supported the locally (RSA) run political government in Namibia were "goeie kaffers". On objecting to this terminology, a few of the servicemen were admonished by the information officers with the words: "Julle sal nog grootword" (*You'll still grow up*). Critical thinking at the time certainly was not seen as part and parcel of professional military men/women. This particular officer was rather blunt in socio-political thinking and sharp with sword, not a professional armed with sword and thought, it seemed to him – even in a Cold War context.

Needless to say that critics of apartheid and racialism were called "naïve", "people who flirted with the terrorists", "gay" (Afrikaans: *moffies*), traitors, etc. In the *PSA Bulletin* of November 1986 the chairperson (chairman), Nic Myburgh, of the Popular Student Alliance (*Populêre Studentealliansie*) that was aligned and sponsored together with the National Student Federation by government (read: Military Intelligence) spent a whole page attacking and slandering persons for their involvement with "terrorist gangs" and "feel-good trendies". The fact that some (including the author) met earlier on with an ANC delegation in Harare and refused further military service, some commissioned officers were not welcomed, to say the least (*PSA Bulletin*, 1986: 7).

The Director of the Institute for the Study of Marxism (ISMUS) whose institute was partly funded by Military Intelligence spoke on the position of religion in the Soviet Union at a meeting of the Christian Association (*Christenvereniging*) in Stellenbosch (See *Dinamiek*, 1987: 8). The Director of ISMUS, after it became known that he collaborated with Military Intelligence, moved to the Department of Political Science at the Stellenbosch University. The Institute (ISMUS) became known as the Centre for Soviet Studies. The above illustrates the complexities, if not contradictions, in the politics of the time for those caught up in it.

### **Notes on politics, social being and subjectivities**

The National Party victory in 1948 saw growing antagonism between the ruling elite as incumbents of the state and its political contenders because of segregation as official policy. Inherited ethnocentric attitudes from the Dutch colonisers and subsequent impositions by the British led to a deeply divided Southern African society in the age of modernity. 'Ethnic' divisions were to deepen substantially after the National Party's election victory in 1948. The National Party and its cohorts like the Afrikaner Broederbond (AB),<sup>6</sup> following the defeat of the

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<sup>6</sup>. *Afrikaner Broederbond*: A cultural society for Afrikaans-speaking, white, male, Christian (Protestant) persons established in 1917 to achieve a white ruled Republic independent of Britain. *Circa* 1920 it became a secret society. The Broederbond operated in conjunction with several organisations such as the *National Party* and the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings* (FAK). Their control was challenged by some smaller

United Party, engineered top-down ‘separateness’ of races (*apartheid*). The fear for ‘the other’ also nurtured an antagonism towards the *Swart Gevaar* (Black danger). In Afrikaner ideology, Communism, as threat and scapegoat increasingly featured since 1933, became pronounced by 1938 and ten years later, the word *Communism* became “crime thought” under the apartheid regime.<sup>7</sup> Political rule in apartheid South Africa became increasingly hard-handed and the rise of an authoritarian state inevitable.

Race, ethnicity and social identities were exploited and manipulated for financial and political gain by Dutch mercantilists, the British colonisers and subsequent Boer rulers (Zegeye, Liebenberg and Houston, 2000). After the ravaging war between Britain and the Boer Republics, South Africa was to become the land of Boer and Brit. Under the Union of South Africa voting rights for the few indigenous people who still had it as well as the land owned by them, were whittled down. Some radical theorists referred to this as colonialism of a special type (CST) (Compare Kotze, 1994: 48–49).

The Soweto rebellion took place in 1976. Following these upheavals an increasingly militarised (white) society that approached the status of a praetorian or garrison-state developed. Rather than relying on police support as under the rule of BJ Vorster, the *laager* mentality that marked Afrikaner Nationalist thinking evolved into an authoritarian state or bunker society (Grundy, 1987; Davis, 1987). Richard Leonard refers to this era as “from police repression to military power” (Leonard, 1983: 3ff). For a short while after 1948, South Africa had the characteristics of a (whites-only) democracy. After DF Malan had left the political scene, Hans Strijdom introduced the term *Baasskap* (*Herrenschafft*). Following the reign of Verwoerd, the Vorster regime increasingly relied on police assistance. The latter was eclipsed under PW Botha by a security-focused regime under an executive presidency relying on military support. The *loci* of power moved away from the (whites-only) parliament to the military. The State Security Council (SSC), established by the *Security Intelligence and State Security Act*, No. 64 of 1972 to combat “any particular threat to security in South Africa”, played no small role (Horrel, 1982: 245). Earlier the author argued that South Africa could perhaps be described as an example (perhaps the only one) of a Third World country that reflected an authoritarian political system with totalitarian elements during the zenith of apartheid rule (Liebenberg, 1990: 135–136). This was

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organisations since 1967 such as the *Herstigte National Party*, a breakaway group when Vorster came to power, *Die Volkswag* and the *Conservative Party*, two other breakaway groups following the introduction of the multi-racial tricameral parliament under PW Botha. Some Broeder-/Afrikanerbonders post-1994 closely aligned themselves with the new ANC regime with others staying “neutral” and some highly critical of the new government’s policies. Following the 1990 elections the Afrikaner Broederbond (AB) changed its name to the *Afrikanerbond* (AB). Various erstwhile Broeder-/Afrikanerbonders pragmatically became advisors to, or members of the African National Congress (ANC). Other conservatives formed groups such as the Group of 63 and PRAAG that mobilised around language politics. Others tried to “reform” the so-called *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings* (FAK) to include Afrikaans-speaking people from other than white backgrounds. In the new parliament those who held culturally conservative perspectives from the white African side (the *Afrikaners*) aligned themselves under the *Vryheidsfront Plus*. The latter accepted in principle a liberal democratic constitution achieved through a negotiated settlement but remained distrustful of non-racialism, populism and the cultural relativity implied in the new constitution, yet produced a cabinet member serving under ANC rule.

<sup>7</sup>. The notion is derived from George Orwell’s *1984*. For an application of Orwell to South Africa, see B. Itterbek (1984: 20). What Orwell communicated through his work about totalitarian communist governments was as applicable to an authoritarian apartheid government with its sophisticated technical abilities to suppress the democratic movement.



made possible by the relatively high state of industrialisation that South Africa achieved as well as technological capacity that evolved since the end of the Second World War (the latter provided an industrial “take off” stage for a previously mostly agrarian society). South Africa’s high-levelled development compared to other “Third World” countries endowed it with a vast bureaucracy to bolster the apartheid state. C. Wright Mills attuned readers to the fact that bureaucracies play an immense role in strengthening the state (Wright Mills, 1977: 114–115). To discuss the political role of bureaucracies in developing societies and what happens when a highly mobilised ideological society and its incumbent state focus on control rather than inclusion is beyond the scope of this article. It suffices to mention that in such a case

*bureaucratic power in developing areas may clearly inhibit, perhaps preclude, the development of a democratic polity* (La Palombara, 1971: 22).

At the time, South Africa and the Soviet Union shared some similarities, especially if one reflects upon the previous sentence. The lack of other parties as opposition and a one-sided/partisan bureaucracy in an industrialising state subverted potential for nurturing democracy and inclusive political ethos. Authoritarian elements in the Soviet Union before Chernenko/Andropov – and to an extent Brezhnev – and South Africa’s power elite shared similarities such as an elite deciding on behalf of the others and oppression of political opposition. Sadly enough, frequently the academic discourse under apartheid and the Soviet Union lost the critical impetus by cow-towing government thinking. As Wright Mills so correctly observes: “The practicality of ‘social problems’ ... (became) overshadowed by newer conservative uses of a managerial and manipulative sort” (Wright Mills, 1977: 100). Academic activity in South Africa, especially at Afrikaans universities, seemed to gravitate towards ‘abstracted empiricism’ that represented a ‘bureaucratic’ development (Mills, 1977: 101) which led to academic institutions such as the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) acting as a consultant to the state, and so assisted bureaucratic forms of domination (Compare again Wright Mills, 1977: 101. See also Van Vuuren, 1985: 47ff; Van Vuuren, 1987: 15ff; Van Vuuren and Liebenberg, 1998: 95).

Despite this, the positive and the negative elements of reciprocal views between Russia, later the Soviet Union, were not always shared by all sides within the respective societies. Views were sometimes confined to certain minority groups or sectors of society, and the power elite depending on their material and political interests. Soviet observers critical of apartheid warned as early as 1973: “A slowdown in economic growth and sharpening of racial, political and social contradictions are characteristic of South Africa” (Butlitsky, 1973: 80). As ever, the highs of political power may not coincide with perceived economic strengths. Soviet economists correctly predicted tension and socio-political violence three years before the Soweto rebellion.

The Second World War days of comrades in arms under the Smuts government were past. Associations such as the SA Society for Peace and Friendship with the Soviet Union were easily forgotten under the new National Party regime. It started earlier: Following the end of the Second World War, the leader of the United Party, Jan Christiaan Smuts, became suspicious of the Soviet leadership and the ideology of Marxism-Leninism under Stalin’s rule.

One marked difference between the Soviet government and the apartheid government was that the communist regime strived for greater inclusiveness by top-down measures and the apartheid regime to maintain exclusion by the same measures. Since 1948 South Africa tried to impose an *exclusivist* racial and ethnic programme of *social engineering* or “ethnicity from above” – with or without success, depending on the political orientation of the observer (Zegeye, Liebenberg and Houston, 2000). In sharp contrast, the Soviet Union, through social engineering, attempted to

steer away from class, racial, sexual, religious and ethnic differences after their revolution – again with or without success in the view of the observer. The Soviet attempt at social engineering was aimed at *inclusion* and consequently the ideal of an equal society rather than apartheid's order of *inequality* and *exclusivity*.

In the South African political structure, *racial capitalism* was in favour of white control over the economy, white privileges and socio-political control (Alexander, 1985: 43). Alexander, in reference to the structural violence of apartheid, argues: “(In South Africa) the national bourgeoisie came to consist of a class of white capitalists. Because they could only farm and mine gold and diamonds profitably if they had an unlimited supply of cheap labour ... they found it necessary to create a split in the labour market – one for cheap (unskilled) black labour and another for (semi-skilled), mainly white labour ... made easier by the fact that in the pre-industrial colonial period white-black relationships had essentially been master servant relations” (Alexander, 1985: 43). Racial domination was modernised to make apartheid look more acceptable (See Adam, 1971). In the labour field, the same happened. While black workers were forced to be a-political through the Wiehahn Commission Report, in reality capital restructuring and the modification of racial elements in the world of work took place without compromising power for the white economic elite (Davies, 1978).

Over all these years, Irina Filatova remarks: “But no one can claim with assurance that all these contradictions notwithstanding, there is (or rather; *was* at the time) a common element in Soviet perceptions of South Africa. Soviet people rejected race discrimination and sympathised with the struggle the majority wage against the apartheid regime. ... (Yet) they have never harboured hostility towards the white minority as such; they denounce the regime but not the people” (Filatova, 1988: 7).

### Changing epochs and contexts

A century is a short time. This contribution focuses on the linkages between these issues while the topic is in need of much more concerted research, and research cooperation between South African and Russian (and then Soviet) historians, sociologists and economists.

The following eras are discussed:

- (1) Before and during the “Second Boer War” [also known as the *Anglo-Boer War*, *die Anglo-Boereoorlog*;<sup>8</sup>
- (2) The First World War to the end of the Second World War;
- (3) The post-Second World War and the apartheid era;
- (4) The post-apartheid era.

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<sup>8</sup>. For this reason, some refer to the liberation struggle against apartheid as the “third war for liberation” or for that matter the “third republic”.

## 1. Before and during the “Second Boer War”/Anglo-Boer War

Refugees from the Kamchatka in eastern Siberia rounded the Cape in 1771. Two of the first Russians to visit South Africa were a junior officer, Yuri Lisiansky, and a musician, Gerasim Lebedev. The latter conducted some recitals in the British occupied South Africa in 1798 with the permission of the then governor (Filatova, 1988: 3). Captain Vasili Golovnin's ship was confiscated and held in Cape Town during the British-French war of 1808-1809 when Russia was an ally of France. Golovnin describes the settlers and their languages, the Malay people, the Khoikhoi and slavery as institution (Filatova, 1988: 3). His memoirs were published in South Africa in the 1960s (Filatova, 1988: 3).

During 1853 Ivan Gontcharov spent time in the Cape Colony and interviewed Xhosa leaders jailed during the Wars of Dispossession (pejoratively known by the colonialists as *Kaffir Wars*). Another illustrated book by an artist, Vysheslavtsev, followed Gontcharov's five years later (Filatova, 1988: 4). Filatova argues that “the formation of grass-roots conceptions” by Russians took place during the Anglo-Boer War (Filatova, 1988: 4). The work of Sophia Izyedina *A few months with the Boers: The war reminiscences of a Russian nursing sister*, was published in South Africa in the 1970s. Russian military attachés were deployed before the Anglo-Boer War to the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* (ZAR). According to Shubin:

*The Russian Empire sent six official military agents to the South African War theatre in 1899-1900* (Shubin, 2000: 13ff).

One may assume that the Tsar and the Russian Foreign Office were well-informed about developments in the far-off Republics. The Russian populace and the elite clearly saw the Boers as “the good people” and had sympathy with them in their struggle against British Imperialism (Davidson, 2003; Davidson & Filatova, 1998: 177ff; 207ff; Scheepers-Strijdom, 1970; *Gedenkalbum van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog*, 1949: 338). “Boer Mania reached such a pitch” and the authors noted that “[w]herever you go these days, you hear the same stories, the Boers, the Boers, the Boers” (Davidson and Filatova, 1998: 177). Church services were held for the health of Paul Kruger in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Orchestras played on request the Republican Anthems of the Transvaal and the Free State (“Kent gij dat Volk vol Heldenmoed ...” and “Kom't Burgers, heft de lied der Vrijheid aan ...”). *Sarie Marais*, a Boer folksong (*volksliedjie*) was translated in Russian, and sung in Moscow and St. Petersburg (to become Leningrad after the Revolution). A popular song at the time, composed by a female poet, called *Transvaal, Transvaal, My Own True Land* was sung. Funds were collected for the Boer wounded (Davidson, 2003: 27).

Political groupings such as the Social Democrats felt that the Boers stood for democracy against a system of oppressive monarchism. Amongst others, Vladimir Illiich Ulyanov (Lenin), then a young social democrat, spoke out in the favour of the Boers in *Iskra*. So did some Russian conservatives (Davidson and Filatova, 1998: 190). In this case the radical factions and the conservatives in Russia were of one opinion.

Olive Schreiner, a famous South African author who first was pro-Rhodes like the young Christiaan Smuts, felt betrayed after the Jameson Raid and started writing feverishly pro-Boer and anti-imperialist works. Schreiner's works were published widely in Russia (Davidson & Filatova, 1998: 190, 191). Maxim Gorky wrote on Olive Schreiner in 1899 in *Nizhegorodsky listok* (Davidson & Filatova, 1998: 274). Her works were translated and published in Russia as early as 1893. Paul Kruger's and General De Wet's memoirs were also translated. Later on works by Uys Krige, Breyten Breytenbach, André Brink, Ingrid Jonker and Barend Toerien, amongst others, were translated into Russian. Soviet/Russian students at the Moscow State

University studied Dutch-Afrikaans (*Afrikaans-Nederlands*), and read South African poetry and novels up till today. I was fortunate to meet with some postgraduate students during a visit to the Soviet Union in 1990. At occasions since then I met with some of the dedicated Afrikaans-Dutch such as Andre Ignatenko. A member of the Institute for African Studies spoke at length to the author in Afrikaans in 2000 during a march commemorating the October Revolution. Amongst others, he enquired about the clicking sounds found in Oranjerivier-Afrikaans. He was informed on the work of Ponelis and interested in the work of Prof. Gawie Nienaber. Filatova, however, reminds us that not all was well in the then state of “Pretoriana” (ZAR). Russian observers commented on the treatment of blacks and their interpretation of Black people’s lives as victims rather than participants in history (Filatova, 1988: 4).



Colonel Gurko, the Russian Military Attaché with the Boer Republics at the start of the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902. Like many others, Russian volunteers came to assist the Boer Republics in their struggle against British Imperialism. Some of them resigned their military positions in order to take part in the activities down south. Maximov for example became a *veggeneraal* (field general) during the war, one of only two foreign officers that were promoted to that rank in the Boer forces. The other one was the Frenchman, De Villabois-Mareuil.

Whether novel is history, or history is novel, is a point to contemplate. One could “read” history, even if between the lines, as becoming unfixed discourse (Bleicher, 1980: 257–259; Thompson, 1982: 145–146). One does not have to agree with Kundera to find that being human holds surprises. The same applies to Russian-South African relations. Interesting anecdotes (yet well confirmed in archives) are worth mentioning. Gennady Shubin relates the story of the Russian volunteer, Prince Mikhail Yengalishev, an aristocrat with Tartar ancestors, who served the Moscow princes in the 15<sup>th</sup> century: “On his return from the Boer War he did not enlist for military service again. But later in Saratov in 1907 he was sentenced for an attempt (to) create a terrorist organisation among local peasants” (Shubin, 2003, e-mail correspondence, 2005). The aim of this would-be terrorist is both intriguing and a surprise: to stage a plot against the Tsar, to assassinate him and establish a Republic in Russia based on the Boer model of the Transvaal! For his newfound democratic zeal and progressive *avant garde*-ism the activist was arrested by the Tsar’s secret police for subversion, sentenced to death and then reprieved. Needless to say that he spent the rest of his life under continued surveillance of the Tsarist secret police (Shubin, 2003; e-mail). As history has shown time and again the one person’s terrorist is the freedom fighter for the other.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>. Gert van der Westhuizen in *Beeld*, an Afrikaans daily newspaper, article *Miskien is die VSA die terrorist?* (English: Maybe the USA is the terrorist?), *Beeld*, 2003 addresses this issue with reference to the conflict in the Middle East.

What about international politics during the Anglo-Boer War? The dream of a great intervention besieged the Tsar. *Realpolitik* was to prevent this. Davidson refers to the “Emperor’s dreams” versus “the harsh realities” (Davidson & Filatova, 1998: 208; 220). Osten-Sacken, a Russian diplomatic representative, enquired from Von Bulow of Germany in 1900 about possible joint action. The diplomatic representative explained that his country and the Kaiser were hesitant in view of the hesitant position of France (Boeseken, Kruger & Kieser, 1953: 185–186). From the plans to challenge the Brits and by the consequences of that perhaps assisting the Boers in their hour of crisis very little materialised. In *Drie Eeue* we find a perspective on why Russia could not go to war against Britain at the time – even if the Tsar may have dreamt of it. References are made to the then geo-strategic position and the power politics of the great nations in Europe. While the Tsar and his followers may have considered challenging the might of the British Empire, *die Grosse Politik der Europa* made it impossible.

Outside South Africa some people conjectured that Russia was to intervene. One of South Africa’s great authors, the late Jan Rabie, during his stay in Paris in the 1950s relates an interesting story: He comments that in 1954 he found a small book in a flea market entitled *Le Président Kruger en France*. The publication dated 1901 informs us that during Kruger’s visit to France some French journalists visited the fortune-teller Madame Julia Layfonvielle. On their question whether the Boers will win or lose the war she made a statement:

*The Boers will not lose the war. They will receive help. In 1901 Russia will intervene* (See a publication by Kannemeyer compiled on Jan Rabie by Kannemeyer [(2003: 64)].

Rabie mentioned that the French daily paper, *Le Gaulois*, reported on this incident. Amongst others *La Vie Illustrée* also reported on the Madame’s statements. Was the soothsayer wrong? Or was she expressing a sentiment? Or was she perhaps, by saying this, trying to influence public opinion and political decision-makers? (In political science jargon: Was she involved in *agenda setting* or *influencing the political agenda* through her intervention?) At the same time her opinion was that France would not intervene directly, but would provide monetary assistance. Was this an attempt to influence the French politicians, knowing that she was widely quoted by French newspapers? France already sold artillery pieces and expertise to the Boer Republics and not too well disposed to an international rival, Britain. It seems that either in opinion or agenda setting the soothsayer was wrong – at least for that moment.

Her reference to French-South African relations may have been based on her knowledge of an arms deal between the French and the Boer Republics. At least in terms of military equipment sold, this happened again seventy years later with the Republic of South Africa importing French armament such as Allouette, Super Frelon and Puma helicopters, Mirage aircraft, Panhard armoured cars and Daphne submarines.

Boer leaders remained optimistic that Russia may intervene. Leyds informed President Steyn from the *Oranje Vrijstaat* that Russian intervention in India may be a possibility, but added that it was “a probability, not a certainty” (Pakenham, 1979: 388). Help would not be forthcoming.<sup>10</sup> A delegation of Boers (*afvaardiging* or *delegatie*) consisting of Fischer, Wessels and Wolmarans went to Holland, the United States, Germany and St. Petersburg, Russia (St. Petersburg later became Leningrad and the name was again changed to St. Petersburg under the Yeltsin regime). The Afrikaner historians reported that “*Die Tsaar was simpatiek*” (The Tsar had

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<sup>10</sup>. For more detail, see Walker (1941: 485, 473, 482 and 492).



sympathy with the cause). Alas, given the international situation, little help was forthcoming (Boeseken, Kruger & Kieser, 1953: 190). Pakenham points out that President Steyn of the *Oranje Vrijstaat* for public consumption spoke about possible 'favourable news' from Europe. Pakenham, however, reminds us that Steyn at the time already knew that it was a forlorn hope. Even if the rumour about Russia about to take Herat close to the border of Afghanistan was true, that did not mean that British-India was at threat (Pakenham, 1979: 388). At no given time the British Empire was to come under serious geo-strategic pressures. The German Kaiser's telegram much earlier on (following Starr Jameson's less-fortunate foray into the Transvaal, 1895/1896) was of little value and few other observers posted hope on it.

Russian volunteers took on the long voyage to the ZAR and Pretoria, while German and Russian government pleas to negotiate a settlement fell on deaf ears in London (Boeseken, Kruger & Kieser, 1953: 187). Together with others from Ireland, Germany, France and the United States of America (the latter mostly Irish) the Russians departed to the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* (ZAR). Many of the Russian volunteers came without the permission – or in some cases knowledge – of their government. Some others resigned their military ranks before their departure in order not to embarrass the Tsar. The Boers saw the majority of volunteers as loyal and admirable friends (*Gedenkalbum*, 1949: 279). "Die Boere het nie alleen gestaan toe hulle in hul uur van nood hulle toevlug tot 'God en Mauser' geneem het nie. Van heinde en ver het vreemdelingvriende hulle na die oorlogstoneel gehaas om die Afrikaners in hul tweede vryheidstryd met woord en daad behulpsaam te wees" (Van Niekerk, 1949: 279). A Russian corps of about sixty men was established according to one Afrikaans historian (Van Niekerk, 1949: 296). The Russian military attaché to the Boer Republics at the time, Rumeiko-Gurko, compiled a list of twenty-five Russian volunteers of whom the majority were officers (Davidson & Filatova, 1998: 46–48). Davidson and Filatova concluded in their research that at least 225 Russian volunteers came to the Transvaal (Davidson & Filatova, 1998: 45). A number of Russian Jews also served in the Dutch volunteer corps, we are informed (Davidson & Filatova, 1998: 51). Two of them became renowned scouts under the Boer Generals Hertzog and De Wet, with the endearing nicknames of "Jakkals en Wolf" (The Fox and the Wolf). Others were killed, one of them an elected *Kommandant* (commanding officer). Another Russian, Yevgeni Fiodorovitch Augustus, an infantry officer, served in and fought with the Krugersdorp Commando, the Russian Detachment and the Johannesburg Police Commando. In June 1900 he was wounded by the British and taken prisoner. He was released on condition that he pledges "on his word of honour" that he would not serve under arms for the Boers. This did not prevent Yevgeni to write extensive memoirs on the war and his participation therein before again fighting in the Russo-Japanese war (1904–1905). He was later killed in the First World War then holding the rank of Captain (2<sup>nd</sup> Class) (Shubin, 2000: 25).

The Prince Nikolai Georgiivitch Bagration-Mukhransky was nicknamed "Niko the Boer". Lieutenant Colonel Yevgeni Yakovlevich Maximov joined the Boers as an experienced officer. After being wounded near Thaba N'chu in the Free State, he received a hero's welcome in Pretoria and was elected general (*Veggeneraal*) – the highest rank to be awarded in Boer military structures. Paul Kruger, while in exile in Switzerland, wrote a personal letter to thank Maximov for his contribution. Only one other foreigner was bestowed the same honour as Maximov. That was the Frenchman, Colonel De Villaboiss-Mareuil, who was appointed in the field to the rank of general (*Veggeneraal*). Mareuil died early in 1900 when his corps was routed near Boshof by General Methuen's superior forces.

Russian officers and fighting men found the Boer strategies and tactics bewildering (Discussion with Gennady Shubin, 2005 and consequent e-mail correspondence. See also Shubin and Shubin, 2005 in Snyman et al.). This is not the place for an extensive discussion, as it belongs more in the realm of comparisons between regular and citizen armies, different approaches to war by European armies and African armies, and irregular tactics used in war against a better armed and larger enemy force (asymmetric war tactics). Despite valiant efforts the Republics would eventually surrender under the pressure of the British army in one of the most costly wars Britain had ever fought.

Russian empathy remained. The Bratina, as a sign of honour, empathy and respect (Boeseken, Kruger & Kieser, 1954: 203) accompanied by 70 000 signatures were handed to the Boer delegation when they visited Russia. The Bratina is to be seen in the Transvaal Museum (today the Gauteng Cultural Museum) in Pretoria, Tshwane.

## 2. The First and the Second World Wars and between

By 1910 the land where Boer and Brit fought against each other in one of the first modern resource wars<sup>11</sup> was to become the land of Boer *and* Brit as the new ruling elite.<sup>12</sup> But resistance was brewing. In 1904 the black people in Natal embarked on the failed Bambate rebellion. The South African Native National Congress (SANNC) – later to become the African National Congress (ANC) – was established in 1912. In the following year the discriminatory Land Laws that were to oust thousands of black people from their land into “reservations” were passed. The Bondelswarts people in Namibia, then South West Africa (*Suidwes-Afrika*), embarked on an ill-fated and desperate rebellion against the Union government of South Africa. The South African military and air force defeated the small force of Bondelswarts people and vanquished further efforts from Namibians to resist for a while.

In 1921 the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) followed the establishment of the Socialist League that came into being in 1915. The 1922 mineworkers strike influenced by, among others, communist sentiments took place on the East Rand with names like Boksburg and Benoni soon to be carved out in South Africa’s history. *Drie Eeue* refers: “Duisende mense het deur die strate gedrom en ’n ware skrikbewind het losgebars ... dit was feitlik die begin van ’n rewolusie wat baie mense herinner het aan die bloedige Russiese omwenteling van 1917. Die kapitaliste het dit ook werklik so beskou, veral omdat die kommunistiese elemente hulle nou laat geld het. Die rewolusionêre lied, die ‘Rooi Vlag’ is gehoor en daar is gepraat van die stigting van ’n swart republiek.” The author in *Drie Eeue* over-interpreted. Few social scientists, including historians, would argue that the 1921 strike was about establishing “a black republic” today. Communist ideals played a role in the strike but few of the strikers had been involved in order to establish a black government. The spectre of a Russian-like revolution under the red banner caused extreme disconcert amongst the white ruling elite, financial bosses and mine magnates.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>. Some historians prefer the term “the last of the (great) colonial wars” (Discussion: Greg Cuthbertson, 07/04/2005).

<sup>12</sup>. On modern resource wars, see Pritvorov & Liebenberg, 2000: 75ff.

<sup>13</sup>. This golden thread of the ‘threat’ of the Red Banner was found sixty years later when elements of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and student groups also sung The Red Flag at meetings during the third liberation struggle.

DF Malan, the Nationalist Afrikaner leader, had sympathy with the actions by the striking miners. He likened the National Party to the *Bolsjewiste* (Bolsheviks) in one of his orations (Talk by Apollon Davidson, National Research Foundation, Pretoria, 2001). Two decades later the very same party of Malan frequently referred to *The Communist Danger* masterminded by Moscow. History, like shortstories or novels, is filled by the odd irony. So are economic realities and politics.

Fearing a communist revolution and debilitating industrial unrest, the Smuts government unleashed the police, the military and the newly established South African Air Force in force against the strikers with devastating effects (Fokkens, 2006). The strike was broken at the loss of at least 230 lives, fifty of them policemen (Krüger, 1978: 125). Some strike commanders were captured. Some were sentenced to death. Others committed suicide when the strike collapsed. More than 4 600 people were detained for questioning. By 1923, 425 people were awaiting trial while 608 had already been sentenced. Eighteen persons were sentenced to death for murder. Instead, prison sentences were given, though a few were hanged (Krüger, 1978: 125–126; Oberholster, 1982: 190–191; Fokkens, 2006; Visser & Fokkens, 2003 150 -153).

“The SACP has always played an important theoretical role in its own right and in the context of the wider national democratic struggle.<sup>14</sup> The Party and all its members should collectively seek to continuously develop and deepen the ideas of Marxism-Leninism and in particular seek to develop its application in our own society” (Quoted in Kotze, 1994: 47). Joe Slovo was later to plead for a more pragmatic approach in order to maintain the “inextricable link” to the ANC (Kotze, 1994: 50). Yet, Slovo remained convinced that “ultimately South Africa will arrive at a socialist system”. Existing socialism, he argued, failed because it was divorced from democracy, that democratic socialism is the only rational future for humankind and that it can be realised in a future South Africa (Slovo, 1994: 41 in Liebenberg et al.).<sup>15</sup> His words echoed the approach of Gorbachov: “Vele jaren geleden was alles heel wat eenvoudiger. Er waren een paar mahcten die vaststeden wat hul belangen waren ...wij hebben een oog open voor wat gaande is (Gorbatsjov, 1988; 157, 156, 161 – Dutch translation). Gorbachov and Slovo’s arguments boiled down to ‘newfound realities’.<sup>16</sup> Did they now, after years of Marxism-Leninism, return to Marx’s idea of the future socialist state as “a direct democracy in which the task of governing would not be the preserve of the state bureaucracy”? (Slovo, 1989: 11). Arguably history will finally put the blame or absolve.

While some South Africans admired communism (and the Soviet state), others feared and loathed the “new Russia” and its ideology. Schisms and fault lines developed that were to mark future relations between the two countries for the greater part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Left in South Africa at the time became deeply divided between Stalin supporters and Trotsky supporters (Hirson, 1994; Liebenberg, 1990; Liebenberg et al., 1994). The “lunatic left” or Trotskyite tendency was consistently vilified by the SACP in South Africa as “reactionaries” – very much as happened in the Soviet Union during the rule of Stalin. Those who persisted were

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<sup>14</sup>. Also referred to as the *national democratic revolution*.

<sup>15</sup>. More can be read in Slovo: *The Unfinished Autobiography* (1996)

<sup>16</sup> For an intellectual engagement with Slovo’s “new” approach, see Heribert Adam (1990). Adam is correct; the SACP led many into the negotiation process – and Thatcherite/Reaganomics if viewed a decade, two and more later.

drummed out of the Marxist-Leninist vanguard represented by the communist parties in both countries.

*The Trotskyist groups that broke with the CPSA and the Comintern voiced their anger at what was happening in the USSR in 1932 ... but squabbled, split and ... retreated into self-righteous sectarianism (Hirson, 1994: 52).*

While the Trotskyites were essentially anti-war at the outbreak of the Second World War, Hirson remarked that they also heeded “Trotsky’s call for the unconditional defence of the USSR”. One of the historical ironies of the Marxist movement in South Africa at the time was that while internally the Marxist-Leninists and Trotsky followers fought each other, belittled each other and implied treachery, they nevertheless had agreement on the necessity for the defence of the USSR against racism and Nazism. But then again, the irony of the time could be a form of visionary focus.

The Trotskyites in South Africa had newspapers *The Spark* (derived from *Iskra*) and the *Torchlight*. They cooperated with the young radical Hashomer Hatzair (the young guard), a Zionist group, before internal strains and different views on the USSR, China, Spain and the Spanish Civil War divided them, and rendered further cooperation impossible (Hirson, 1994: 59, 63). These debates would influence South African liberation politics for years to come, perhaps even today.

Debates initiated by Martin Legassick and the Marxist Workers’ Tendency of the ANC (Legassick, 1994: 173ff) lasted up to the 1980s – at least at the two universities where the author studied (Stellenbosch and the University of Western Cape). Jaco Malan, then chairperson of the Stellenbosch branch of the National Union of South African Students (Nusas), was ousted because of his sympathies for the Marxist Workers Tendency (MWT) and the political philosophies of Leon Trotsky. After he had been drummed out of Nusas, Mark Behr was elected chairperson of Nusas being more ‘mainstream’. Behr was later identified as being in the pay of the South African Security Police and made a submission in this regard to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Given the ever fluid nature of Western Cape politics, such debates were not unknown at the University of Western Cape, which then was known as the “intellectual home of the Left”. (At the time Jakes Gerwel was the Rector of *Bush*.) Again, the influence of debates and tensions following from different interpretation and application of Marx’s theory had an effect. Perhaps as much as the deep rooted racism advanced by the white power elite one may argue ...

The Suppression of Communism Act in the 1950s before South Africa became a white republic, declared communism unlawful. The Act stated that “Communists were those following the teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky”. Names like Antonio Gramsci, Palmiro Togliatti and Rosa Luxemburg were not mentioned – otherwise the apartheid regime would have had to add plenty more names to their list.<sup>17</sup> Following the Suppression of Communism Act, Marxist groups were driven underground and the Marxist-Leninists dealt with their banning more successfully than the Trotskyites. Some of the latter group aligned themselves with the Committee of Liberation or African Resistance Group (ARM). ARM “counted amongst its members a bewildering array of political tendencies” which became involved in amateurish sabotage and the infamous Harris bomb, and soon thereafter predictably rounded up by the

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<sup>17</sup>. The names of anarchists such as Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin were relatively unknown to the security agencies in South Africa at the time. If so it would have struck fear into their hearts and enhanced their *angst* about a revolution substantially.

South African Security Police (Du Toit, 1994: 97ff; Hirson, 1994: 62). But, let us take a step back. Stories, like history, are not always chronological.

South Africa was to join the Allies, inclusive of the Soviet Union, in the war against Fascism and Nazism. War was declared on 1 September 1939. On 4 September the pleas for neutrality of the then South African prime minister, JBM Hertzog, were defeated in the South African parliament with thirteen votes. The United Party of Smuts argued for entering the war on the Allied side (Oosthuizen, 1942: 4). Hence, South Africa was on the side of, amongst others, the Soviet Union against the Axis Forces of *Herr* Adolf Hitler and *Il Duce* Benito Mussolini, and later on by implication, at war with Japanese militarism.

The Labour Party, the Dominion Party, the *Naturelle-verteenwoordigers* (representatives for black people in parliament) and some of the Hertzogites supported Smuts (Muller, 1980: 450–451). Many South Africans within the National Party and two major right wing movements, namely the Ossewa Brandwag headed by Hans van Rensburg and the New Order Party headed by Oswald Pirow were supportive of the Nazis. Internally the government saw movements sympathetic to nationalism and socialism as a threat. Ossewa Brandwag leaders were interned.

Many South Africans may be aware that the Soviet Union lost around 20 000 000 citizens and soldiers during World War Two. They are well aware that the “Russians” – in other words, the Soviet Union – sacrificed people, material and their future to defeat Fascism and Nazism. The number of people that the “Russians” in war (the Soviet people) lost in comparison with others, for example the United States of America, the UK, France and other allies fade to insignificance. History tells us that those who suffered the greater losses were Jewish people and the Soviet people, the latter more than the former. (Sadly South African historiography does not sufficiently inform us about Chinese or for that matter, civilian losses in the East in the same war).

South Africans supportive of the war against Fascism and Nazi-nationalism in their own way tried to support Allied forces and the Soviet Union. An organisation called Medical Aid for Russia (Afrikaans: *Mediese Hulp vir Rusland*), following a request from the Soviet Red Cross, acted on the call to provide “ten thousand bottles of human blood serum” for the “soldiers of the Red Army”. Among others, members from Kimberley, Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth, East London, Pietermaritzburg, Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria contributed. The mobilising slogan simply read: “Give your blood that they shall not die!” (Unisa, Archival Group: Communist Party and Russia, 1922–1975).



M.1150/42

UNIE VAN SUID-AFRIKA.  
UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA.

KANTOOR VAN DIE MINISTER VAN POS-EN TELEGRAAFWESE.  
OFFICE OF THE MINISTER OF POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS.

PRETORIA.  
16th October, 1942.

Sir,

I attended a meeting of the United Party at Klerksdorp when a resolution was passed, the contents of which I was asked to convey to you, and I have much pleasure in informing you that the following resolution was carried with acclamation:-

"This meeting of the United Party wishes to express its admiration of and gratitude to the heroic Russian Armies who with so much valour are maintaining the fight against the Nazis.

This meeting requests the Chairman to inform the Soviet Representative in our country, that it is our earnest prayer that the awful struggle may soon be brought to a successful conclusion and that every Nazi may be chased out of Russia."

Yours faithfully,



MINISTER OF POSTS & TELEGRAPHS  
AND PUBLIC WORKS.

Nicolai Iakovlevich Demianov,  
Consul General of the U.S.S.R.,  
PRETORIA.

A letter dated 16 October 1942 from the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs and Public Works to the Consul General of the USSR in Pretoria, Nicolai Demianov, read:

*This meeting of the United Party wishes to express its admiration and gratitude to the heroic Russian Armies who with so much valour fight against the Nazis.*

It continues:

*(It is our earnest prayer that the awful struggle will soon be brought to a successful conclusion and that every Nazi will be driven out of Russia. (Unisa, Archival Group: Communist Party and Russia, 1922-1975).*

Smaller acts of solidarity deserve attention. The workers of Eskay Shirts (Pty Ltd) in Salt River, Cape Town gave a donation to the Medical Aid for Russia. The covering letter for the donation is dated 17 December 1943. It is likely that this gift was to be an offering to coincide with Christmas 1943. The Cash Cycle and Motor Works Wholesale and Retail at 345 Pretorius Street, Pretoria, donated 50 pounds. The manager, A. Wolson, signed the letter (Unisa, Archival Group: Communist Party and Russia, 1922-1975).

In response to an urgent appeal from the Soviet Red Cross

## MEDICAL AID FOR RUSSIA

has placed an order with

**THE SOUTH AFRICAN BLOOD TRANSFUSION SERVICE**

for

## TEN THOUSAND BOTTLES OF HUMAN BLOOD SERUM

to be sent by air to the

## SOLDIERS OF THE RED ARMY

To cope with this order the South African Blood Transfusion Service requires 30,000 donors immediately. As a token of thanksgiving to our most gallant allies, whose blood is flowing so freely in our common cause, we beg you most earnestly to communicate with the address undermentioned which is nearest to you, where intending donors can obtain enrolment forms, sign up and give their blood.

South African Blood Transfusion Service, Johannesburg Branch, Cor. Klein and Esselen Streets, diagonally opposite Nurses' Home, Hospital Hill, Johannesburg. Phone 41-2144

South African Blood Transfusion Service, East Rand Branch, Astor Court, Princes Avenue, Benoni. Phone 54-1551

South African Blood Transfusion Service, West Rand Branch, Krugersdorp Hospital, Krugersdorp. Phone 66-3131

South African Blood Transfusion Service, Vereeniging Branch, Galen Chambers, Main Street, Vereeniging. Phone 66

South African Blood Transfusion Service, Durban Branch, Addington Hospital, Durban. Box 2356. Phone 2-0051

Maritzburg Blood Transfusion Service, 856 Boshoff Street, Maritzburg. Phone 3132

Port Elizabeth Blood Transfusion Service, Norwich Union Insurance Company's Office, Cuthberts Buildings, Main Street, Port Elizabeth. Phone 3928

Cape Peninsula Blood Transfusion Service, Atlas Buildings, 52 St. George's Street, Cape Town. Phone 2-2312

South African Blood Transfusion Service, Bloemfontein Branch, Cuthberts Buildings, Maitland Street, Bloemfontein. Phone 2176

South African Blood Transfusion Service, Kimberley Branch, Hospital Gates, General Hospital, Kimberley. Phone 19

East London Blood Transfusion Service, Frere Hospital, Connaught Avenue, East London. Phone 3361

## GIVE YOUR BLOOD THAT THEY SHALL NOT DIE!

S.C.P. CO.

Source: Unisa, Archival Group: Communist Party and Russia, 1922-1975

The South African Medical Aid for Russia, apart from cash donations totalling roughly £800 000, also supplied antigas gangrene serum, antibacterial dysentery serum, antityphus vaccine, 7 452 bottles of human blood serum, 600 000 yards of bandage, 5 000 000 vitamin B (complex) tablets and 80 tons of tuna fish. Correspondence from the Medical Aid for Russia dated January 1945 addressed to the Soviet Consulate, Mr. Snagerev, proves that by 1945 deliveries continued.

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South African seamen also served on board naval vessels in the operations to relieve Leningrad during 1941/42. In 2005, the Great Patriotic War commemorations in South Africa took place in Cape Town in order to honour some of the seamen who were still alive and back then took part in the “Arctic Convoys” (Photo compliments, Andrey Sharashkin and Fiodosiy Vladyeshevskiy, Embassy of the Russian Federation in Pretoria, 2005).



South African seamen participated in the Arctic convoys to assist the Soviet Union during the siege of Leningrad (today St. Petersburg). **Source:** Embassy of the Russian Federation in Pretoria, 2005

An illustration of the divisions within the white community in South Africa at the time can be seen from a letter from the Afrikaans Reformed Churches. In a letter addressed to the Smuts government the Afrikaans Reformed Churches appealed to the Smuts government about the “dangers of Communism” (*die gevare van die Kommuniste*) and “the pressures of communist propaganda” (*die druk van kommunistiese propaganda*). The letter, signed by eight Reformed Church leaders delegated to do so, mentioned by name the unacceptability of “communist principles that are materialist, godless and unchristian”. The Trade and Labour Council, the trade unions and the Friends of the Soviet Union are mentioned by name. The letter appealed to the government to ban all communication between the Soviet Union and unions (Unisa, United Party Archives, Division of Information, “Church and Politics”). At the time the Dutch Reformed Church members were mostly Afrikaners. The Afrikaans Reformed Churches (the

*Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk*, die *Gereformeerde Kerk* and the *Hervormde Kerk*) were penetrated by members of the secret Afrikaner Broederbond. The Afrikaans churches were to a degree also sympathetic to the authoritarian national-socialist movement, the *Ossewa Brandwag*,<sup>18</sup> of which many members were interned by the Smuts government.<sup>19</sup> In the Western Transvaal institutions of higher education were supportive of the *Ossewa Brandwag*.

In 1948 the international community accepted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a direct result of the horrific effects of racial supremacy that led to the Second World War. The National Party and its Broederbond cohorts came to power with the slogan *Apartheid* (Separateness) soon to be transformed under the premier Hans Strijdom to *Baasskap* (*Herrenschafft*). It speaks for itself that, compared to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the white power elite's idea of racial separatism for South Africa was not received well. In the Soviet Union and the rest of the civilised world that saw the effects of extreme nationalism whereas they tried to eradicate class, religious and ethnic differences, apartheid was abhorrent.

In the Soviet Union the attempt to eradicate class, religious and ethnic differences happened through authoritarian strategies. At the same time the new South African government under the Broederbond and National Party power elite in tandem with the Afrikaans churches installed racial exclusivity, ethnic differences and racial-class divisions by authoritarian means. The paths between erstwhile comrades would split.

### 3. Apartheid, liberation struggle (and a Cold War)

The Smuts government was defeated in the general election of 1948. The National Party came to power – a reign under one dominant white party that was to last 40 years. In the Soviet Union the reign of the Communist Party was to last roughly 70 years. Did this perhaps happen because at least theoretically Communism aimed at inclusion and some benefits were redistributed under communist rule, while apartheid in theory and practice aimed at exclusion and exploitation of a perceived 'inferior' other and hence caused earlier alienation from its subjects?

The period 1948 to 1988 can, perhaps from the South African (elite) side, be described as grudging admiration turning into fear, if not hate, for the Soviet Union. It was the beginnings of apartheid social engineering, legalised racialism, the Red Bear syndrome and paranoid fears for Communism as ideology. The Cold War mythology also played a role. South Africa was to align itself with the "Christian West" and in tandem their free market ideology.

Geldenhuis, with reference to the Afrikaner power elite, argues that in 1949 the South African Minister of Justice, CR Swart, referred to "Communism as a snake in the backyard which had to be killed before it bites" (Geldenhuis, 1988: 8). Geldenhuis points out that from the days of DF Malan, the first National Party prime minister, to the times of Verwoerd and Vorster "... the Soviet Union was regarded as the source of (all) communist evil" (Geldenhuis, 1988: 9). He also

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<sup>18</sup>. Northwest-University (previously the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education) houses a comprehensive archive of *Ossewa Brandwag* literature and history worth consulting.

<sup>19</sup>. John Vorster and later BOSS Chief, Hendrik van den Bergh, were internees, among others.



points out that for a brief period John Vorster, who succeeded Verwoerd, singled out Communist China as the most serious threat facing South Africa. This happened especially during the time when China financed and built the Tanzam railway line between Tanzania and Zambia in 1970–1975. However, the Soviet Union remained in the scope and would be the dominant focus of anti-Communism.

“Jy kan ’n Kommunis vertrou om ’n Kommunis te wees” became the slogan used by National Party/Broederbond leaders from the late 1950s in order to mobilise whites and “moderate” (“responsible”) black people against internal and external resistance which was presumed to be orchestrated from the Soviet Union. For many Moscow became a loathsome word, in contrast to the time of the Anglo-Boer War and partially the period up to the end of the Second World War. Schisms became pronounced and different sections of the population in South Africa and presumably the Soviet Union viewed each other with feelings that varied from admiration, grudging respect, sheer adulation, scepticism and hate/fear. Needless to say, the political elite (and their faithful media) played a major role in influencing opinions on both sides.

Vale (2008: 22) observes that “South Africa was a *cause célèbre* in the life and times of the Cold War ... a rich white majority seemed to enjoy the support of the West while an impoverished black majority looked towards the Soviet Union and its allies as a source of support”. Many white elite viewed the picture as such. Vale quotes Verwoerd: “South Africa is unequivocally the symbol of anti-Communism in Africa. Although often abused we are still a bastion in Africa for Christianity and the Western world” (Vale, 2008: 22).

In 1950 the Suppression of Communism Act (Act No. 44 of 1950) was passed. It also applied to occupied territories such as the then South West Africa (today Namibia) (See Horrel, 1982: 201). The official definition was wide open to interpretation and (ab)use. It covered anyone or anybody or any group, institution or association that expounded the teachings of Marx, Lenin or Trotsky. In an ironic twist the law condemned any scheme or action that aimed at “despotic rule or dictatorship of the proletariat”, any action aimed at “bringing about political, industrial, social or economic change within the Union”, “political disturbance” or “the encouragement of feelings of hostility between European and non-European races in the Union” (Horrel, 1982: 202). Following the Sharpeville shootings on 21 March where 83 black persons lost their lives and many were injured, the Unlawful Organisations Act (Act No. 24 of 1960) followed. Hence, the PAC and ANC were banned. In 1961 South Africa left the Commonwealth and declared herself a republic.

Between 1962 and 1966 the General Law Amendment Act (1962) and the further General Law Amendment Act (Act No. 37 of 1963) were passed, outlawing various organisations. (For a full list consult Horrel, 1982: 204–205.) The Affected Organisations Act of 1974 and the Internal Security Amendment Act, Act No. 79 of 1976, were to follow. Between 1960 and 1975 several organisations were banned. Following the Internal Security Amendment Act another eighteen organisations followed. Amongst them were Parents and Teachers Organisations, Youth and Black Journalist Organisations and various Black Consciousness Movement related organisations. Several publications and the Christian Institute headed by Beyers Naudé followed the same path (Horrel, 1982: 205–207). The newsletter of the Christian Institute, *Pro Veritate*, was amongst the publications banned.



The Afrikaner political elite led their followers into the psychosis of a presumed *Total Onslaught*.<sup>20</sup> South Africa's minority, due to increasing international criticism and later isolation in their view, stood alone – much like the Smith regime in the then Rhodesia did before Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. The South African regime felt betrayed by the United States of America which temporarily withdrew its initial support to South Africa and the rebel movement Unita after the 1975/1976 invasion of Angola by three South African battle groups. Geldenhuys argues that a “complex love-hate relationship” developed between South Africa and Western powers (Geldenhuys, 1988: 9). Such feelings of betrayal can perhaps be traced back to the comparisons, similarities (even mirror images) that the South African white people shared with the American South. The intertwining of religion, especially Puritanism, elements of Calvinism, a belief in a God-given right to rule over and to decide on the life and death of the underlings of a different race, had a major influence. Romanticism also played a role. In the South African case ideas – amongst others, Herder – brought in by Dutch immigrants after the Anglo-Boer War also played a role. South African theologians who studied in Nazi-Germany such as the brother of the then prime minister John Vorster also played a role in advancing ethnocentrism and authoritarian attitudes. The Stellenbosch Dutch Reformed Church theologian FJM Potgieter, a committed Calvinist, who studied in pre-war Germany later became known for his insistence that “apartheid was God's will”. Cash (1971: 93–106, 127ff, 216 ff, 346, 382ff) in referring to the mind and mentality of the American South discusses Romanticism's role at length. For more on romanticism in South Africa, see the late Dawid Bosch on the roots and fruits of Afrikaner civil religion.<sup>21</sup>

Notwithstanding a complex love-hate relationship with the West, South Africa did cooperate with France on nuclear energy and security issues, and imported military transport aircraft via Morocco from Western states. South African scientists studied nuclear physics in the USA without restrictions. Major oil companies such as Shell and British Petroleum exported oil to South Africa, and South Africa continued to work closely with USA/Western supported states at the time. German companies exported soft skin vehicles to the RSA of which many found their way into the SADF. Covert nuclear cooperation with the USA, France and Israel (and some say Germany) continued. Pro-Western countries and US proxies with which RSA colluded at the time, included Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Israel and Taiwan. In the Latin-American cases these countries were all authoritarian regimes. In Africa the relationships with US-backed states like Zaire of Mubutu SeSeseko remained warm. Outspoken anti-Communist statesmen on the continent like President Banda of Malawi (who happened to be an authoritarian leader) were hailed in South Africa. Likewise, socialist leaders such as Julius Nyrere of Tanzania were vilified. Even Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia that frequently pleaded for a peaceful settlement of conflict in southern Africa was frequently scoffed at.

Inside South Africa tensions increased as political oppression deepened through a cynical judicial mix of repressive acts and marginal reforms. Southern Africa, especially Angola, was to see an escalation of war fuelled by apartheid involvement. Following the support for the South Africans

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<sup>20</sup>. Compare Marthinus van Schalkwyk's sudden conversion to the ANC that resulted in a cabinet post for the “leader” of a nearly non-existent party. The “miracle” conversion since 1998 of the ex-National Party leaders such as Pik Botha and others falls in the same category.

<sup>21</sup>. Bosch coined the term an “Afrikaner Civil Religion”. In this regard a book, *The Puritans in Africa*, by WA de Klerk is also notable. So is Debroey's, *Zuid-Afrika: Naar de Bronnen van Apartheid* published in the early 1970s.

and Unita by the CIA, East Block countries, including the USSR, supplied military advisors, weapons/arms to Angola's MPLA government. Cubans were dispatched to Angola to bolster the new government's defences against the increasing destabilisation of Southern Africa by the apartheid regime.<sup>22</sup> South Africa was becoming increasingly militarised by the likes of PW Botha and general Magnus Malan. Some observed that the South African state transformed from a state backed by police to a militarised state (Frankel, 1980, 1984). Under the rule of BJ Vorster the South African state depended heavily on the South African Police (SAP), more specifically the Security Police and the Bureau of State Security (BOSS). Following the ascendancy of PW Botha and Magnus Malan the state became more dependent on the military for its survival.

As a member of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, Vladimir Shubin practically engaged in the South Africa/Soviet Union/Africa arena during the struggle for liberation in close association with the African National Congress (ANC) and its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe ("The Spear of the Nation"). Subsequently Vladimir Shubin published extensively on South Africa. So did members of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee such as Slava Tetekin.<sup>23</sup> Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee members worked closely with members and leadership of the exiled movement. In the 1980s Vladimir Shubin, being closely involved with the liberation struggles in Southern and South Africa, wrote a book entitled *Social Democracy* that was clandestinely distributed amongst South African activists (especially students at the University of the Western Cape). The author used the pseudonym Vladimir Bushin at the time. Vladimir and Slava were aware of other Afrikaners who joined the struggle against apartheid, albeit from different points of departure in South Africa (1963–1990) such as Abraham Fischer, Beyers Naudé (*Oom Bey*), Hein Grosskopf, HW van der Merwe, Van Zyl Slabbert and various others.

English-speaking whites involved in the struggle such as Joe Slovo, Ronnie Kasrils and Rocky Williams were also known to Shubin and colleagues. At various stages Shubin, Tetekin and others worked closely with especially the former two persons during the resistance (Shubin, 2008a: 192, 364; 2008b, 239ff). Closer links and loyalties between ANC/SACP and Soviets developed. Vladimir Shubin<sup>24</sup> in *The ANC: A View from Moscow* deals in great detail with this. The Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee played a major role. The name Slava Tetekin may ring a bell for many here. ANC cadres went for training in Russia. Many of them still speak the language. Many students from Third World countries went to study in the USSR at the People's Friendship University, amongst them many South Africans. Others went for military training. A few stayed behind in the Soviet Union while the majority returned home.<sup>25</sup> In South Africa, following the transition to democracy, the newly created South African National Defence Force

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<sup>22</sup> With tacit or not so tacit USA/CIA support. See amongst others Moorcraft and McLauchlan (2008: 186–188, 189–190).

<sup>23</sup> Tetekin's views on the USSR's foreign policy towards Southern Africa may be read in an *IDASA Occasional Paper* (No. 15, 1988: 7–10).

<sup>24</sup> In April 2005 Vladimir Shubin received the Order of the Champions from Oliver Tambo (Silver) for his contribution to the struggle against apartheid and colonialism in Southern Africa (*Pretoria News*, 27 April 2005).

<sup>25</sup> In Russia there is an association catering for fathered or mothered children who were left behind when the "Third World" trainees and cadres returned to their countries then already liberated or involved in struggles for liberation. One would presume that this also applies to cadres, guerrillas and students from Southern Africa and perhaps South Africa. The organisation is known as the Inter-racial Children's Fund (French: *Enfants inter-raciaux Fond Humanitaire* ("Metis")).

(SANDF) incorporated, among others, MK cadres trained in various arms of service in the Soviet Union.

During these years the South African regime had apologists, if not advocates, outside South Africa. In 1988 (the same year that Gorbachev's *Perestrojka* – in Dutch – saw its 10<sup>th</sup> impression in The Netherlands) a Dutch scholar, M de Haas, wrote *Sovjetbeleid ten aanzien van Zuidelijk Afrika*. De Haas spent much of his work pointing out that the Soviet Union was delivering arms, not food, to Sub-Saharan Africa. Like South African magazines of the time such as *Die Huisgenoot*, *Scope*, *Paratus*<sup>26</sup> and *Armed Forces* (earlier also *Newsweek*) De Haas listed the perceived quantities of Soviet equipment delivered to African countries. The work aimed at pointing out the Soviet Union's attempt to isolate South Africa through Soviet propaganda (*een propagandacampagne*) against South Africa (De Haas, 1988: 33). De Haas, for example, referred at the time without qualification to the African National Congress (ANC) and South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) as terrorist organisations (De Haas, 1988: 34ff). While a variety of Dutch organisations such as the *Kairos Werkgroep* fought apartheid, others like the *Nederlandsch Zuid-Afrikaansche Werkgemeenschap* supported the apartheid philosophy. Others such as the *Nederlandsch Zuid-Afrikaanse Vereeniging* (NZAV) remained "liberal" (*verlig*) in orientation, pledged political neutrality and believed in "racial reform" in South Africa, and maintained cultural links with South Africa in a time of increasing calls for international isolation.

In 1981 we see a person Ronald Reagan: "Can we abandon a country that stood behind us in every war we fought, a country (that) strategically is essential to the free world in its productions of minerals that we must have and so forth?" (Shubin, 1999: 234). Reagan's attitude would eventually lead to the policy of *constructive engagement* that prolonged South Africa's aggression in Angola. In sharp contrast Oliver Tambo, President of the ANC, responded: "We stood together with the Soviet Union and the Allies in fighting Nazism in the Second World War ... the Soviet Union and other socialist countries stand with us to this day fighting the apartheid system and its leaders ... of Nazi ideology and practice" (Shubin, 1999: 234). Interestingly enough, at this time the People's Republic of China, having made a shift in policy, tried to make closer contact with the ANC and the SACP. The "Chinese question" was to be discussed with the CPSU during a visit by Moses Madhiba, SACP representative, when he attended Brezhnev's funeral (Shubin, 1999: 233).<sup>27</sup> In 1982 the SACP Secretariat discussed the issue in Maputo and decided that "we should be cautious about the issue but should not reject the overtures" [by the Chinese]. Shubin argues that the decision was an example of SACP and CPSU relationships. "The Soviet did not dictate their position to the SACP, nor did they prevent the SACP from developing relations with Beijing" (Shubin, 1999: 234). It should be mentioned that, following Rivonia and the infamous Treason Trial in the early 1960s, some cadres of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the ANC, did military training in China. Earlier on relationships between the ANC and China were most cordial.

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<sup>26</sup>. See for example magazines between 1967 and 1988, inclusive of *Nou* magazine. Many of these pro-government magazines also (before 1980) regularly reported on the struggles by Rhodesians to maintain minority rule (See for example *Nou*, 08 August 1975 or *Armed Forces*, May 1977).

<sup>27</sup>. The first edition of this work sold out in a short while. After numerous delays, the second edition of Shubin's work was published in 2008 by Jacana Media, Auckland Park. It is a sad reflection that such a work did not find a publisher (or rather a suitable publisher found it) for its second edition. Among others, the University of South Africa undertook to publish it but publication were delayed.

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#### 4. Post apartheid: contradictions and transition to democracy

In 1990 the author acted as coordinator for a visit of young scientists to the Soviet Union. Hermien Kotze, Zorah Ebrahim, Khehla Shubane, Nic Borain, Mark Swilling and the author undertook an extensive ten day visit to the Soviet Union. The visit, needless to say, was less scientific and more political in nature. The group met with a whole range of political parties, and political and economical experts. The group had freedom of movement, and also interacted with working people and those on collective farms. Supporters and critics of the system spoke freely. Some such as Khehla Shubane and Nic Borain became disillusioned with what they saw in the Soviet Union. On return, Nic Borain (no relationship with Alex Boraine) wrote an article in the monthly newsletter of the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (IDASA) titled "Ten days that shook my world" (*Democracy in Action*, 1990: 1–6). Borain resigned from all activist positions and entered the literary world. Perhaps Nic was more honest than many other SACP members of then. They remained in office and since 1997/98, together with the new ANC leadership, led their followers into a new macroeconomic strategy (GEAR) that was to lead to the jettisoning of a Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). Despite lip service to equality they seem to have embraced liberal "equity" and the free market that led to "jobless growth" and increasing poverty and corruption.

By 2000 the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), a social democratic initiative based on growth through redistribution during Mandela's rule, was jettisoned. The alliance partners, the trade union COSATU and the SACP paid lip service to government and followed Mbeki diligently into a macroeconomic programme that was to be based on "redistribution" through capitalist growth. The "trickle-down effect" of this programme resulted in jobless growth and job reduction in South Africa. Mbeki was jettisoned at the Polokwane conference in South Africa. The new leadership after Polokwane's youthful decisions follow the motto of "Do not challenge us. We are right".

It seems to the observer that the elite in new Russia and the new elite in South Africa share a common characteristic. They changed from one system to the other for reasons of material benefit and opportunism without missing a single goosetep (with apologies to a South African poet). In the meantime critics of the government from the left (or if white) are told that they are unpatriotic, racist and against progress or transformation. Or, as in governments obsessed with security those speaking their mind have become enemies of the people. This notwithstanding that many of these people formed part of the resistance movement and at home destroyed apartheid. History is seldom without irony ...

During one election the Independent Democrats were called "traitors" when the party was established. In 2008 another breakaway party, the Congress of the People (COPE), whose leadership, together with the ANC, oversaw the introduction of a very peculiar democracy was called "snakes" by some ANC members. An ANC youth movement leader recently claimed that fellow South Africans that differ from him are less than rats at best insects. Among others this young man referred to the leader of the opposition as a cockroach, a term used to describe political enemies during the Rwandan genocide (*Die Burger*, 04/11/2010). Interesting how history and social dynamics brought us around to the time when National Party leaders referred to their opposition as a snake in the backyard.

The road to democracy is no easy one Another long march to transform an emerging democracy to a non-racial equal society will have to continue in which all sectors of society will be involved without fear or prejudice ...

## **Conclusion**

The people of “old South Africa” and the Russian people experienced times of affinity and adversarial relationships. This can be related to bi-lateral agreements (or the dislike of it) driven by nationalism, the nature of government, the vision of an equal society and views on the desirability of racialism or the struggle against racism and economic inequality. Economic pathways chosen and advocated by governments in power (western aligned capitalism/free market *versus* socialisms of various sorts) exacerbated tensions.

Political antagonisms (1948 – 1990) between respective governments relate to the effects of the Cold War mythology perpetuated by US leadership and their loyal journalists. “Cold War” mythology deeply influenced the (white) South Africans caught up in a northbound gaze. The rift between Cold War warriors between 1950 and the 1980s and those that resisted racial capitalism on a non-racial basis was a given. “The Cold war discourse came as Gods Grace to the apartheid politicians and their hawkish generals” to paraphrase a thoughtful retired SADF colonel.<sup>28</sup>

Oppressed people in South Africa as elsewhere in the world found countries like the Soviet Union and China more receptive of their needs for liberation and economic equality. With countries that aligned themselves with the West, this caused political tensions; not because of the Soviet Union or China but because of the perceived and projected sympathy for national liberation movements and those in favour of a socialisation of economies. Frozen relations post 1948 between the South Africa and the Soviet Union thawed only after the fall of the Wall of Berlin and South Africa’s negotiated transition (1990–1996).

Both post-authoritarian governments embarked on the liberal-capitalist course. Both countries seem to reflect tolerance for white collar corruption. The elites of both countries seem to have warmed up substantially to the ways of exploitation that they once fought.<sup>29</sup> The idealised vision of the liberal-capitalist society as logical outcome at the end of history now awaits both countries. In reality joblessness, crime and exclusive tendencies increase in both countries and the political elite gains while citizens experience the converse (Compare Van Tonder, *Rapport*, 11 January 2009). The rich-poor gap grows in South Africa and Russia while the elites empower themselves more and more at the cost of the citizenry. In both countries white collar corruption and crime in general are accepted social problems, if not the norm. In both countries the evolution of a consolidated left opposition seems remote or at least fuzzy. Following “transition to democracy” all may not be well in Tshwane and Moscow.

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<sup>28</sup> . Name withheld.

<sup>29</sup> . For an insightful article in this regard, see M.B. Ramose, African Renaissance: A Northbound Gaze. *Politeia* (Vol. 19(3): 47–61).



What does the future hold for the relations between the people of Russia and South Africa? We can only speculate. Time, economic developments and political dynamics will tell.

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