AN OVERVIEW OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS ARCHIVES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE

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I

Located in the small town of Alice in South Africa’s Eastern Cape Province, the University of Fort Hare (UFH) was established in 1916 and for many years was the only institution of higher education in sub-equatorial Africa which was open to black students. Therefore, among Fort Hare’s alumni are well-known African nationalists and politicians such as Oliver Tambo and Govan Mbeki of the African National Congress (ANC); Robert Sobukwe, who founded the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC); Mangosuthu Buthelezi of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP); Eluid Mathu, who was the first African member of the Kenya Legislative Council,;President Robert Mugabe and Herbert Chitepo of Zimbabwe; Prime Minister Ntsu Mokhehle of Lesotho; former Prime Minister Fwanyanga Mulikita of Uganda; and many others. While Fort Hare was taken over by the apartheid government in 1959 and incorporated into a network of ethnic universities within the homeland system, from the 1960s to early 1990s various banned liberation movements were active on campus and students periodically clashed with security forces. As a result, “[i]t is thus not surprising that with its venerable history of resistance and struggle, the UFH was chosen to be the repository of most of the archives of the Liberation Front.”

In October 1992 the president of the African National Congress, Nelson Mandela, signed an agreement with the vice-chancellor of the University of Fort Hare, Professor Sibusiso Bengu, for the deposing of the ANC archives at this institution. After the South African government banned the ANC in 1960, the organization based itself in Lusaka, Zambia, and eventually established 33 subsidiary missions in various countries. This meant that at the unbanning of the organization in 1990 and the closure of its international missions after the South African elections of 1994, its archival records were dispersed across a number of continents. The ANC then began the task of retrieving its documents which were collected at Shell


House, the party headquarters in Johannesburg, for vetting. As early as September 1992 the first shipment of ANC documents to arrive at Fort Hare were sent directly from the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO), an ANC school in Tanzania, and were initially housed in the University's Centre for Cultural Studies. However, in February 1995, after much debate within Fort Hare, the SOMAFCO collection was moved to the Howard Pim Library, which is an Africana collection within the larger library complex.

In October 1995 the first consignment of records from Shell House arrived at Fort Hare. With one archivist and limited space, the long and continuous process of cataloging then began. In March 1996 the ANC Archives was officially opened to the public by South Africa's Deputy President Thabo Mbeki. At this lavish event, which was attended by many prominent individuals connected with South Africa's liberation movements and a number of well-known historians within the country, several speakers stressed the need to use the archives to rewrite South Africa's history, which has been so distorted by generations of writers who supported the racist colonial and apartheid states.

While the ANC Archives at Fort Hare is one of the newest and fastest growing archival collections in southern Africa, it has not been visited by many researchers. Consequently, the aim of this brief paper is to make the wider academic community, particularly those based outside South Africa but interested in this subject, aware of this archives and its contents.

II

As already stated, most of the archives consists of records from ANC offices in exile, of which 12 have been received so far. In addition, the archives has embarked on the collection of non-official records such as the private papers of individual ANC activists, exiles, and leaders. Besides conventional documents such as reports, minutes, correspondence, memoranda, and diaries, the archives also contains a substantial number of video and audio tapes, films, slides, banners, posters, and other graphic and artistic material. The rest of this paper will look briefly at the contents of each section of the archives and highlight some particularly interesting files. While most documents within the archives are kept in boxes measuring roughly one and a half cubic feet each, several large collections are kept in many smaller folders, of which three can fit into the standard box. In order to illustrate the size of the archives, the number of boxes/folders of docu-
ments/periodicals contained within each section is indicated after each title.

(1) The Speeches of Oliver Tambo (1 box)
This section contains speeches, messages, press conference statements, and lectures given by Oliver Tambo from 1975 to 1991 in his capacity as president of the ANC. Some notable examples include his statements to the foreign ministers of the Organization of African Unity in 1975; when Nelson Mandela received the 1979 Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding in absentia, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Mkonto Wesizwe or MK (the ANC’s armed wing) in 1986; at the opening of the ANC Conference “Peoples of the World United Against Apartheid for a Democratic South Africa” which was held in Arusha, Tanzania in 1987; and at his installation as Chancellor of the University of Fort Hare in 1991. In addition, there are a number of his statements issued on various anniversaries of the ANC, speeches to various committees of the Red Cross and United Nations, and addresses made during official visits to Sweden, Barbados, Britain, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.²

(2) Oliver Tambo Papers (94 folders or 31.3 boxes)
Ranging from 1960 to 1993, the papers of Oliver Tambo are divided into three main sub-sections—personal papers, office of the president, and special topics—which all contain a wealth of detailed information in the form of original documents. The “personal papers” contain letters sent between Oliver Tambo and his wife Adelaide, individual financial statements, medical reports, appointment books, notes on his early life, greetings cards, and a considerable amount of private correspondence with people such as Beyers Naude, Harry Belafonte, Trevor Huddleston, and many others. Under the heading of “Office of the President” there are official letters to and from Oliver Tambo; general ANC correspondence; and correspondence and reports from the ANC’s National Executive, National Working, and External Coordinating committees.
Also within this sub-section are documents from the ANC departments of Information and Publicity, Arts and Culture, Economics, Education, Health, International Affairs, Legal and Constitutional Affairs, Manpower Development, Political Education, and Religious Affairs, plus the offices of the Secretary General and Treasurer General, Women’s and Youth sections, regional political com-

² Professor Mbulelo Mzamane, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Fort Hare and a well-known novelist, is currently editing a selection of Oliver Tambo’s speeches for publication.
mittees, and a research unit. The final part of this sub-section deals with special topics such as the Albert Luthuli Memorial Foundation, ANC camps, and MK personnel. The overall “special topics” sub-section deals with a host of conferences throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and files on 82 different countries, 19 prominent individuals within South African liberation movements, and a nearly exhaustive list of organizations involved in the struggle against apartheid. There is also a large collection of press clippings on a wide variety of subjects and countries. Compared to other sections of the archives, the Oliver Tambo papers are presently the most thoroughly cataloged and indexed, and contain the most information on the 1960s and 1970s.

(3) Mozambique Mission, Maputo Office (13 boxes)

Ranging from 1979 to 1994, there are a substantial number of records from the ANC’s office in Maputo. This includes policy statements dealing with education and economics throughout the 1980s and early 1990s; sections on youth and women within the organization; and studies of South Africa’s foreign policy in the 1980s, such as its relationship with Israel and its strategy towards Mozambique after the Nkomati Accord of 1984. There are also papers and speeches by Ronnie Kasrils, Albie Sachs, and Joe Slovo. Of particular interest are files containing correspondence between the ANC and Frelimo from 1989 to 1991, and between Nelson Mandela and Mangosutho Buthelezi in 1988. Additionally, there are over 200 photographs, various periodicals relating to the liberation movements such as Dawn (the journal of MK) and Isizwe (the journal of the United Democratic Front or UDF), various newsclippings from the mid-1980s which focus on Mozambique, and many audio and video tapes on subjects ranging from Gandhi to the Freedom Charter.

(4) Japan Mission, Tokyo Office (10 boxes)

This section contains documents dealing with a wide variety of topics from 1984 to 1994, such as reports by the ANC’s departments of Arts and Culture, Information, Health, Economics, and Education. Other examples of files include press releases, appeals from Pretoria’s death cells, the Japanese section of Amnesty International, comments by University of Osaka students, the International Organization for Migration Assistance of South African Exiles, the Japan Anti-Apartheid Committee, the Japan Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs, and Taiwanese investment in South Africa in the late 1980s. There are a large number of correspondence
files, including faxes received and sent, mostly dealing with communications with other ANC missions, particularly Lusaka. Furthermore, this section has a number of newsclippings and periodicals relating to South Africa and Japan in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

(5) Australasia and Pacific Mission, Sydney Office (12 Boxes)

Both the general and correspondence files from Australia cover the period from 1984 to 1994, and deal with a vast number of topics including Aboriginal land rights in Australia, Amnesty International, various ANC departments, scholarships for ANC students, the Australian ANC Support Committee, the Australian Anti-Apartheid Movement, Australian Parliamentarians Against Apartheid, the South African Embassy and its propaganda, the Victims of Apartheid Material Aid Campaign, Oliver Tambo's visit to Australia in 1987. Examples of periodicals in this section include the ANC News Weekly from 1982 to 1990, The South African Communist from 1973 to 1989, and a complete collection of Sechaba from 1967 to 1990. There are also newsclippings dealing with Rhodesia/Zimbabwe from 1967 to 1985 and South West Africa/Namibia from 1966 to 1985. In addition, there are over 900 photographs, many of which belong to an exhibition entitled "South Africa, the Imprisoned Society," as well as numerous flags and posters relating to South African liberation movements. Finally, there are 34 audio and video tapes with titles such as "the CIA in Nicaragua and Angola" and "South Africa Belongs to Us."

(6) Zimbabwe Mission, Harare Office (6 boxes)

While the earliest documents in this section date from 1982, it mostly covers the late 1980s and early 1990s. The general files contain the usual documents on ANC policies regarding health, international relations, and economics, as well as papers on the 1993 MK conference, the ANC program of action adopted at Arusha in 1987, the PAC, the South Africa-Mozambique non-aggression pact of 1984, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the 1984 Summit Meeting of Frontline States in Arusha. There are also collections of speeches by Chris Hani, Max Mlonyeni and Walter Sisulu plus Albie Sachs' 1986 "Bill of Rights for a Democratic South Africa." Some of the notable correspondence files include letters between Robert Mugabe and Nelson Mandela between 1992 and 1993, the ANC and the Zimbabwean African National Union (ZANU) during 1992, and the Harare office and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1985. In addition, there are a number of official ANC
publications on its activities and the situation in apartheid South Africa.

(7) Senegal Mission, Dakar Office (8 boxes)
Compared to the other mission records, the files of the Dakar office deal with the relatively long period from 1979 to 1994, with considerable emphasis on the early 1990s. Besides the typical policy documents on arts and culture, international affairs, education, and youth, there are files on subjects such as the ANC Oslo Conference of 1989, ANC consultative meetings with the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa) in 1991, and the Gambian Anti-Apartheid Movement in 1990. With major gaps, the correspondence files are comparatively thin, covering only the 1982-83 and 1989-91 periods. However, there are a large number of periodicals from multiple sources, the ANC and others, dealing primarily with southern Africa from 1966 to 1993.

This is one of the largest and best-organized mission collections so far received by the ANC archives. The administration files contain a host of ANC statements/declarations from 1989 to 1992, plus information on many prominent individuals such as Chris Hani, Bantu Holimisa, Pallo Jordan, Winnie Mandela, Hugh Masekela, Alfred Nzo, Dullah Omar, Cyril Ramaphosa, Sheila Sisulu, and Adelaide Tambo. There are also files relating to Nelson Mandela’s tour of the United States in 1990 and the Mandela Scholarship Board. The correspondence files deal exclusively with the 1990 to 1993 period and include letters to and from the Office of the ANC President, the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, the National Black Police Association, the Peace Corps, and Spike Lee. Of particular interest are letters from Nelson Mandela to F.W. De Klerk, Jimmy Carter, and Stevie Wonder. Furthermore, a special section on fund-raising activities in the early 1990s deals with the ANC Youth League, international women’s groups, and South African students in exile. The vast number of subject files covers topics from African-American organizations to Inkatha to Zaire. Finally, there are a large number of publications and periodicals from the ANC and other organizations, along with over 30 photographs of prominent figures in South African liberation movements.

(9) French Mission, Paris Office (29 boxes)
The largest collection from a single mission, the documents from France date from 1976 to 1994. In total there are 382 general and cor-
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respondence files covering topics such as ANC conferences, international anti-apartheid activities, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), French arms sales to South Africa, the Israel-Chile-South Africa axis in the 1970s and 1980s, and United Nations conferences. There are also many ANC and various French publications and pamphlets.

(10) Botswana Mission, Gaborone Office (6 boxes)
Although the earliest documents from Gaborone date from 1985, most relate to the early 1990s. The general and correspondence files deal mostly with ANC policy/discussion papers, information on prominent ANC leaders, and various speeches. There are also 27 different periodicals, mostly publications of the ANC, but also of other liberation movements, from the late 1980s to early 1990s.

(11) India Mission, New Dehli Office (5 boxes)
With regard to documents, this section is one of the thinnest, containing only eight subject and correspondence files. There are letters to Nelson Mandela after his release from detention in 1990, records relating to Mandela’s visit to India in 1990, speeches by Oliver Tambo from 1985 to 1991, and correspondence with the Indian Prime Minister’s Office from 1981 to 1994. In addition, there are 18 films and videotapes on South Africa and Namibia, along with a number of photograph albums, most of them chronicling Mandela’s visit to India.

(12) Italian Mission, Rome Office (4 boxes)
Another relatively small section, the documents from Rome cover the 1980 to 1994 period. The subject files include ANC policy papers plus information on conferences, the German Foundation for International Development, the South African Institute for Race Relations, and the United Nations. Falling outside the main time-frame of this section is a 1961 document on MK. There is also a variety of correspondence, including faxes and telex messages, from the 1980s and early 1990s. As usual, the Rome office deposited a number of miscellaneous pamphlets and periodicals from the ANC and other organizations, as well as memorabilia such as posters and flags.

(13) Belgian Mission, Brussels Office (7 boxes)
The original documents from Brussels are of fairly recent origin, ranging from 1987 to 1994. There is a significant number of files relating to ANC policy, workshops, speeches, and various reports.
Files which stand out include those on the European Community Observer Mission in South Africa in 1992 and 1993, the Organization of African Unity from 1987 to 1989, and a large collection on United Nations documents covering the late 1980s to early 1990s. There is also correspondence with the European Economic Community from 1989 to 1992. Finally, this section contains the usual assortment of periodicals from the ANC, SACP, and the South West Africa Peoples Organization (SWAPO) from 1971 to 1993.

(14) Namibia Mission, Windhoek Office (5 boxes)
Because the ANC could operate openly in Namibia only following that country's independence, the documents of this section begin in 1989. Therefore, the usual files on policy, the Women's League, the Youth League and speeches mainly cover the early 1990s. There are also a number of UNESCO and Namibian periodicals.

(15) Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO), Mazimbu, Tanzania (835 folders or 278.3 boxes)
Following the Soweto uprising of 1976, a large number of young people, mostly students, left South Africa to join the ANC in exile. In order to cater for the education of these students and to counteract the negative impact of South Africa's "Bantu Education," the ANC officially opened the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) in 1979, although classes had begun the previous year. Located on land donated by the Tanzanian government near Mazimbu, SOMAFCO was named after a student who had gone to exile in 1976, where he was trained as an MK operative, but was eventually captured and executed when attempting to infiltrate South Africa. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, SOMAFCO provided primary and secondary education to young South Africans, many of whom went on to study at tertiary institutions in other parts of the world. This school not only aimed at producing good ANC members, but also served as a laboratory for the ANC's vision of education in a future, non-racist, South Africa. SOMAFCO was closed in 1992 after the unbanning of the ANC in South Africa and the return of many exiles to the country.3

Currently, the records of SOMAFCO represent the largest (it is bigger than all the rest of the sections together) and ar-

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guably the richest single collection in the ANC archives. Covering the entire period of its existence (1978-92), these documents relate to the school’s day-to-day operation including administrative, educational, political, and social activities. The files include central administration, project management, manpower and development, catering, transport, various youth committees, zonal political committee, library department, nursery school, adult education, primary school, day care center, pioneers, computer department, arts and culture, and the boarding section. There is also some information on the ANC centre at Dakawa, which was near SOMAFCO. Furthermore, the SOMAFCO section contains a very large quantity of teaching aids, such as maps, videos, photographs, and slides, as well as students’ and workers’ magazines.

III

With reference to original documents, the type used as primary sources by historians, the archives is generally strongest on ANC exile activities in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although the ANC went into exile in 1960, the various mission records contain very little on the 1960s, and not much on the 1970s. The Oliver Tambo Papers is the only section which preserves a significant amount of primary documents from this early period of exile. There are many reasons for this. It must be remembered that it took the ANC years to establish its network of international missions. Many of the ANC offices whose records are available at Fort Hare were not officially opened until the 1980s. Given the necessarily clandestine nature of some of the ANC’s activities as a revolutionary organization, conventional correspondence and records may have sometimes represented a security risk. Although it is impossible to assess how much material was removed during the vetting process at Shell House, this is somewhat understandable considering the ANC’s delicate position as South Africa’s first post-apartheid government and that many of the documents are very recent. In a South African government archives, which the ANC archives is not, special permission would have to be sought by researchers wanting to look at most documents less than twenty years’ old. Perhaps in a few years the ANC will release documents which have not been made available as part of its archival collections.

A significant percentage of the material in the archives are secondary sources, periodicals, and publications that are available at other libraries around the world. However, researchers will cer-
tainly find it extremely convenient to have so much periodical literature on the ANC and South Africa’s liberation struggle accessible at one location. Also, the periodicals tend to cover a much wider time frame than the original documents, with many dating back to the 1960s. Furthermore, the archives is full of valuable non-documentary sources such as photographs, taped interviews, and ANC memorabilia. In fact the archives could easily open a museum exhibition on the ANC’s exile experience. While it is unlikely that the archives will meet the lofty goal of stimulating the complete revision of South African history which was touted during the official opening of March 1996, it could undoubtedly serve as the basis of many studies on neglected topics such as the operation of the ANC in exile and its transition from a banned liberation movement to a mainstream political party.

When examining the ANC archives, it is important to realize that the collection process is continuous and that not all the ANC mission records have been received by Fort Hare. Documents from the ANC offices in Canada, Cuba, Kenya, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Russia, Sweden, Uganda, the United Kingdom, the United Nations Observer Mission, and Zambia are still expected sometime in the not too distant future. Some of these are currently being edited by the ANC at its Shell House Headquarters in Johannesburg and may be at Fort Hare before this paper is published. Perhaps they will shed greater light on ANC activities in the 1960s and 1970s. It is likely that the papers from Lusaka, the ANC’s headquarters in exile, will constitute one of the most important sections of the archives.

The ANC is the first of several South African liberation movements to open its archives at Fort Hare. The records of the PAC, mostly originating from its offices in exile, were deposited in the university’s Centre for Cultural Studies in late 1995 but have not yet been opened to the public. Additionally, the Unity Movement of South Africa (UMSA) and the Azanian Peoples Organization/Black Consciousness Movement (AZAPO/BCM) have promised to send their respective archival collections to Fort Hare, although they have not yet arrived.4 Once all these archives have been organized and opened, Fort Hare, once a center of resistance against white supremacy, will become a focal point for anyone interested in the history of protest against apartheid.

4 Many thanks to Robert Kukubo, archivist of Fort Hare’s Centre for Cultural Studies, for this information.