

## **Communist Controlled? Reassessing the years of ANC exile**

Review essay: **Stephen Ellis**, *The External Mission: The ANC in Exile*. London: Hurst, 2012. ISBN: 978-1-84904-262-8.

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Some recent books mentioned in this essay:

Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba [pseud.], *Comrades against Apartheid: The ANC & the South African Communist Party in Exile*. London: James Currey, 1992.

SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa. Volume One: 1960–1970*. Pretoria: South African Developmental and Educational Trust, 2010.

Ariana Lissoni et. al., (Ariana Lissoni, Jon Soske, Natasha Erlank, Noor Nieftagodien, and Omar Badsha), eds., *100 Years of the ANC: Debating Liberation Histories Today* Johannesburg: Wits Univ. Press, 2012.

Eddy Maloka, *The South African Communist Party: Exile and After Apartheid*, Revised Edition, Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013.

Irina Filatova & Apollon Davidson, *The Hidden Thread: Russia and South Africa in the Soviet Era*. Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2013.

Wonga Welile Bottoman. *The Making of an MK Cadre*. Pretoria: LiNc Publishers, n.d. (2013).

Hugh Macmillan, *The Lusaka Years: The ANC in Exile in Zambia, 1963–94*. Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013.

In the era of exile, the ANC (African National Congress) as well as occasionally the (overlapping) SACP (South African Communist Party) promulgated narratives (in posters, and bulletins, and press releases, and funeral orations) of their actions to end apartheid. In them the people had almost always arrived at the penultimate stage or level, just before the general political insurrection (whether this was 1962, or 1969, or 1978, or 1985). In the end, negotiations with the ANC preserved virtually the entire private sector, existing rights in land and commercial license, in (partial) exchange for importing the external ANC leadership as the victors in a new dispensation. With this fact as a background, Stephen Ellis asks, Did the Communist Party control MK (Umkhonto weSizwe), or the whole ANC, over the duration of its years in exile? And he answers, Yes, they did. And so, secondly, he tries to discern why things worked out as they have, today. And the reason is a general incompetence and venality, and a frequent recourse to short term solutions, to appearance over reality, form without substance. In the end, *External Mission* makes a compelling argument for the importance of Communists in the ANC's personnel, although he overstates his case. Separately, as a second layer of argument, Ellis highlights what he sees as a general dysfunctionality in the so-called external mission or ANC-in-exile. As in his earlier, co-authored book, *Comrades Against Apartheid*,<sup>1</sup> he endeavors to unite these strands, Communism and

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba [pseud.], *Comrades Against Apartheid: The ANC & the South African Communist Party in Exile* (London: James Currey, 1992).

ineptness/rigidity/corruption, but sometimes he just assumes their kinship. Unlike his earlier book, however, *External Mission* uses a convincing scholarly apparatus (for the most part), and features new findings (see below) and a rectified chronology to tell this two-layered story. And, truth be told, it is a good read.

*External Mission* is an exposé, and Ellis has begun a very public conversation about the conduct of the struggle against apartheid, embroiling former ministers, SACP leaders, commissars of the ANC, popular intellectuals, and gadflies. *External Mission* contests the semi-official narrative of the struggle against apartheid — that is, the one in popular culture, and promulgated by the ANC — in which heroic act follows heroic act, each exceeding the last, and every moment is a stopover in the ascent to 1994. *External Mission* attacks this narrative by stressing the centrality of Communists and among them white (European) Communists in the struggle.

It is undeniable that the ANC is, and has long been, a great survivor, as Phil Bonner points out in the recent collection<sup>2</sup>, *100 Years of the ANC*. The ANC's history is one adaptation; and at each point of adaptation, the ANC revised its own history. If the goal is to attack the accepted narrative about this struggle and the (sometimes exaggerated) ANC role in it<sup>3</sup>, one must also be careful what one is replacing it with. *External Mission* bears no real chain of argumentation, but it delivers a series of shotgun blasts at the pious edifice of vetted anti-apartheid history. The overall implication however is that the ANC was hijacked by Communism and therein incapacitated.

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Bonner, "Fragmentation and Cohesion in the ANC: The First 70 Years," in Ariana Lissoni et. al., eds., *100 Years of the ANC: Debating Liberation Histories Today* (Johannesburg: Wits Univ. Press, 2012), 1–30.

<sup>3</sup> To an extent SAHO.org's perspective, e.g. <http://www.sahistory.org.za/umkhonto-we-sizwe-mk-and-armed-struggle>; and Wikipedia's ("South Africa",) and thoroughly the ANC.org's (all accessed in January, 2014).

Ellis's initial achievement is to have confirmed with solid evidence that Mandela joined the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party in 1960 (or earlier).<sup>4</sup> To those who remark that this datum is not interesting or important, one simply shakes one's head in incredulity. The position of this reviewer, however, is that joining the Party was not an act of weakness but an act of strength for Mandela. Everyone of importance around Mandela in Johannesburg was joining or had joined the Party. Why would the head of the "Volunteers" (the action-oriented organizers, and the "strike policing" division of the ANC), keep himself outside of CC meetings deliberately?

The book's cover is a picture of Vela Pillay and Dr. Yusuf Dadoo of the SACP in conversation with Chairman Mao in November, 1960. Ellis gives attention to the nationalist, 1950s' roots of violence (p. 9), but his early emphasis is to highlight Communists, Lionel "Rusty" Bernstein, Joe Matthews, Michael Harmel, Moses Kotane, Yusuf Dadoo and other Communists.<sup>5</sup> These men and other SACP people liased abroad over a period of many years with Chinese and then mostly Soviet contacts. Ellis reports that the first Soviet meeting that might be said to have "approved" of armed struggle came on 21 October, 1961 (following Vladimir Shubin's account, *The ANC: The View from Moscow*). The authoritative SADET series however discusses a meeting in Moscow in July, 1960 in which armed struggle arose, and there were the meetings with Chinese leaders (one just mentioned) which resulted in the military training of some SACP-recruited men that same year.<sup>67</sup> In December, still in 1960, in Emmarentia, a quasi-

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<sup>4</sup> This reviewer has found separate evidence in three or four sets of collected papers and interviews and besides Landau, "The ANC, MK, and 'The Turn to Violence' (1960–1962)," *South African Historical Journal*, 64:3, 538-563; they will be cited in the book in progress, *Spear: Nelson Mandela and the Revolutionary Moment in South Africa, 1960–64*.

<sup>5</sup> As against Vladimir Shubin, *The ANC: The View From Moscow* (Cape Town, Mayibuye, 1999), Ellis shows that Pillay, the contact in London, in fact travelled to Beijing (Ellis, p. 7), hence the cover photo.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Magubane, Philip Bonner, Jabulanni Sithole, Peter Delius, Janey Cherry, Pat Gibbs, and Thozama April, "The Turn to Armed Struggle," Chapter 2, 53–146, SADET,

urban/suburban Johannesburg neighborhood, the SACP's Central Committee or CC convened and and Lionel "Rusty" Bernstein read out a declaration remembered slightly differently by different people: it adopted the policy of an armed force, or armed propaganda, or armed struggle.<sup>8</sup>

The SACP had prepared itself for that moment, organizing many of the biggest 1950s civil-rights style movements and actions, finally fashioning a Leninist-inspired theory for themselves and directly in 1959 and especially 1960 sitting on functioning, mixed, ANC-SACP committees in the major cities. African, "Coloured," white and Indian-descent Communists went in and out of the same offices and when detentions depleted the African leadership they stepped into the breach. Moses Kotane, the longtime Communist stalwart and NEC (ANC) member, in this context *resisted* the shift to armed struggle, and therefore (according to Ellis) "flouted" Communist authority. Eventually over his and Chief Lutuli's objections Nelson Mandela and his Communist allies formed MK (p. 27). The launch of MK at the end of 1961 involved about 80 acts of destruction that inconvenienced rather than threatened the apartheid state. After two more years of desultory sabotage, and the use of draconian laws allowing detention without trial, and encouraging torture, the security forces of the state destroyed the brief Umkhonto insurgency. They jailed, scattered, and exiled the core group of its leaders.

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*The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, Vol. 1, 1960–1970 (Pretoria: South African Educational Developmental Trust, 2004): 81.

<sup>7</sup>Nandha Naidoo, "'The Indian Chap': Recollections of a South African underground Trainee in Mao's China," *South African Historical Journal*, 64, 3 (Sept., 2012), 707–36.

<sup>8</sup> Ben Turok, Mayibuye Center, Brian Bunting papers, Box 131, 8.4.5, interview of Ben Turok by Bunting, October 1973 through May, 1974, for B.P. Bunting, *Moses Kotane, South African Revolutionary: A Political Biography* (Johannesburg: Inkululeko, 1975); hereafter Bunting/Turok; Lionel "Rusty" Bernstein, *Memory against Forgetting: Memoirs from a Life in South African Politics* (London: Viking, 1999), 225; Bob Hepple, personal account, supplied in 2011, and Hepple, *Young Man with a Red Tie: A Memoir of Mandela and the Failed Revolution, 1960–1963* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2013), p. x.

Ellis chronicles the consequent passage of the High Command to the external headquarter(s) of exile, through the brief period of the South African United Front (pp. 62,37, 41-2) and into the post-1964 period. The “leadership” involved most active participants in the post-March 1960 national, political struggle and was thenceforth in jail or away. Ellis does not suitably reflect this tragedy. Careers languished. Marriages ended, families broke up. Children became estranged from absent parents. The crushing defeat dealt the ANC and the breakaway Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) — the end of the 1950s political struggle, the brief emergence and then dying away of the gem-like flame of revolution — this backdrop does not make it through into Ellis’s story. Although Ellis does not clearly explain however how or why “the ANC” followed the existing leaders into exile, so to speak, the shift was more contentious than Ellis represents.<sup>9</sup> The top underground comrades included (the Afrikaner) Bram Fischer arrested in ’66 and John Nkadimeng<sup>10</sup> who, against all odds, revived the rudiments of an underground network in Soweto (with Robert Manci). Meanwhile amidst the new leadership in London and Lusaka, Ellis underrepresents the conflicts behind the efforts of the SACP to position a member *qua* member, i.e. someone sitting entirely as an SACP person, closer to policy-making e.g. on the national Executive Committee (NEC) of the ANC. This implies that such an SACP representative would be beholden to the SACP and not at all to the ANC, meaning, he or she would not be an African.<sup>11</sup> And if that is so, and the nationalists also captured Dadoo and Kotane, much of the wind is taken out of Ellis’s sails, for it means that the nationalists ran the struggle. He is too honest a reporter not to tell us also that the ANC resisted what he sees as a pro-Communist shift,

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<sup>9</sup> Univ. of Fort Hare, ANC Archive, Lusaka Mission, **Baard letter to external mission “ambassadors” complained of (\*) 1965**

<sup>10</sup> Greg Houston and Bernard Magubane, *The ANC’s Armed Struggle in the 1970s*, Chapter 9, 453–530, in SADET, *Road to Democracy, Vol. 2, 1970–1980* (Pretoria: SADET, 2007), 374–5.

<sup>11</sup> Because, after all, many African SACP members *already* sat on the NEC of the ANC.

but does not make enough of this opposition. The larger picture he sees as the firming-up of Communist power.

The late 1960s for the ANC might in fact be characterized by the effort to bridge the gap between Africa-based and London-based, — and therefore Black and white (and Indian and Coloured) — Communists, at a moment of institutional crisis (near insolvency).

Behind the scenes all the top movers and shakers on all sides of every issue were Communists. The ANC rejected putting non-Africans on its supreme Planning Council even as it drew on Soviet support. Ellis's larger picture is about "The Party Triumphant," which is the title of Ellis's third chapter, but when one thinks about race that picture gets cloudy. In fact, in 1966, the ANC reiterated *it* was in command of the struggle, and that no representatives of the other race-linked "Congresses" could have a place in MK — people of non-African background being allowed to join MK only as individuals. No "race" was recognized in MK, in line with MK's post-Charterist, Communist, unionizer roots (44-50). But as with the ANC, in African exile MK was mostly African, and became almost entirely so, in line with its ANC, nationalist roots. The whole issue of MK's changing identity requires a deeper explanation and although one will not be attempted, a few pointers toward a different picture will be.

Ellis redirects our readers' gaze next to the development of security networks in the ANC in exile, under Duma Nokwe, Maindy Msimang, and others. His tone turns critical and his focus episodic. Hugh Macmillan's recent judgment is that intelligence and security were weakly developed in Tanzania and Zambia, but if so Ellis shows how weakness and overreach might nonetheless coincide.<sup>12</sup> Apparently the "NAT" as the intelligence bureau was known became a peerless inquisitorial tribunal operating freely

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<sup>12</sup> Hugh Macmillan, *The Lusaka Years: The ANC in Exile in Zambia, 1963 to 1994* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2013), 135; Ellis, *passim*.

in Africa (150), yet incapable of disabling the state's placement of informers and mischief-makers among them. Ellis' narrative treats the MK rebellions in the Tanzanian camps, at Kongwa, a camp under the command of Ambrose Makiwane, himself a competitor with Joe Modise. Ambrose's cousin, Tennyson Makiwane, would later with Ambrose be excommunicated from the ANC. One problem, as it began to emerge for MK, based as it was in Tanzania, was the fragility of the support from President Nyrere and perhaps even from President Kaunda (Zambia), and the coexistence of different diagnoses of the reasons for stasis. Unfortunately, Ellis does not clearly connect world issues and events, on the one hand, and the 1970s rebellion of the "Gang of Eight," on anti-white-Communist grounds, on the other. While most of the book is fluid, the treatment of dissenters in the 1970s is incomplete and disconnected.

In *External Mission* we also notice some missing *errata* notices. Chris Hani (a presence from the early 1960s in the Youth League) was one of those chosen for the "Wankie" (Hwange) military campaign, a foray in league with Zipra in Southern Rhodesia, in 1967. This was intended to set in place a route of entry through Southern Rhodesia into South Africa. The operation spectacularly failed. Hani survived, having experienced real combat, "seen the elephant," as World War II veterans put it. While "Wankie" was, mythically, very successful,<sup>13</sup> some felt it had been murderous in its (non)-planning. After the Rhodesian army's sweeping up of the disorganized ANC guerillas — this is

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<sup>13</sup>Ellis and Sechaba, 47–8, get this chronology mixed up, and Ellis does not draw attention to the specific correction in the new book. Stuart Davis gives an excellent account of the Wankie campaign in "Cosmopolitans in Close Quarters: Everyday Life in the Ranks of Umkhonto We Sizwe (1961–Present)," Ph.D. Diss., University of Florida, 2010; and so does Thula Simpson, in "The People's War of Umkhonto weSizwe, 1961–1990," Univ. of London, History Ph.D, 124–130. Also, Howard Barrell, "Conscripts to Their Age: African National Congress Operational Strategy, 1976-1986," Oxford Univ. Ph.D., 1993, based on Barrell's extensive and detailed interviews (held by the Bodleian, Rhodes House, Oxford, which I also use here); Stephen Ellis, "Politics and Crime: Reviewing the ANC's Exile History," *South African Historical Journal*, 64:3, 622-636, 623; and Ray Suttner, "The 100th Anniversary of the ANC," *International Affairs*, 88: 4 (2012), 719–738.



meticulously described by Macmillan<sup>14</sup> — Hanı ended up in a Gaborone jail for well over a year, quite enough time to think about what had gone wrong. When he was finally released and encountered the leadership, he found that he was not even properly debriefed. Hanı then co-wrote a “Memorandum” with other disillusioned junior-officer level comrades, to his ANC superiors, issuing a list of indictments and complaints with the central thesis: We are not moving toward action in South Africa, and this is shameful.

As a result of the Memorandum, and the fallout over it, Hanı was *almost* targeted for execution by the leaders of the struggle!, but he was not in the end killed, nor ultimately expelled, and he rose again in stature later on. The 1969 Morogoro (Tanzania) Conference, from which Hanı and the co-signers were excluded, formulated a rather convoluted response to the Memorandum. Hugh Macmillan and Stuart Davis emphasize more the issues raised by the strategic failure of the ANC’s military Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) as what mandated the Conference, but in any case, it is often said to have constituted a watershed event for the struggle overall, the first big meeting since 1966, the first full conference since 1962 of the ANC, set on addressing the aim and methods of the struggle. A feeling of crisis pervaded, and Tambo opened by resigning before attracting in absentia a unanimous vote for his restoration.<sup>15</sup> The formulation that emerged (see below) fully embraced the notion of revolutionary struggle against the state, leaving no doubt that the ANC and the SACP were committed to an insurrection; but in hindsight such a declaration looks much less impressive.

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<sup>14</sup> Macmillan, *Lusaka Years*, 39–56.

<sup>15</sup> On Tambo: Luli Callinicos, *Beyond the Engeli Mountains* (Claremont: David Philip, 2004), *passim* and 351; Macmillan, *Lusaka Years*, *passim* and 249, and Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, “The ANC in Exile, 1960–1970,” Chapter 11 of SADET, *Road to Democracy*, Vol. 1, 411–78, 443.

Once the relatively permanent nature of the MK camps became clear, and the nationalist, Africans-centered notion of the struggle reinforced with Communist words, the ANC was dragged accidentally into a *coup* plot, and Nyrere expelled it from Tanzania. The exiles were evacuated to the USSR via Aeroflot, and only later relocated to Lusaka. Joe Modise, Wilton Mkwayi's successor as commander-in-chief of MK, whom the "Hani Memorandum" called corrupt and unreliable, was not purged. Losing only his supreme command title, he was "promoted" to the Revolutionary Council, where he served with Slovo, Dadoo, and Reg September, before regaining his command once more in the 1980s.<sup>16</sup> Ellis relates the rumors that surrounded Modise's brief detention at one point in Botswana, where, it was speculated, South African intelligence officers got access to him and turned him. Thabo Mbeki (who headed a "bogus" youth organization, according to the seven Hani signatories) also survived the long years, becoming Oliver Tambo's speechwriter.<sup>17</sup> MK as an organization continued to draw on the non-racial intersection of esteemed figures in and out of the SACP and ANC and regrouped.<sup>18</sup> Joe Slovo survived and remained a key planner with Yusuf Dadoo in London, and Duma Nokwe, though demoted for a while, returned and flourished until his alcoholism killed him. The most interesting target of the Memorandum is Moses Kotane. He was blameless of the specific charges, a man of scrupulous integrity. But who better than he represented the conservative *status quo*? We must remember again that both Hani and Kotane were SACP.

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<sup>16</sup>Ellis, 76-81; Macmillan, *Lusaka Years*, 78, 144.

<sup>17</sup>Hugh Macmillan, "The 'Hani Memorandum' — Introduced and Annotated," *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, 69, 2009, 106–129.

<sup>18</sup> I will not cite theoretical literature ("special case" of colonialism) here not least because events proved it wrong (or interminably delayed and so meaningless). For the Party, the SACP in the 1970s and '80s inside and outside South Africa, a full history has not yet been written, but see Raymond Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2008) as well as Maloka, *The SACP* (op. cit.)

Some signatories were later expelled, and some figures associated with them were later mistreated and one was killed. Ellis discusses Tennyson X. Makiwane, the Africa pioneer of the ANC, who rooted his power in his African connections, until his demotion and expulsion with the “Gang of Eight.” Makiwane was murdered in June of 1980, a killing Ellis speculatively attributes to the top leadership (to Hani: Ellis, p. 155; Tambo was apparently close to Makiwane). Even if this is not so, certainly there were grave and continuing problems in MK, persisting long after the Morogoro Conference watershed, and certainly the NAT made further errors in punishing and even killing people without always achieving the intended effect. One suspects that many other historians would demur however from reporting innuendo as “possibilities” in assigning blame for assassination and torture, and hesitate before telling us that Alfred Nzo stole other people’s wives, based on a “Gavin Evans” deleted website posting.<sup>19</sup> It cannot be denied that there is a fair amount of unconfirmed information put forth in *External Mission*, almost all of it deprecatory to the ANC.

The compromising of the ANC’s external-to-internal pipelines is a murky story. It is not as apparent as Ellis implies that Thami Zulu was put to death by the ANC (239-43), even though, clearly, things went badly wrong in Natal. We must remember however Oliver Tambo’s sotto voce admission to a “shocked” Albie Sachs: “We use torture.”<sup>20</sup> The Gang of Eight had a real critique and were finally rebuked, slandered, and silenced. At the same time, there was also a tradition of vibrant debate in the ANC, both in meetings and in writings, sometimes in Tambo’s face. Vladimir Shubin in a recent essay congratulates Mzwai Piliso in “taking his medicine” so well at the time of his demotion from the internal security service (the “NAT”); Shubin scorns “self-appointed defenders of

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<sup>19</sup> Ellis, 242, and see n. 76, 348.

<sup>20</sup> Macmillan, *Lusaka*, 195.

human rights after 1990.”<sup>21</sup> More impressive is that the *African Communist* was sometimes a vehicle for frank discussion. And not only the Hani Memorandum, but other texts show that ANC and the SACP could talk honestly enough amongst themselves: The John “Pule” Motshabi report (91–2), the Mark Shope report (of 1970), the “First” Jack Simons diary, and so report, from Novo Catengue, and the Stuart Report and the Dan Tloome financial report<sup>22</sup>, of 1984: all say, Here are things that are going wrong.

Part of this self-interrogation was wasted, as no reforms were attempted. Some of this self-attention resulted in finding spies. Ellis treats the unmasking of real traitors, such as Ralph aka “Fear” and “Piper,” as almost incidental to the work of the NAT, arguing that Piper was innocent (198–9), and then moves on to treat the reshuffling of commanders and committees in 1982. But clearly the NAT had work to do. The Revolutionary Council gave way to the Politico-Military Council (PMC), a nod to the pressing issue of reaching out and connecting with any genuine political mobilization in South Africa. Just as before, however, the PMC neglected the political angle and authority devolved into separate lineages. Reforms were reshufflings, and the Revolution-speak of early-1970s *Sechaba*, press-releases, and Slovo’s internal formulations, all coincided with events largely beyond the ANC’s ambition to alter. In the 1980s the repression of dissent in MK went further awry: Hani saw the unrest in the Angolan camps as “counterrevolution” (Ellis, 216), improbably, and he and Steve Tshwete reacted to events by stepping up the heat of ANC rhetoric, implying that all white people might be targeted by MK, as they might be seen as collaborators. They could “turn South Africa into a wasteland.” Yet Ellis is careful also to report the inclusion of the consistent command: that “we must not hit soft targets at any time” (223–4), an injunction that was

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<sup>21</sup> Shubin, in Lissoni et al.

<sup>22</sup> Macmillan, *Lusaka Years*, 166–7.

ignored on only a handful of occasions. The 1980s saw the first real operations inside “Country K,” as South Africa was called in internal training literature,<sup>23</sup> 150 operations in 1985, 240 in 1986, and 250 in 1987, a far bigger total than of all previous attacks, but with a few awful exceptions, groups of civilians were not targeted. That last year, 1987, however, Ellis concedes, was the year the Lusaka headquarters “lost control” of the actions of MK, and the struggle passed elsewhere.

Ignoring that it was thus a very small period ('77 to '87?) when the SACP as an organization of loyalists actually had a role in formulating ANC policy, Ellis focuses on the shortcomings of the ANC, and features a fascinating summary of the ANC's and the security police's triangular relationship with the criminal underworld especially during this same period. It does appear to this reviewer that he overstates. There was medium-scale auto-theft and auto-smuggling, but it seems most South Africans in exile did not live very highly, and few people had good working cars. The request by an MK comrade for a small refrigerator in his flat is either a luxury or a minimum requirement for surviving in Zambia, depending on your point of view.<sup>24</sup> One ends up feeling that corruption was not the primary poison in the ANC abroad.

After a strangely respectful discussion of Operation Vula, the late-'80s operation to stockpile guerilla-warfare weapons at depots in preparation for unprecedented armed maneuvers, Ellis emerges from his reconstructions to speak about the connotations of his findings. He argues that the “acquisition of state power by force” (218) became the aim of the ANC after it created an army, but there was never a threatened invasion. This is because “Party strategists seriously underestimated the state's resilience.” In my view,

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<sup>23</sup> Barry Gilder, *Songs and Secrets*.

<sup>24</sup> The University of Ft. Hare, ANC files from these years are filled with minute financial complaints, and the NEC in its meetings in Lusaka often concerned itself with small amounts of money.

putting that on Party strategists begs the question. Ellis then concludes: “. . . the declaration of war against the state in 1961 deprived anti-apartheid politics of its most capable leaders, who were thrown into prison or went into exile” (290). In other words, the shift, which he thinks happened in 1961, to absolute confrontation, was the signal mistake, one committed by Communists as Communists. The subsequent static revolutionary posture of the ANC, punctuated by a scattering of months of incendiary sabotage and eventually some attacks on human targets, squandered possible opportunities to negotiate which would have presented themselves earlier, had MK not been fixated on overthrow.

*Reckoning with Ellis: Race, Communists and Nationalists*

Several things had to happen before the ANC-SACP alliance could develop. First, there was the practical experience in the national campaigns of the 1950s, many organized by the Party, and the human closeness born of the Treason Trial docks. Next, there had to be a centralization of the ANC structure constitutionally, and an articulated theory suggesting that South Africa’s revolution against capitalism could not proceed without a nationalist overthrow of white “settler” rule first, as an initial phase or stage of change. No one really thought a unified proletariat was close to rising against capital, but some in South Africa felt racial violence was a genuine if frightening possibility at various moments. The theory, called “Colonialism of a Special Type,” or CST, refers to the status of South Africa: it featured “colonialism within one country,” colonialism without a foreign-based colonial master.

This view had to win over Party members of a more orthodox Marxist orientation.

Debates played out in 1958 and ‘59 in the Party, with the CST champions (among them

Michael Harmel) labeled “Revisionists” in one manuscript’s attack.<sup>25</sup> Slovo would later emphasize CST obliquely in this way: “The main concept is liberation of the largest group the African people . . . ‘national sense of grievance’ is the ‘most potent revolutionary force’ for the time being.”<sup>26</sup> Just as other African independence movements captured the support of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU), so had South Africa’s. Note the CPSU never funded MK as a vanguard of revolution in South Africa but only as a liberation movement. At home, the CST Communists prevailed by allying with recent or current ANC NEC members, African nationalist leaders, bringing them into the Central Committee (CC) of the Party — namely Walter Sisulu, Joe Matthews, Duma Nokwe, and likely in 1960, Nelson Mandela. The Mandela-faction (“Sophiatown group”) of Johannesburg Congress-men entered the Party and harmonized completely what it meant to be a Communist with the African liberationist aims of the ANC. They and those designated as their legatees in the future held privileged positions. Ellis sees their agency as passing away in the grey miasma of doctrine and bureaucratic infighting.

Ellis’s book is indeed however mainly about the intervening years from the sixties to today, after the first generation had been removed or nullified. As Eddy Maloka certainly grasps in his recently reissued *The South African Communist Party*, however, whatever the vicissitudes of the ANC-SACP alliance in the past, today, in the 21st Century, the SACP is a partner in neo-Liberal, patronage-ridden government, and South Africa is no closer to Communism, or to any significant redistribution of resources, than it ever has been. If the SACP ran the ANC, then what happened? Was the miracle of 1994 brought about by forces so heedless of the Left that the SACP was simply happy just to survive? Ellis acknowledges that Nkomati accords eliminated another “front-line”

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<sup>25</sup> Cullen Library, Johannesburg, Manuscript, Bob Hepple Papers, as yet uncatalogued.

<sup>26</sup> Karis-Slovo, *Ibid.*

African base, Mozambique, and moved the ANC to negotiate out of weakness, and that much credit is owed to Mandela, who happily had renounced his Communism and become a moderate (Ellis, 207).

South African race, and African-ness, matter to this story. Neither Ellis, nor the excellent SADET volumes, nor the *Cambridge History of South Africa, Vol. 2*, quite manage to treat the topic of race in resistance politics.<sup>27</sup> People of different race intermingled in command positions in 1960, and MK was in 1963–4 again subordinated to a High Command featuring whites in the positions of highest authority, even “D-Class” (no-cell) Communists, as is confirmed by Mac Maharaj; but thereafter, MK then swiftly returned to African control outside the country.<sup>28</sup> Was the struggle controlled by white people secretly, behind the scenes, as it were? The reputed personalities and energies of men like Govan Mbeki, Henry “Squire” Makgothi, Ahmad Kathrada, Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Maulvi Cachalia, Walter Sisulu, and Moses Kotane would seem to make that unlikely.<sup>29</sup> No, in other words. Was the ANC via its Executive (NEC) controlled by

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<sup>27</sup> But see Ellis p. 92. Gregory F. Houston, “The South African Democracy Educational Trust’s ‘Road to Democracy’ Project: Areas of Focus and Methodological Issues,” *African Historical Review*, 42, 2, Nov. 2010), 3–26 re whether to credit the non-SACTU 1970s trade unions, and Anne Kelk Mager’s and Maanda Mulaudzi’s elegant essay, “Popular Responses to Apartheid, 1948 – c. 1975,” 369–408, and Tom Lodge’s thoughtful “Resistance and Reform, 1973–1994,” 409–91, in Robert Ross, Anne Kelk Mager, and Bill Nasson, eds., *The Cambridge History of South Africa, Vol. 2, 1885–1994* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011). There is interesting historical work forthcoming in past conceptualization of race in South African politics from Jon Soske; see Soske, “Unravelling the 1947 ‘Doctors’ Pact’: Race, Metonymy and the Evasions of Nationalist History,” Chapter 7 in Lissoni, et al., *100 Years of the ANC*.

<sup>28</sup> And some of the Regional Commands. Interview with Mac Maharaj, Pádraig O’Malley, 28 Mar 2002: <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/cis/omalley/OMalleyWeb/03lv03445/04lv03689/05lv03714/06lv03720.htm>, commenting on John Matthews’ brief elevation to the top of the High Command (which also included Ivan Schermbrucker and Lionel Gay). This information did not get put into *Shades of Difference: Mac Maharaj and the Struggle for South Africa* (New York: Viking, 2007) fully intact. — Ruth First (Slovo) also briefly took charge of top appointments before departing for Swaziland.

<sup>29</sup> On this issue see Gregory Houston, “The Post-Rivonia ANC and SACP Underground,” Chapter 15, 601–660, SADET, *Road to Democracy, Vol. 1*, 612; and Jack Simons’ comments as quoted by Hugh Macmillan, *Lusaka Years*, 92–3.



*African people* (allied to people of color and white people) *who were members of the Communist Party?* With the exception of Tambo, Joe Modise, and a few others, the most powerful people in the ANC, those with “Volunteer” experience, *were* Communist Party members. So, largely, the answer here is *Yes*.

So in thinking about how the ANC remained largely Communist and violent, and yet received the support of American college students and British MPs, one might note that it remained clearly *African*. The Africanist transformation of the struggle, and the maintenance of its African identity, facilitated the ANC’s Communism.

It can be summarized metonymically by returning to the early 1960s. Moses Kotane, trusted aid to President Albert Lutuli and esteemed by top NEC leaders, General Secretary of the SACP, is a puzzle for Ellis, because he was a top Communist and yet he opposed the supposedly Communist embrace of armed struggle. Even though Kotane sat on the Central Committee (CC) of the SACP, he resisted the trajectory suggested by MK’s fervent partisans late into 1961. But perhaps Kotane opposed the move to establish an armed force *because* of his orthodox Communism, which at that time (as noted above) completely lined up with his nationalism. A baker’s assistant when his union sent him Moscow in 1931, Kotane was schooled for leadership for two years. On his return he was never above setting type or roneoing documents (six copies of everything were mailed to Moscow), working tirelessly into the evenings.<sup>30</sup> 30 Mandela, the firebrand

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<sup>30</sup> Irina Filatova & Apollon Davidson, *The Hidden Thread: Russia and South Africa in the Soviet Era* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2013), 301–. Ahmed Kathrada, Interview, Oct. 2011. Kotane had his roots in the Federation of Non-European Trade Unions, organized especially by T.W. Thibedi, “the first African to join the CPSA” (pre-1952 SACP): Brian Bunting, *Moses Kotane, South African Revolutionary, a Political Biography* (London: Inkululeko Publications, 1975), 49–52, 64–66, cited by Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919-1939* (London: Africa World Press, 2013), and see esp. chap. 10, the ITUCNW and South Africa; and Thula Simpson, “People’s War,” 92-3.

and “Volunteer in chief” in the ANC, was a newer member of the SACP, and was very specific in what he wished to make of “armed propaganda” in his protestations to Kotane. In contrast to Kotane’s Mandela’s ideas were not orthodox Communist ideas. Instead, he argued directly to Kotane in favor of a shift toward real guerilla warfare *in advance* of the fuller preparedness of the population. This was not (*pace* Ellis) the influence of the SACP on the struggle but that of activists (Mandela, Slovo, Resha, Modise, and from the Eastern Cape, Govan Mbeki and Ray Mhlaba) arguing a position relying more on accounts given by Che Guevara, and by the American ex-serviceman and Philippine-insurrection *Huk* volunteer, William Pomeroy, than Marx or Lenin. His own reading of pragmatic texts, rather than Marxist or even Leninist orthodoxy, animated Mandela.<sup>32</sup> Mandela explicitly drew from Communist *and* non-Communist, anti-colonial and revolutionary movements; he learned about military command by reading Clausewitz and Frederick the Great.<sup>33</sup> His perspective echoed Joe Slovo’s in envisaging guerilla actions, or in other words, rural warfare, with eventual commanders and liberated zones. But unlike Slovo Mandela was also interested in urban attacks also via his interest in the Irgun in Israel. He rooted his understanding in tactics and contingency plans, interested in brass-tacks decision making rather than elevated theory. He hearkened to those using unconventional warfare, from North Korea to Malaysia, to

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<sup>31</sup>Of his motivation, Arianna Lissoni quotes him: “I am first an African, then a Communist.”

[http://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/dadoo\\_london\\_debates\\_by\\_lissoni.pdf](http://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/dadoo_london_debates_by_lissoni.pdf); accessed March, 2014: “The Dadoo / London Debates”; Jack Simons, *Class and Color in South Africa, 1850–1950* (London: Pelican Books, 1969), 492.

<sup>32</sup> See William J. Pomeroy, *The Forest: A Personal Record of the Huk Guerrilla Struggle in the Philippines* (Manilla: University of the Philippines Press, 1963), and Che Guevara, *Guerilla Warfare* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1961), also available at <http://mecanopolis.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/08/guwar.pdf>, accessed 5 January 2012; Regis Debray, *Revolution In The Revolution?: Armed Struggle And Political Struggle In Latin America* (Paris: Maspero, 1967). Che was killed the same year and Debray was later arrested.

<sup>33</sup> See my “The ANC, MK, and ‘The Turn to Violence’ (1960–1962),” *South African Historical Journal*, 64:3, 538-563; apparently Pillay favored Maoist rural theory.

Castro in Cuba. His thinking was Debrayan, ahead of Regis Debray. All this was made clear to Kotane.

Failures of the three day strikes called by the ANC in 1961 and 1958 reminded both men that the “Black population” *per se* were not ready to put their trust in revolutionary leadership and would likely not support a war. Ben Turok claims this fact became apparent to savvy observers only when the population did not “spontaneously” undertake sabotage “when called upon to do so,” but there were few attempts to stimulate popular participation in sabotage.<sup>34</sup> Many of the initial saboteurs were used to working in functioning structures at a high level, businesses, finance, the arts, the law, and the workers among them had been organizers in labor unions, public people and it would have been very difficult for them to disappear and become “underground” leaders. Mandela wanted to move toward incendiary actions anyway.

MK initially represented itself as one of *two* things: a natural result of the people’s (defensive, self-protective, angry) violence against a violent state, i.e. its vanguard, *and second*, an attempt to draw the attention of the government to the possibility of worse violence with small, precise acts signifying this. Two quite different aims were made to coincide: to attack, and to symbolize attacks. In signifying, the ANC also warded off worse, something Mandela said repeatedly.<sup>35</sup> Mohandas K. Gandhi’s *Satyagraha* and his personal legacy among union leaders and activists in the Indian communities on the

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<sup>34</sup> Even from Hilda Bernstein’s mimeographed broadsheet, “The Freedom Fighter.” (She did call for the “cleansing” of “informers.”). Hilda Bernstein or anon. author, “Freedom Fighter” (early 1964), in Pdraig O’Malley Archive, <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley>, my emphasis; and see Ben Turok, “South Africa: the Violent Alternative,” *Socialist Register*, 9 (1972), 257–88 (quote: 282).

<sup>35</sup> In his 1962 sentencing speech (Wits, Cullen Library, Historical Papers Collection, Robert Hepple Papers, uncatalogued, preparations for Mandela defense in 1962, p. 21; and the Rivonia speech, in his autobiography, and elsewhere cf. Landau Johannesburg in Flames in Peter Limb, ed., *The People’s Paper: Abantu-Batho* William Kentridge labels a lit bundle of dynamite “Propaganda for Action” in his installation-piece,

Rand and especially Natal was not squarely challenged by this symbolic dimension, an alert system for the state at root.

At the same time MK recruited young men from the ranks of young men evicted from Alexandra Township as early as '61, promising them training with "modern weapons."<sup>36</sup> Sabotage was therefore also itself already a stage leading to guerilla warfare. As Joe Matthews (a CC and NEC [ANC Executive] member) recalls, and Ben Turok says the same thing, among many colleagues one perceived "the idea that Africans [would] only achieve their liberation through some form of armed struggle."<sup>37</sup> Ordinary Africans would provide the force of violence whether or not its sort was chosen by leaders. Raymond Mlhaba and Bram Fischer both separately made the point, as did comrades facing the immigration from South Africa of young people in 1976: they feared that fuller recourse to violence, if pursued, might degenerate into race war.<sup>38</sup> Communists felt that they were playing with fire, magnifying and directing popular anger. It has been said that the SACP initiated sabotage earlier than "the ANC" (meaning, presumably, ANC members, in lieu of a major conference). Yes, some SACP cells cut phone wires in mid-1961 and some later became MK cells. The M-Plan, the cell-based organization plan put forth by Govan Mbeki and Nelson Mandela in light of the state's criminalization of the ANC, also decanted directly into MK (if they were "Amavoluntiya," the agentive and disciplinary cadres).<sup>39</sup> Mac Maharaj further spoke of "a group, which would have had Party and ANC people, that started in the Eastern

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<sup>36</sup> Martin Ramokgadi, interviewed by Peter Delius, 1990, cited by Phil Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien, *Alexandra, A History* (Johannesburg: Wits, 2008), 180

<sup>37</sup> Wits, Cullen Library, Barbara Harmel Papers, A 3301, Thomas Nkobi, interviewed by Harmel and Bonner, 1993, and see op cit., B7.2, Govan Mbeki, Interviewed by Bonner and Harmel, Oct. 1993. And Joe Matthews, B6, interviewed 18 Aug. 1994; my *emphasis*.

<sup>38</sup> [SADET Chapter 2, pp. 81-82] Lodge, "Resistance and Reform," 433, reprising Stephen Davis, *Apartheid's Rebels: Inside South Africa's Hidden War* (Yale: New Haven, 1987).

<sup>39</sup> South African National Archives, Pretoria, Yutar Papers, 385/24, Police Interrogation Reports, Cecil Benjamin Nduli, 23 Aug., 1963, 777 (3) and 784 (10), and Idem, Selbourne Maponya's testimony, from p 467 on; John Nkadimeng, recollected in that testimony.

Cape and went through Natal and went to the Transvaal [using] Molotov Cocktails. They ended up in MK . . . but that was not official.”<sup>40</sup> As soon as MK was formed it asked its members to cease attending SACP meetings: MK was now the chain of command.<sup>41</sup> And MK reported to the NEC of the ANC.

It is now known that Mandela and Sisulu, Duma Nokwe and Joe Matthews, all ANC and Party men, constituting themselves as a “working group” in 1962, opted to reposition nationalist Africans at the helm of this authority-structure.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, undeniably, it would be Soviet funding — beginning in 1960 and soon equaling 300,000 USD / year and making up 85% of the ANC’s budget by 1965 as Vladimir Shubin first revealed — that permitted MK to grow.<sup>43</sup> In 1963, Slovo, Mbeki, and Harmel championed the ambitious invasion-and-uprising protocol called Operation Mayibuye. The CC of the Party did not approve it, but Tambo (not a Communist) heartily did.<sup>44</sup> Referring to Mayibuye and subsequent declarations of war on the apartheid state, “Rusty” Bernstein gave it as his opinion that the MK partisans effectively left the fold. Thus Joe Slovo, a longtime Communist, ultimately “was not Party.”<sup>45</sup>

In 1965, Kotane asked out loud, “Shall MK be all-African?” Non-Africans (non-white) were still however recruited for Soviet- and GRD- provided comprehensive training, called “the *thuto*” (Setswana: learning, knowledge; Biblical teaching) early on in English

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<sup>40</sup> Barrell-Maharaj interview.

<sup>41</sup> Landau, “ANC, MK, and the ‘Turn’.”

<sup>42</sup> Ellis does not cite this document. Note “African image” discussed at the ANC’s general meeting in the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1962, Fort Hare, ANC Archives, Lusaka Mission, Box 51, folder 2, “Report on the Lobatsi Conference.” See Lissoni, below.

<sup>43</sup> Shubin, *The ANC: The View From Moscow* (Cape Town, Mayibuye, 1999), 67-8. and Soviet airlifts that rescued MK (after President Nyrere of Tanzania expelled them in 1969)

<sup>44</sup> Lionel Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting: Memories from a Life in South African Politics, 1938–64* (London: Viking, 1999), 234–5.

<sup>45</sup> Mayibuye Center, Robben Island Collection, Lionel Bernstein, Interview, MCA 6 442, 1995, conducted by Rachidfi Molapo 4/12/95 (2 tapes).

language documents.<sup>46</sup> But as Moses Kotane institutionalized Marxist basics in the camps' curriculum for by the rank and file, he also banned any independent activity of the Communist Party. As Ben Turok put it, in the African camps, "Moses was the Party."<sup>47</sup> This eliminated the need for whites (as non-racial Communist Party members) to occupy teaching roles in Tanzania and Angola. Kotane thus helped undo the "alliance" model of the struggle binding Congresses together with unions and Left whites, a policy initially supported by the SACP, and then applied the same logic to the SACP.<sup>48</sup> The absence of a role for other organizations or parties under the ANC did not mean Communist Africans diminished as a proportion of the highest leadership, nor that the rank and file eschewed the Communist understanding of the world and its history: it meant, as it did on Robben Island among the detainees, the discouraging of the formation of internal political elites. Correctly called "liquidationism," the policy required the universal enrollment of MK's African cadres in Communist thinking, not its abandonment.<sup>49</sup> For Slovo, regretting it, "all our . . . people" including "Dadoo and Kotane" had been "totally coopted and taken over by the ANC."<sup>50</sup>

In forbidding all Party activity Kotane was forbidding open discussion of political ideas in order to avoid factionalism. A racial protest from the Communists outside his domain

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<sup>46</sup> I cite the documents from the Rivonia trial in this regard in Landau, "The ANC, MK, and the Turn the Violence," op cit.; and Ft Hare, Lusaka Mission, Box 82, folder 7, OR Tambo's Office, '63-'66, n.d., "General Outline of Training Requirements."

<sup>47</sup> Barrell Papers, Ben Turok, p. 1325; Bunting/Turok Tape Two. There were few white Communists around, Jack Simon occasionally. J.B. Marks was afraid to leave Tanzania because he was worried he would not be allowed back in. This issue is muted in Bunting, *Moses Kotane*.

<sup>48</sup> Ndebele and Nieftagodien, 591.

<sup>49</sup> Post-Lobatse Conference (1962), MK was represented as the ANC's military wing. Mayibuye Center, MCH 02, 1, 1960-72, London CP Secretariat to Moses Kotane, 12 Ap. 1965, attaching Kotane letter excerpts on "matters which cannot be solved without get together" including "A determination of the whole future of MK from the point of view of the extent, if any, of non-African participation."

<sup>50</sup> Mayibuye, Bunting Papers, Box 131, 8.4.5, Turok, Tape 2, Aug. 1973, hereafter "Tape Two," confirmed by Robert Hepple, Jr., personal communication; Wits, Cullen Library, Harmel Papers, A 3301 B1.3 Lionel and Hilda Bernstein, Berea, Jhb., 5 May, 1994, quoting Joe Slovo.

however soon developed. Yusuf Dadoo (the top SACP office holder) asked in private and in print that non-African, non-white South Africans must be mobilized into revolutionary (military) action as well. Dadoo thus criticized the posture of Africanizing the militant part of the struggle in a Leftist ANC that denied non-Africans membership, at the cusp of new, determinative action.<sup>51</sup> Eddy Maloka, in his book about the SACP, drawing in part on privileged access to Party documents, draws a picture in this period of an anxious and restless SACP, painfully aware that it lacked the status of a formal alliance. Sifiso Ndlovu in SADET also shows the SACP as divided. As Tambo commented on the anxiety to be included at all levels, "Some of us, including myself have been unaware of the gap which appears to have existed between the two bodies [ANC and SACP] as collectives. We have not always felt the need for joint discussion of this character because we had thought that the party was a collective and operates as a collective."<sup>52</sup> Tambo knew, of course, that the SACP was often riven by factions, too.

The historian Arianna Lissoni points out that the same time as African support for the ANC weakened, Yusuf Dadoo and others in London made their complaint that non-Africans were subsumed and yet excluded by not being able to join the ANC. After a faction of the Coloured People's Congress defected to the PAC, Alex Laguma's vote was needed to bring the rest of it into the ANC fold. They could not join the ANC yet were represented by the ANC everywhere abroad; they were to subordinate themselves to the African struggle.<sup>53</sup> According to Lissoni, these conflicts also helped bring about the

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<sup>51</sup> Arianna Lissoni, "Transformations in the ANC External Mission and Umkhonto we Sizwe, c. 1960-1969," *JSAS* 35, 2 (2009), 287–301, here citing p. 296. Her Ph.D. dissertation may be consulted at: WEB ADDRESS and title.

<sup>52</sup> Maloka, *The South African Communist Party; Exile and After Apartheid*, p. 70-1, 29. Macmillan, *Lusaka Years*, 148-164

<sup>53</sup> Nhlanhla Ndebele and Noor Nieftagodien, "The Morogoro Conference: A Moment of Self-Reflection," Chapter 14, 573–600, SADET, *Road to Democracy*, 591.

national conference in Morogoro, in 1969.<sup>54</sup> The resulting “Strategy and Tactics” statement, by Slovo and Nokwe and Joe Matthews, reiterated the primacy of “the political” — of political control over MK in and outside South Africa — in partial reaction to the Hani Memorandum’s attack on Joe Modise, their complaint that MK operated “independently of the Political Organization” (SACP or ANC).<sup>55</sup> At the same time, Slovo and his allies also reiterated the external ANC’s absolute control of the struggle and their commitment to replacing the state with force, the “conquest of power.” Did the primacy of the political mean “that before an actual beginning can be made by the armed challenge we have to wait for the evolvement [*sic*] of some sort of deep crisis in the enemy camp?” Not at all, said asks Strategy and Tactics.<sup>56</sup> By preemptively ruling on the most significant political issues in the future of the struggle and requiring an indeterminate long period of organization and effort, the *prolonged* or *protracted* struggle.

An early typed draft reads, “Inside our country the *possibilities* of any change by peaceful or non-military means are slight if not impossible. The African National Congress *and its allies* have drawn the necessary conclusions and the result was the emergence of Unkonto weSizwe in December 1961.” This has been hand-corrected to, “Inside our country the *possibility* of any change by peaceful or non-military means is *no longer conceivable*. The emergence of Unkonto weSizwe in December 1961 was the result of the acceptance of *this fact* by the *African National Congress . . .*” It is no longer “[t]he

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<sup>54</sup> Arianna Lissoni, Yusuf Dadoo and the London Debates, n.d. (2010?), [http://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/dadoo\\_london\\_debates\\_by\\_lissoni.pdf](http://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/dadoo_london_debates_by_lissoni.pdf), and *Ibid.*, 578–84; Ellis, 96.

<sup>55</sup> Hugh Macmillan, “The Hani Memorandum,” section five.

<sup>56</sup> “. . . which is serious enough to hold out the possibility of an immediate all-round insurrection? Certainly not!” weights the dice by linking the first imperative to the second absurdity (“immediate”). Reprinted: <http://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/anc/1969/strategy-tactics.htm>. See also Martin Legassick, “Armed Struggle and Democracy in South Africa,” Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Sweden, 2002, “Discussion Paper 20.”



movement” that “had decided” the course of the struggle; it is the ANC that decided “that the oppressed people of South Africa must prepare to engage in a prolonged revolutionary war to overthrow the Apartheid regime.” None of these passages made it into the final document but “protracted” did, three times. According to Mac Maharaj, these earlier drafts are comparatively nuanced but “[t]he final document removes all that. Its treatment of insurrection is like a biological classification.”<sup>57</sup> At this and other junctures, the revision of the ANC’s own self-understanding is part and parcel of its articulation of its new mission.

According to Ndebele and Nieftagodien it was another stalwart ‘40s-era colleague who stabilized the situation at Morogoro: J.B. Marks. Yet for the 1970s the ANC created a “Revolutionary Council,” responsible for in-country mobilization, effectively run by Yusuf Dadoo and Joe Slovo out of London. At the same time, as Howard Barrell got Joe Slovo to admit, the essential emphasis out of Morogoro was on behalf of African nationalism, African liberation. While subordinated to the NEC the RC did organize operations, but most of them failed, until Duma Nokwe, objecting to the RC’s essential independence (and non-Africanness), vitiated their power.<sup>58</sup> By 1975 there began to be an appreciable number of underground structures in South Africa, in the low hundreds of people, some having been through the *thuto*; and two years later, reflecting the absorption of the influx of refugees fleeing the post-Soweto crackdown, there were again

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<sup>57</sup> “African and other” is entered as an addition without a clear location in the ms. Univ. of Fort Hare, ANC Collection, Lusaka Mission, Series 2, Box 78, File 18, Treasury General Reports, 1966–70, “Memorandum on Foreign Policy of the ANC.” [*sic. etc. my italics* to show difference]. “Each phase in the unfolding of the struggle of the fifties played a part in setting the stage of our new approach,” begins the (finally adopted) paragraph giving the essential ANC/SACP paradigmatic history of the struggle alluded to at the start of this essay (up to 1969) (see website cited above); Rhodes House Library, Oxford, Howard Barrell Papers, interview with Mac Maharaj (1st Nov. 1990), p. 408;

<sup>58</sup> Johannesburg, Wits, Cullen Library, Historical Papers, Carter and Karis Papers, Int. with Ben and Mary Turok, Johannesburg, Sept. 26, 1993.

MK attacks run from the military command in Lusaka and Mozambique.<sup>59</sup> As Slovo volunteered to Thomas Karis, however, “from ‘64 to ‘77 there was not a shot fired in anger in South Africa,” and MK only “notionally” had an armed struggle.<sup>60</sup> In the years after that, the Party wrested more “control” hierarchically in the struggle, but these were difficult times: there followed mutinies at Viana, and Pango, the ANC’s “Shishita” reform campaign, and in which the ANC put almost a score of ANC of dissidents (the sinister meaning of being “sent West”) in front of a firing squad.<sup>61</sup> Overall for the ANC, and for the South African Communist Party as an organization, a mixed record.

### *Common Experiences*

We do not understand Communism in the ANC if we do not pay attention to the experience of the rank and file, which is missing in Ellis’s account. Indeed the nature of camp abuses, the experience of the common suffering soldiery in MK’s Tanzanian and Angolan camps, is only now coming to light in other work. In the MK training camps in Kongwa and elsewhere in Tanzania, in Lusaka’s varied ANC neighborhoods, in the big camps in Angola, a semblance of life unfolded for decades, and scholars are reconsidering these semi-permanent spaces as locations for history.

In the camps one found “traditional” African forms — African political and eventually generational ceremonies such as *bogwera*,<sup>62</sup> and patriarchal ranking systems — but also the invention of a new public and private space, a sphere of renaming and new belonging. Much remains to be discovered about these semi-known, military

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<sup>59</sup> SADET, Chapter 2; Lodge, 435; see Ray Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2008).

<sup>60</sup> Cullen Library Karis-Gerhard collection: A 2675 46-1 Slovo interviewed by Karis and Gerhard: 1990.

<sup>61</sup> Macmillan 170 ff. provides what he says are precise figures (all known individuals) and tallies over thirty executions carried out in Angola mostly in the early 1980s.

<sup>62</sup> Forthcoming work on MK marriages and livelihoods in Tanzania by Arianna Lissoni.

installations with permeable boundaries, but they developed at least in part within African popular, and often Christian, political assumptions. Not only Poqo (the PAC's armed section) inducted new members by playing on Christian-millenarian sentiments before battle and dabbing ash on men's foreheads. NEC member Flag Boshielo and his group also doctored themselves, in Jack and Ray Simons' back yard.<sup>63</sup> Like chiefly alliances in generations past, the 1970s and '80s ANC featured ranked near-equals, with sometimes competing, sometimes allied, sometimes parallel lines of authority. Still the ANC cultivated the exaltation of its commanders and made loyalty a preeminent feature of its discourse. For the ordinary MK member, the ANC showcased, in its Marxist analytics, something very like a liturgical language, with its own interpretive assistants or commissars. Song, dance, and ceremony also inculcated unity and purpose among young men. A political culture with roots in South Africa past inspired the ANC abroad — strengthened, redirected, and yes, changed, by international ideas, constraints, money and aid.

The ordinary soldiers, regimented, underequipped, were kept in the dark as to top strategy. They were disciplined for agitating to return as revolutionaries in South Africa, and they sometimes found themselves for years at a time forced to adopt peasant livelihoods, growing much of their own food, which they were mostly, as urban people, unequipped to do. They developed half-acknowledged *lingua francas* and greetings, hierarchies of cool.<sup>64</sup> Described by Wonga Wellington Bottoman in his recent book, *The Making of an MK Cadre*, the life of a post-Soweto MK soldier in Tanzania and Angola was most of all however deeply tedious. Rote drills and food, compelled labor, camp-job

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<sup>63</sup>Macmillan, *Lusaka Years*, 87.

<sup>64</sup>Natoo Babenia as told to Iain Edwards, *Memoirs of a Saboteur: Reflections on My Political Activity in India and South Africa* (Cape Town: Mayibuye Books, 1995); James Ngculu, *The Honor to Serve: Recollections of an Umkhonto Soldier* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2009); and below. Also, see Crain Soudien, "Robben Island University Revisited," *passim*, in Lissoni, et. al., eds., *100 Years of the ANC*.

duty, sleep, was occasionally relieved by discipline issues, the singing of songs, soccer (football), and news (of actions or internal politics or state attacks, eagerly heralded and repeated).<sup>65</sup> Distinctions based on origin developed among soldiers, even when everyone used a *nom de guerre*, as was the case. An important distinction arose between those who fled to the camps from the Soweto uprisings, young people racing out of their burning neighborhoods eager to pick up arms, and those people who took some time in 1977 and '78 to think and then crossed over. All of them were put into barracks and drilled by visiting instructors, and while some years in the camps were fulfilling no doubt, men took to ancillary pursuits and to dominating one another in various intimate ways. Most of them never saw action in South Africa.

The state managed to compromise many of the newcomers to the external ANC camps in the 1970s and '80s. This should not surprise, as the United States, the UNHRC, and the Tanzanian government cooperated to funnel directly African refugees into the MK apparatus, where they were subject only to makeshift security measures.<sup>66</sup>

Operationally, internal enemy agents jeopardized MK's communication and infrastructure and this is why MK could not therefore maintain lines of communication to contacts inside South Africa. At bottom, As Mac Maharaj told Mark Gevisser, MK could not seem to find, or place and maintain, a strategic thinker to coordinate political and military events inside South Africa. Such a person would have to be operating underground. The attempt to move Flag Boshielo into South Africa in 1970 resulted in

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<sup>65</sup> Wonga Wellington Bottoman, *The Making of an MK Cadre* (Johannesburg: LiNc Publishers, 2013). Thanks to Mr. Bottoman for a follow-up interview, August, 2013, and to Arianna Lissoni for arranging our meeting. For the repetition of news, see Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 2000).

<sup>66</sup> The same security modes that Macmillan calls primitive, Ellis claims as Communist fixtures brutal in their demands: the forced writing and rewriting of autobiographies, for instance (152–3).

his disheartening disappearance.<sup>67</sup> As Ronnie Kasrils told Howard Barrell, MK never had (or had access to) “city underground committee[s]” that could communicate one with the other and coordinate violence on the ground.<sup>68</sup> Repeatedly, MK’s top strategists faced this reality — that no externally based military takeover was possible, yet no really good internal infrastructure *or* mass movement existed — and cast about. Repeatedly, the Lusaka and London headquarters of the ANC strove to integrate this understanding with one that continued to value their own particular, theoretical and administrative, vanguard roles.

Much may be made of the Soviet connection, as a distortion (from Ellis’s point of view) prolonging an agonizing situation. Long after 1969, the Soviets provided military materials and rations and money to the ANC and to MK. Yet this did not translate to control, nor to a push to create a truly threatening military force. Contact between the CPSU (Soviet Communist Party) with the ANC was regularized through Boris Nikolaievich Ponomarev, a long term “candidate for membership of the CC’s politburo” in Moscow, and none other than Dr. Yusuf Dadoo was the chief fundraiser there. The structure of their relationship was that MK requested funds piecemeal, and those requests were usually granted. Ellis enjoys conveying the image of the mild mannered, pipe-smoking Dadoo with his overcoat stuffed with banknotes (216). After the failure of an initial attempt at a sea landing by guerilla operatives (“Operation J,” discussed by Ellis, p. 87–90), funding was cut, however, and the Soweto influx of camp initiates did not expand Soviet aid in a way fully comensurate with the new situation.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Hugh Macmillan, “Shishita: A Crisis in the ANC in Exile in Zambia,” esp. 249-50, in Ariana Lissoni et. al., eds., *100 Years of the ANC: Debating Liberation Histories Today* (Johannesburg: Wits Univ. Press, 2012); see Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa*, 28 ff.

<sup>68</sup> Ronnie Kasrils’ words, from Rhodes House Library, Howard Barrell Papers, Interviews, Kasrils, Lusaka, 19 August 1989.

<sup>69</sup> Filatova & Davidson, *The Hidden Thread*, 301; 311, and 310, and 328, specifically referring to Arthur Goldreich’s Soviet training in 1963 in relation to Operation

The importance of Soviet aid and the historical role of Russia's interest in southern Africa becomes clear from Irina Filatova's and Apollon Davidson's readable account, *The Hidden Thread*. Drawing on heretofore closed European archives, Filatova and Davidson show how the ANC simply would not have survived without the Soviet Union and GDR at several key junctures. The Swedish government eventually gave more money to the ANC than the Soviet and Communist nations, but that money was earmarked entirely for nonmilitary use (Ellis, p. 43). Especially when it became clear that after the *thuto* "graduating" students were being warehoused for extended periods, however, both soldiers and students abroad began protesting the ANC-linked authority over them.<sup>70</sup> The aid given, channeled, and raised by the ANC was to sustain MK abroad, and allow it to survive its mostly small-scale failures and successes.<sup>71</sup>

In the later 1970s, Joe Slovo began to attack the Cuban "*foco*" theory, the Debrayan theory that holds that the actions of a smallish guerilla group or groups can give rise to the conditions favoring revolution. This he caricatured as a "detonator" approach, and said that acts of violence perpetrated by MK must be intended ("were" intended) only generally to "foster a revolutionary situation" amid other (political) actions on the ground. These were fine words but (to take a cynical view) the ANC could really only be

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Mayibuye. Bernstein (op. cit. 1995 Interview) explicitly discounted Goldreich's trip to the USSR as independent of the fact that the SACP never voted to support guerilla war, and see Suttner, *The ANC Underground*, 50 ff. for the dissolution of the Party under Dadoo in 1962.

<sup>70</sup> Rene Staedler's paper on GDR Ft Hare, Morogoro Mission, Box 20, Folder 179, Students in Socialist Countries.

<sup>71</sup> A meeting Vladimir Shubin and Filatova-and-Davidson put at two different times: see Shubin, *The ANC: The View From Moscow* (Cape Town: Jacana, 1999, 2008). Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Out Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic/Perseus, 2005), "The Cold War Comes to Africa," i.e. "Until the mid-1970s Moscow had only modest expectations of the prospects for national liberation movements in sub-Saharan Africa," as they from 1963 nonetheless channeled 300,000 USD/year, in addition to regular payments to the SACP (56,000 USD/year) (p. 443).

seen as successful in the 1970s, if the 1970s status-quo were said to be the intended result of the struggle, or the only possible result so far. That was reasonable especially if, as was the case, the apartheid regime looked truly unmovable and the near-future was called a “revolutionary situation.” Or like Michael Harmel suggests in a fictional (unpublished) science fiction novel, one could argue the aim had been a “prepared” citizenry, and that had been mostly achieved.<sup>72</sup>

After the Soweto generation had been trained, Slovo and other mostly-SACP MK delegates went to Vietnam and met with Gen. Ngo vinh Giap to learn about the anticolonial struggle there, to see what they should do, and they received advice to *re-emphasize the political*. Although Slovo had asked for this, and listened seriously to the Vietnamese’s advice, and wrote his “Green Book” as a policy guide as a result, in fact the *Vietnamese* Politburo had rejected this counsel itself, since 1967, under the direction of Le Duan, the VNCP’s CC’s strategist of the war with the Americans.<sup>73</sup> Le Duan had, according to Lien-Hang Nguyen’s banner study, *Hanoi’s War*, based on newly available Vietnamese archives, himself thrown battalion after battalion at the Americans, instead of looking for political mechanisms on the ground. Similarly the ANC/SACP’s PMC, and Slovo in particular, would not reform either. Furthermore as mentioned we must not suppose the Soviets were pushing for more effective and complete deployments, and

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<sup>72</sup> The tape version of Gail Gerhard Collection, Reel 3, File 35, three interviews (8/89 and 10/89) with Joe Slovo (Howard Barrell); separately, Howard Barrell, *Conscripts to their Age: African National Congress Operational Strategy, 1976-1986* (Oxford University; 1993). Ph.D. Dissertation, Chap. 1, *Old Battle-Cries and Borrowed Language*,” on SAHO.org, nr. no. 87-94; and see Doc. 58, “Strategy and Tactics,” Excerpted from Document of the First Consultative Conference of the African National Congress, April 1969, and *Sechaba*, July 1969, from Sheridan Johns and R. Hunt Davis, Jr., *Mandela, Tambo, and the African National Congress: The Struggle Against Apartheid, 1948–1990, a documentary survey* (New York: Oxford, 1991). Harmel: this is the argument made in *The White People* by the Party activists.

<sup>73</sup> Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2012), featuring access to important North Vietnamese and CP archives.

the Soviet Politburo advised postcolonial partners such as Le Duan to submit to “talks.”<sup>74</sup>

The ANC survived under Oliver Tambo in part by permitting conflicts without resolving them. However the ANC also allowed the NAT to coexist with internal secrecy and poor record keeping, which created an uncertain atmosphere not conducive to successful operations. Black September and the Novo Catengue catastrophe, the various mutinies, the poor treatment (i.e. rapes) of women comrades, the conditions in Camp 32 or “Quattro,” the ANC prison, these matters do not define the ANC in the struggle against apartheid, but they are part of it. Yet the ANC’s toleration for catastrophes is also what allowed it to survive its dueling hierarchies and remain a single organization, and perhaps this is still true today.

For Ellis, the SACP despite its penetration (and the failure of all the 1970s operations) remained a “secret organization at the core of the ANC” (67), a stronger presence for the ANC than the Broederbond was for the National Party. In his photographic captions, he is quite direct: Robert Resha for instance “resisted the South African Communist Party’s takeover of the ANC after the 1969 Morogoro Conference,” which is therefore said to have happened. As it has been argue here, in fact, the SACP did not take over the struggle. There were no purges of non-Communists in the annals of the ANC, and most often Communists attacked Communists.<sup>75</sup> Resha was himself a Communist.<sup>76</sup> Secondly, this review has suggested replacing Ellis’s implication that Mandela and others succumbed to Communism with the thesis that African ANC leaders entered the Party

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<sup>74</sup> A point Barry Gilder makes in is cagily written *Songs and Secrets, South Africa from Liberation to Governance* (New York: Columbia, 2012), 58, 222.

<sup>75</sup> See Brown Bavusile Maaba, *The PAC’s war against the state, 1960-1963*, chapter 6, 257-97, in SADET, *Road, Vol. 1*, Previously in Landau, “ANC, MK, and the ‘Turn’” I wrongly wrote Alfred Nzo was a non-Communist, and misidentified the *Bafabegiya*.

<sup>76</sup> Ellis has usefully rescued John Pule Motshabi from the condescension of posterity.



quite strategically. Third, there has been argued a revision of Ellis' thesis that the Communists favored armed struggle with the argument that they did not, and that nationalists (ANC) did; that the shape of the ANC abroad was determined by racial perceptions among other factors, and Africanist unities more than SACP-specific politics, and lastly, that while the ANC repeatedly advised itself to establish elastic connections to political actions inside South Africa, this was never executed.

The ANC abroad was in the main offices and a military force composed almost entirely of Africans, funded by international Communism, ideologically trained to understand the world as a battle with capital, yet unable to aid or accelerate a fight against white settlers as such. This "protraction" of the struggle (up to that time, the early 1990s) was both an effect of the success of the state, its 90-day detention law, its extra-legal punitive and extractive modes, namely torture, a matter of necessity, not choice. Still, MK was always rhetorically seizing "power," and, at the same time, in a very "protracted" way, such as would not overly offend Barbara Castle's supporters.<sup>77</sup> It was always possible the struggle would encourage those with power to negotiate and reform the state — as in fact arguably happened in the end.<sup>78</sup> Communist, African nationalist, pragmatic, all these terms described the ANC and its affiliated MK spaces after 1962.

Ellis' most serious charge, also made by Stephen Davis in his recent Ph.D,<sup>79</sup> is that, absent coherent and sustained engagement inside South Africa, the political culture of the SACP/ANC/MK network abroad further decayed, until, finally, the very demand to return to South Africa, *to fight*, was taken itself as tantamount to military indiscipline,

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<sup>77</sup> Barbara Castle was the honorary president of the London-based Anti-Apartheid Movement. See Rhodes House Library, AAM 925 "Violence" (a "legitimate policy, responsibly undertaken . . . although we recognize . . . [etc.]" ), from Niola Cardwell to AAM, 7 Feb. 1989.

<sup>78</sup> Madeleine Fullard, "State Repression in the 1960s," chapter 9, 341–90, of SADET, *Road to Democracy*, Vol. 1, p. 357.

<sup>79</sup> Davis, *op. cit.*

and thereupon, a form of political betrayal — “treason.”<sup>80</sup> There was a pervasive tendency to blame any dissidence on enemy activity, because anything that hindered the direction charted by the top was sabotage in the interest of apartheid; Ellis further holds that this Orwellian situation was a Communist trait inculcated by the Stalinist Stasi (the GDR secret police involved sometimes in the *thuto* training).<sup>81</sup> It is also the same idea that one finds in fascist and dictatorships however and in the deeply Nazi-influenced apartheid government. It was the criminalization of the ANC as “treasonous” that commenced their exile.

These suggestions do not constitute a proper history which is still being written. The 1950s were a decade when top-down transmission, hierarchical organisation and widespread diffusion of Marxist doctrine all first took place within the ANC.<sup>82</sup> It was also a time of centralization in the ANC, and ideological changes in its leaders’ orientation. Especially fluid were conceptualizations of *race*. Multi-racialism and the “alliance” model in the struggle -“racial group” representation gave way to an urban-based form of association, “non-racial,”<sup>83</sup> familiar to SACP members and others on the extreme Left after 1960 in urban places such as the “Makhosa House” on Market Street. A strong current of nationalist, “African”-identified subjectivity continued unabated in ANC politics alongside it, however, and developed numerically abroad. Despite the urban, Civil-Rights sensibility projected outward to the international arena, this organization was fueled by the injustice of apartheid and the anger of African young men, the ongoing logic of why UmKhonto (MK) was required. Buried deep within the debates about the turn to violence of the ANC is the hidden fact that threshold for useful

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<sup>80</sup> Treason defined in ANC documents: CITATION

<sup>81</sup> Ellis, p. 152, 184; Brian Bunting, *The Rise of the South African Reich* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1964), 160–1; Macmillan, *Lusaka*, 148.

<sup>82</sup> Raymond Suttner, “The African National Congress (ANC) Underground: From the M-Plan to Rivonia,” *South African Historical Journal*, 49 (Nov. 2003), 123-146: 146

<sup>83</sup> Jon Soske, forthcoming.

violence was met for nationalists but not for Communists. From the dynamiting the Fordsburg Post Office, *qua* MK's tiny mission in Alger, down to the SASOL refinery bombing and the Angolan military camps' eruptions, the exiled ANC was a unique historical formation, originating in an unstable and ambiguous set of alliances, but with a nationalist heritage, somewhat removed from the common man, yet adventurist and radical in its disconnected actions. Part of its heritage included the repertoire of Africans' politics practiced in rural and urban South Africa before it, and the acceptance of a universal ideology. Part of its heritage involved idiocy, ego, and Stalinist rigidity. Ellis does not have perfect aim, but he hits some plaster statues along with the innocent bystanders. One simply hopes readers grasp his is not the whole story.