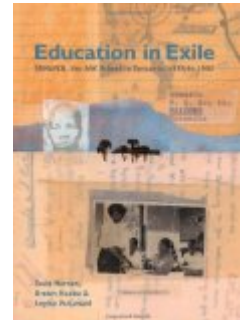


**Sean Morrow, Brown Maaba, Loyiso Pulumani.** *Education in Exile: SOMAFCO, the ANC School in Tanzania, 1978-1992.* Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council Press, 2004. xiv + 218 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7969-2051-5.



**Reviewed by** Carol Summers

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*Education in Exile* offers a candid description of a short-lived but ambitious African National Congress (ANC) school in Tanzania. For anyone who experienced SOMAFCO as a child, student, teacher, advisor, or worker, the book is likely to be an interesting evocation of a particular moment in their lives and in the South African struggle. And this study is rich in source material, offering vignettes and perspectives drawn from individual life histories as well as internal school documentation. With names, dates, and justifications, this study may well inspire more analysis of ANC youth policy and education initiatives. As it offers an essentially descriptive view of the school's purpose while at the same time providing details of funding, disciplinary problems, and cultural clashes, this study can be read on two levels: either as polite celebration of official ANC policy, or as a pointer toward significant questions and problems that historians must begin to address as we move beyond simply celebrating the ANC's victory in South Africa.

The study's authors situate the school as part of a post-Soweto-uprising ANC effort to cope with

youth who were politicized and ended up in exile, in need of training, education, and preparation for a new South Africa. From the naming of SOMAFCO for Solomon Mahlangu, a young militant hanged in 1979, to a curriculum that emphasized science, "History of the Struggle," and "Development of Societies," as an explicit rejection of Bantu education and preparation for socialist action, the school stood for revolution. In his preface, the South African minister of education, Kader Asmal emphasized that the school had been a "beacon of hope" during the difficult years, and described the school as a "brave and exciting experiment" in democratic and progressive education (p. v).

On the basis of its undeniably important mission, international donors supported the school in many ways. Tanzania's government provided land. Scandinavian governments and development organizations provided money. Eastern European governments provided scholarships for the continuing education of SOMAFCO graduates. And a wide variety of organizations and individuals offered everything from volunteer teachers to children's bicycles to jazz performances. In a cele-

bratory mode, the study is careful to note each donor's contribution. But despite lacking consolidated statistics that would allow a quick glance at the school's costs and achievements, this study offers occasional statistics on budgetary matters (such as the US \$500,000 offered by Swedish students for constructing student laboratories) and claims that by the time the abandoned institution was handed over to the Tanzanian government in 1992, it had been developed with infrastructure worth "somewhere between US \$300 and 600 million" (p. 178).

These very descriptions give rise to questions. The school was in a poor area of Tanzania, on a thousand hectare sisal plantation and was linked with an even larger allotment at the Dakawa development center. Local people's wishes seem to have been wholly irrelevant in its planning, and villagers effectively became second-class citizens when their access to schooling, medical care, and economic infrastructure was compared to that of the donor-sponsored South Africans. SOMAFCO planned to use its land to develop modern agribusiness and industry in conjunction with the school. The ideal was Education with Production--a concept with Marxist connections, celebrated in Zimbabwe in the 1980s but recognizable as an updated version of Phelps-Stokes education initiatives of the 1930s that sounded good, but failed expensively. And it had another sharp similarity with mission education: the land the school and its development center worked was effectively removed from the hands, hoes, and hammers of local Tanzanians, who farmed the land and built the school's buildings as wage laborers for alien foremen. Thus, one of the big questions raised in the book is whether the money and resources that went into the school were invested well in the human capital of revolution, or ostentatiously displayed, offering donors such as UNESCO and others the opportunity to claim support for the struggle by spending money in ways that did not directly challenge South Africa's apartheid government. The descriptions of the school's infrastruc-

ture and role as a regional center of economic development suggest that much of the school's development initiative was unsustainable and possibly worse. The farm used "large sums of money from Scandinavian countries and elsewhere" but touted itself as an icon of self-reliance. South Africans managed the farm, but Tanzanians worked it using "a level of technology, expertise and investment that proved impossible to maintain today it is a sd relic, barely functioning as a productive enterprise" (p. 120).

Nor was the SOMAFCO farm's hypocrisy and failure the only example of problematic "development." The entire Dakawa development center, designed to offer adult education that would facilitate work in the new South Africa, failed repeatedly over the years, beginning with a leadership by "old comrades" described in internal materials in 1982 as smoking dagga, and doing little, as they were "completely soaked with the local brew" and unable to remember what they were supposed to do (p. 144). Gradually somewhat reformed, Dakawa grew important as a place to look for spies and provocateurs among newly arrived refugees, and a place to dump individuals who had become disciplinary problems at the main college, either through illicit pregnancies or more serious difficulties. It also housed individuals who had failed in scholarship studies in Bulgaria or elsewhere. Like the main SOMAFCO farm, the Dakawa farm was supposed to be mechanized. But it was even less successful. Donated equipment rusted for lack of spare parts. Rats, Masai cattle, wild pigs, and elephants ate or trampled crops, and training gave way to calls for discipline and policing that sought to block student unrest and protests.

The pairing of celebratory description and evocative detail extends well beyond the study's description of donors and physical infrastructure to discussions of pedagogy and curriculum. *Education in Exile* celebrates SOMAFCO's interracial preschool, experimental elementary school, and

ambitious secondary school. It features descriptions of innovative, committed educators who saw needs, and sought to fill them, whether by establishing a preschool and creche to care for babies of activists, or rather short-lived experiments with "holistic," cooperative, and egalitarian education in the primary school. But it notes as well the ways these top-down initiatives and efforts faltered in the face of staff and students who wanted more structure, clearer lines of status and authority, and less pressure toward science or politics. Despite its progressive leadership, the preschool had to cope with staff firmly committed to corporal punishment and out of patience with its pretentious leadership. The grade-free cooperative environment cultivated by the New Zealand primary school headmaster Terry Bell gave way to a more conventional structure under "Babu" Dennis September, who had been trained as a physical education teacher in the "coloured" schools of Cape Town. And in the secondary school, a boarding school with some students as old as 32, "rowdiness, insubordination and disruptive behavior" could be problems despite explicit and conservative school rules about attendance, demeanor, and dress (p. 64). Given a school philosophy that advocated students' responsibility for their own learning, and encouraged them to engage in questioning, teachers and staff sought to maintain control through unofficial corporal punishment, control over scholarships, and the threat of exile to Dakawa. Students struggled, though, and not just over social lives sometimes funded by selling donated or stolen goods and including sex and alcohol. The school's emphasis on science was difficult for learners with inadequate preparation. Some students complained about the required "Marxist oriented Development of Societies" class, and wished instead for a more religious curriculum (p. 74). And "Education with Production" seems to have simply failed as students considered physical labor to be punishment rather than tuition (pp. 86-92). This study provides enough evidence to point toward

serious tensions, but organizes chapters around successes, not conflicts and struggles, and offers plenty of excuses for why things did not go according to a radical activist's dreams. The chapter on the social lives of students, for example, celebrates student life in a political environment of exile, but acknowledges fights, religious charlatans, ethnic sectionalism, sexual harassment, rape, pregnancies, drunkenness, and dagga, ending the chapter with a note on psychological disturbances and suicides.

*Education in Exile* is a valuable study. It is securely in the tradition of institutional histories of schools. This means that it has been able to draw on the internal documents, disciplinary records, personnel files, and curricular materials (as well as participants' reminiscences) generated at and by this particular school, rather than simply offering generalities. But despite this unusual richness of material and access, it is not a whitewash. Future scholars can supply a more critical edge, but will find plenty of dangling threads here from which to begin. I wonder, for example, why some militant exiles ended up at school and others at training camps for Umkhonto we Sizwe forces. I suspect an entire ethnography of South Africa's ANC elite could be started with a discussion of how international scholarships and bursaries were distributed among students both at SOMAF-CO and beyond. The study lacks a clear, ethnographic perspective on how students and youth saw the school, their experiences there, and the changes over time. And it bypasses entirely a discussion of ethnicity, why the African lingua franca ended up as Zulu, or the implications of Inkatha and conflicts within the ANC in the 1980s and early 1990s. But as a celebration of a not particularly successful school, this study points scholars and would-be policy makers toward the difficulties of translating political and social theory into the realities of what children and youth learn and live by.

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