

Origins and Dynamics of the Botswana-Soviet Union Relations, 1960s to 1990

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Abstract

This paper primarily uses archival and oral sources to examine the origins and dynamics of relations between Botswana and the Union of Soviet and Socialist Republic (USSR) within the context of the Cold War. The USSR or the Soviet Union applied for the diplomatic relations with Botswana in March 1967 and the request was accepted in March 1970 after protracted and tense negotiations. At Independence in 1966, the poverty-stricken Botswana was desperate to court many friends. But its diplomatic relations with the socialist Soviet Union incensed apartheid South Africa, which believed that the Soviet Union wanted to use Botswana to spy on South Africa. Before Botswana's Independence, a handful of Left-leaning young Batswana had already secured Soviet Union scholarships through the help of the Botswana Peoples Party (BPP) and the Botswana National Front (BNF). After Botswana attained Independence, the sending of some Batswana to the Soviet Union for study was not appreciated by the capitalist-inclined and ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP). The latter branded the opposition leaders as irresponsible hot-heads hell-bent on indoctrinating the youth with the Marxist or communist ideology. The issue of Batswana students studying in the Soviet Union dominated the diplomatic negotiations.

Introduction

The analysis of the origins and dynamics of the Soviet Union relations with any African country or even elsewhere in the post-Second World War era cannot avoid the centrality of the Cold War. The Cold War has been described as an 'international civil war' (Onslown 2009) in which Southern Africa, Botswana inclusive, was enmeshed (Gaborone 1994 and Filatova 2012). The Second World War left Europe economically and politically devastated but the United States of America (USA) emerged from the war economically and politically stronger (Fischer 1950). Thus, on 3 April 1948 the US president, Harry Truman, signed the Marshall Plan (the European Recovery Programme) to assist the Western European countries to rebuild their ruined economies and prevent the spread of the Soviet Union's ideology of communism (De Long and Eichengreen 1991). The US extended the offer to the Soviet Union which had been an American ally during the war. The Soviet Union, however, rejected the offer as it viewed the Marshall Plan as primarily designed to promote the US sponsored capitalist ideology (Trachtenberg 2005).

The first priority of the Soviet Union's foreign policy was to exert control over Eastern Europe (Narinsky 1994). Therefore, a Western bloc dominated by the US 'was simply intolerable to Moscow' (Narinsky 1994:51). Moscow's outright rejection of the Marshall Plan triggered 'the development of the Cold War' (Parrish and Narinsky 1994:1). Until the end of the Cold War in about 1990, the US led the capitalist bloc while the Soviet Union led the communist bloc. The Cold War 'was essentially about ideas' (Mueller 2004:609). In vying for global influence and support, the US and the Soviet Union aggressively recruited sympathizers and collaborators world-wide. Africa became a 'convenient battlefield in the global rivalry' between these two superpowers (Volman 2009). Until the death of the Soviet Union leader Josef Stalin in 1953, the Soviet Union-Africa relations had been insignificant. Stalin had considered African states under colonial rule 'to be part of the capitalist system and unsuitable for penetration by the Soviet influence' (Giles 2013:3). This changed after Nikita Khrushchev succeeded Stalin.

Khrushchev's rise to power coincided with the struggle against colonialism in Africa. Khrushchev

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saw 'the possibilities offered by engagement with newly-independent states and anti-colonial movements across the continent' (Giles 2013:3). The Soviet Union identified the support for 'struggles for national liberation and social progress... as a foreign-policy objective' (Arkhangelskaya and Shubin 2013:6). Therefore, Khrushchev supported the liberation movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America. He redefined 'national liberation movements, so that they were not understood by the USSR as local wars' (West 2008:225). In 1955 the Soviet Union transferred its first consignment of weapons to Egypt (Antonenko 2001). In 1956 Khrushchev, speaking at the 20th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), stressed the criticality of the 'collapse of the colonial system of imperialism' and reaffirmed the Soviet's 'irreconcilable struggle against colonialism' (Arkhangelskaya and Shubin 2013:6).

By 1960, the USSR had established diplomatic relations with these newly independent African countries: Egypt gained independence in 1922, Ghana in 1957, Guinea in 1958, Mali in 1960, Sudan in 1956, Morocco in 1956 and Libya in 1951 (Giles 2013). These African countries 'favoured political integration as a prerequisite for economic integration and a socialist path to economic development' (Wapmuk 2009:650). In October 1961, the leaders of these countries were invited by the CPSU to attend its 22nd congress in Moscow. The congress outlined the Soviet Union's vision towards Africa as far as advancing socialism and development was concerned (Giles 2013). Khrushchev believed that 'African countries could bypass capitalism and advance straight to socialism, fostered by the USSR' (Giles 2013:3). In Southern Africa the liberation movements received enormous support from the USSR. The Peoples Republic of China also supported the struggle (see West 2008; Volman 2009 and Filatova 2012).

When the landlocked and poverty-stricken Botswana gained Independence from Britain in 1966, the Cold War was raging. Botswana was surrounded by hostile and capitalist white minority regimes in South Africa, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Namibia (South West Africa) which received support from the capitalist bloc led by the US. In Angola and Mozambique, the Portuguese had also refused to relinquish power until 1975. In order to survive, Botswana courted as many friends as possible (Masire 2006). Botswana's first president, Seretse Khama (1966-1980), was concerned about the Cold War and the dilemma his country faced. In his first address to parliament, he declared that 'Our first duty will always be towards the people of this country rather than to any world political ideologies because the histrionics and fulminations of extremists outside this country will not help Botswana to achieve its destiny' (Carter and Morgan 1980:15).

The BPP (formed in 1960) and the BNF (formed in 1965) received various support from the communist-socialist bloc to the disquiet of the pro-West ruling BDP (formed in 1962). Interestingly, President Khama's successor, Quett Masire (1980-1998), insists that Botswana's foreign policy was informed by pragmatism and not any ideology. He notes that 'it was appropriate for us to recognise and cooperate with any country whenever we thought we might benefit from our relations' (Masire 2006:300). Masire's position seems to lend itself to the Realist theory of international relations which emphasises the primacy of 'national interests' in foreign policy formulation and execution (Morgenthau 1952). In short, cooperation amongst states 'is possible but only when it serves the national interest' (Evans and Newnham 1998:466).

In reflecting on the origins of the Botswana-Soviet Union relations, this paper analyses the experiences of some of the first citizens of Botswana to travel to or study in the Soviet Union before the two countries formalised the relations in 1970. The role of the BPP, the BNF and the liberation movements in connecting these individuals with the Soviet Union is examined, and so is the BDP's reaction. It also comments on the BDP-CPSU relations in the 1980s.

Botswana-Soviet Union Informal Relations and Political Parties, 1960-1970

Some daring young Botswana established informal relations with the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 1970s. They travelled there for studies and conferences much to the discomfort of the ruling party. They include,

among others, Dr Kenneth Koma, Motsamai Mpho, Fish Keitseng, Klass Motshidisi, Mareledi Giddie, Conference Lekoma, Staba Tibi, Obonetse Menyatso, Dikobe Ontumetse, David Mhiemang, Christopher Lesolle, Shathani Mannathoko and John Seakgosing (Edge 1996; Keitseng 1999 and Mokopane 2001). Some of these pioneers later became political activists, members of parliament, cabinet ministers, senior civil servants and business persons. The Soviet Union's active support for the liberation struggle inspired them (Kwante 2010). Just before 1960, the Soviet Union had already established contacts with the leaders of South Africa's leading liberation group – the African National Congress (ANC) (Edge 1996 and Filatova 2012). Throughout the 1950s and 1960s many people from Botswana worked in South Africa and some participated in the liberation struggle against apartheid there. When the ANC and other liberation groups were banned in 1960 Botswana received thousands of South African refugees. Some Batswana also assisted South African freedom fighters who crossed into Botswana on their way to Zambia, Tanzania, Algeria, the Soviet Union and China for military training and studies (Edge 1996). In addition some refugees came from Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola (Parsons 2008).

In 1960, the Soviet Union established the Peoples' Friendship University (PFU) in Moscow to assist in the global crusade of spreading communism (Parsons *et al* 1995). It recruited students even without the knowledge of their governments. In 1961 the PFU was renamed Patrice Lumumba University to honour the assassinated Congolese president, Patrice Lumumba. During those days, 'the typical student at Patrice Lumumba University would be a young African, someone who could hope to become his country's first native-born doctor or engineer after graduation. The new graduate would be expected to take communism home with him and preach of its glories' (Germani 1995). Kenneth Koma was probably the first Motswana to travel to and study in Eastern Europe in the late 1950s. He 'had the distinction of being the first African to be awarded a doctorate' in the USSR (Parsons *et al* 1995:235). He was among the first few Batswana to earn a PhD. He had previously studied in Botswana, South Africa and England. Upon his return to Botswana, just after the 1965 general elections which were won by the BDP, he formed the Left-oriented BNF. Koma organised scholarships for other Batswana to study in the USSR (Mokopane 2001). These included David Mhiemang, Klass Motshidisi, Obonetse Menyatso and Mareledi Giddie. They later became Koma's confidants in the BNF.

Fish Keitseng travelled to Moscow in 1963 to attend a Workers' Conference as a member of the ANC, which he had joined in 1949 while working in South Africa. Alongside Nelson Mandela, Keitseng was charged with treason during the famous Treason Trial of 1956 (Keitseng 1999). In his memoirs, he laments that on his way to Moscow he was subjected to interrogation because his destination was unpopular with the capitalist bloc. Keitseng met Koma, for the first time, at the 1963 conference in Moscow. Koma was a PhD student in political science at the Academy of Sciences in Moscow (Mokopane 2001).

Motsamai Mpho was another Motswana who became an ANC activist in 1952 while working in South Africa. In 1948 Mpho worked for the Crown Mines in Johannesburg as welfare assistant. He says that he was inspired by the ANC's organised and led Defiance Campaign of 1952 to join the ANC (Edge 1996). Like Keitseng, he faced treason charges during the 1956 Treason Trial (Edge 1996). Upon acquittal, Mpho was deported to Botswana where he founded the BPP in 1960. He had close links with the Soviet Union and the Chinese (Edge 1996). Mpho says that 'I made contacts with individuals from the Soviet Peace Committee. I got one student a chance to study abroad. I found Mareledi Giddie and John Seakgosing who worked for Dr. Kaunda's government in Zambia and made arrangements for them to travel abroad' (Edge 1996:83-84). It seems Giddie was sent to Moscow by Koma and Mpho as we discuss below.

Figure 1: Obonetse Menyatso, Natashe and Klaas Motshidisi in the Soviet Union



Source: Obonetse Menyatso's personal collection.

The founders of the fiercely anti-colonial BPP in 1960 included Motsamai Mpho, Klaas Motshidisi, Philip Matante, Kgalemang Motsete and others. A mass-based party it 'appealed to urban semi-proletarians and discontented youth' (Parsons *et al* 1995:197). The BPP had strong links with socialist countries and pan-African solidarity groups (Edge 1996). In 1962 Menyatso joined the BPP and became a branch chairperson until the party's split in 1963. Alongside Mpho, Motshidisi and others formed the BPP No.2 (Interview with Menyatso 1 November 2009). Upon his return from Moscow in 1965, Koma tried to unite the opposition parties which had badly lost elections to the BDP. Koma's effort did not bear fruit and he decided to form the BNF together with Keitseng, Daniel Kwele, Menyatso, Motshidisi and Serogola Seretse (Parsons *et al* 1995).

Koma was impressed by his new team but found that they lacked critical socialist grounding which he greatly believed in. To address this deficiency, Koma organised scholarships for some of his cadres to study in the Soviet Union. Menyatso and Motshidisi were the first to go. Menyatso studied a diploma in Political Science while Motshidisi read for a diploma in Trade Unionism (Interview with Menyatso 1 November 2009). In the Soviet Union they were able to experience, understand and appreciate socialism. There was 'nothing like sharing of property which was how people in Africa [and Botswana] were made to understand [and fear] socialism or communism' (Interview with Menyatso 1 November 2009). In 1966, both returned home and worked very hard to grow the BNF. Menyatso contested the parliamentary elections in Mahalapye and Tswapong constituencies until 2004 under the BNF ticket but he never won. Motshidisi later joined the government as a civil servant and was subsequently appointed the commissioner of labour. He retired in the 1990s and returned to the BNF (Morton *et al* 2008).

In the 1950s David Mhiemang met Koma, who was then a temporary teacher at Moeng College, Botswana. At the same time, Koma established the Botswana Youth Front (BYF) and traversed the country recruiting members. He used the BYF to conduct lessons on 'African revolution' and the struggle for the Independence of Botswana across the country (Interview with Mhiemang 26 October 2009). Some grad-

uates of Koma's BYF include Otsweletse Moupo (BNF leader, 2001-2010), Peter Sentetswetse, Mareledi Giddie, Staba Tibi, James Pilane, Motsei Rapelana (nee Madisa), Kalmon Mogalakwe (professor of Sociology at the University of Botswana), Ponatshego Kedikilwe and Botlogile Tshireletso. Menyatso and Motshidisi were Koma's right hand men and senior graduates (Interview with Mhiemang 26 October 2009). Kedikilwe and Tshireletso would later join the BDP and became cabinet ministers, with Kedikilwe rising to the position of Vice President of Botswana from 2012 to 2014.

Mhiemang considered the revered Koma as a very inspirational and influential leader. Koma inspired him to accept a scholarship organised for him by the ANC's office in Zambia to study conflict resolution in the Soviet Union's satellite of Czechoslovakia in 1966 (Interview with Mhiemang 26 October 2009). He said that his studies focused on intelligence and politics. It was very difficult for activists such as Mhiemang to leave Botswana for the Soviet Union since the government was suspicious of communist activities (Parsons *et al* 1995 and Makgala 2006). He returned after six months, and told the Botswana authorities that he had been working at the South African mines. Mhiemang said that he had three passports for Botswana, South Africa and Zambia. He maintained his true names in the Botswana passport. In his South African passport, he was Thabiso Ngwenya and for the Zambian passport, he went by the name Mulligan Chota (Interview with Mhiemang 26 October 2009). Upon return, he continued his BNF activism and was one of its study group teachers. He also represented it as a parliamentary candidate for Molepolole South during the 2009 general elections but lost.

Staba Tibi joined the BYF in 1966 and in the same year, alongside some BYF members, he pleaded with Koma to organise scholarships for them to study in the Soviet Union. Again in 1966, Tibi, Shathani Mannathoko and Conference Lekoma travelled to Lusaka, Zambia, by road to board a plane to Moscow (Interview with Tibi 20 February 2010). Hotel accommodation was arranged for them in Lusaka but they decided to stay with John Seakgosing, a Motswana working for the Zambian government as a clerk. After two weeks, they flew to Moscow. Seakgosing later joined them to study medicine. They first studied Russian language at Patrice Lumumba University. After two years, Tibi enrolled for an MSc in agriculture, and graduated in July 1972 (Interview with Tibi 20 February 2010). He returned home in August 1972 and he says that upon arrival at the Gaborone Airport, he found two police officers waiting for him. They demanded to see his books but were disappointed to find that he was reading agricultural books. The next day Tibi travelled to Mahalapye under a police escort. The police maintained surveillance on him even though he was not into politics. He later secured a job as a lecturer at the Botswana College of Agriculture (BCA) even though the college principal, a certain Moffat (a British national) doubted his qualifications (Interview with Tibi 20 February 2010). In 1974 the principal sent Tibi back to school to study a certificate course in agricultural education at Wolverhampton Teachers' Institute in the United Kingdom. Upon return Tibi progressed to become the BCA principal and ultimately the director of the department of crop production in the Ministry of Agriculture.

Christopher Lesolle joined the BYF while he was a secondary school student in the late 1960s. Upon completion, Koma organised a Soviet Union scholarship for him. A promising young man Lesolle secured a temporary job in Gaborone at the District Commissioner's office in 1969. He secured another temporary job with Radio Botswana as an administrator in the same year. Again in 1969, the government offered him a full time job at the statistics office. Before the end of 1969, the government sent him to the University of Dar es Salam in Tanzania to study a one year course in statistics (Interview with Lesolle 22 February 2010). However, Lesolle stayed in Tanzania for less than four weeks before secretly proceeding to the Soviet Union. This incensed the Botswana government such that his actions would dominate the negotiations on starting the diplomatic relations between Botswana and the Soviet Union (Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS), Office of the President (OP) 24/38, 23 November 1970). Lesolle left for Moscow accompanied by Sefora Molefane, also a member of the BYF. They were admit-

ted at Patrice Lumumba University to learn the Russian language before transferring to Odessa College of Technology in Ukraine where Lesolle studied mechanical engineering (Interview with Lesolle 22 February 2010).

He stayed in Ukraine for six years and returned to Botswana in 1975. The following year, in 1976, he secured employment as an instructor with the Serowe Brigade. From 1977 to 1978 he worked for the Bangwato Concession Limited (BCL) at the Selibe Phikwe mine as a mechanical engineer. In 1979, he joined the Botswana Enterprises Development Unit (BEDU) as a senior technical officer. By 2009, he was an ordinary member of the BNF (Interview with Lesolle 22 February 2010). It should be noted that acute lack of trained and skilled personnel in Botswana forced the government to employ these Soviet Union trained Batswana despite their (graduates) overt inclination towards opposition politics or sympathetic to the opposition parties.

BDP Government's Reaction to Socialist Inspired Opposition, 1960s

As noted Botswana got its Independence when the Cold War was raging, and as Masire writes in his memoirs: 'During those years, the communist and Western countries were stirring things up in southern Africa' (Masire 2006:118). The BDP-led government was scared of the socialist-oriented opposition parties in Botswana and like the apartheid government in South Africa it branded these 'Communists' (Makgala 2006). President Khama and his deputy Masire and other high-ranking BDP leaders such as Daniel Kwelagobe, among others, were concerned about the informal relations between individual Batswana or the opposition and the Soviet Union (Kwelagobe 1979; Parsons *et al* 1995 and Masire 2006). This delayed the formalisation of the diplomatic relations between the two countries. 'We were careful with the Soviets, since we knew their interest in establishing an embassy in Gaborone did not reflect interests in us, but rather in South Africa and the rest of the subcontinent', notes Masire (2006:299).

The Special Branch of the Botswana Police sensationalised the issue causing the BDP to certainly feel that its rule was under serious threat from the BNF and the BPP (Parsons *et al* 1995). For example, in August 1967 the Special Branch compiled a report 'which began with the assertion that Koma had been 'thoroughly indoctrinated in communism' to 'gain eventually complete and dictatorial control of the opposition' (Parsons *et al* 1995:267). The report also noted that the BNF was in a crusade to indoctrinate the civil service, the youth and labour groups with communism (Parsons *et al* 1995). Masire admits that quite often 'the Special Branch came up with reports about politicians, both in *Domkrag* [BDP] and in opposition parties' (2006:118). Overwhelming evidence shows that those in the opposition (alleged communist agents) were often targeted than those in the BDP (Edge 1996; Keitseng *et al* 1999 and Mokopane 2001). Parsons *et al* (1995) analyse the BDP's paranoia about the BNF and its leader in the 1960s. For instance, in November 1967 the government ordered the police to raid the BNF offices. Koma and four others, including a woman activist named Pretty Molefe, were arrested and charged with sedition. Copies of the BNF's newsletter were also seized (Parsons *et al* 1995).

The Special Branch and the BDP discredited the BNF as a communist organisation capable of rigging the elections (Parsons *et al* 1995). The BDP also raised alarm by suggesting that the 'united front', which Koma advocated for, was intended to overthrow the democratically elected government (Parsons *et al* 1995). In 1979, Daniel Kwelagobe, then BDP's secretary general, responded to the socialist-inspired opposition parties by authoring a book portraying communism as an evil phenomenon, and warned Batswana to be extremely cautious of the BNF and its leader (Kwelagobe 1979). His booklet has the subtitle: *Beware of the Wolves in Sheep Skins*. In his memoirs, Masire views communism as a threat to the security of the country. He describes Koma as 'a dishonest' and 'an inscrutable fellow', who 'came back from his training in Russia full of Marxist ideology' (2006:116). However, it is said that the BDP tried to tame Koma by offering him the lucrative position of chief executive officer of the then highly profitable Botswana Meat

Commission and the prestigious position of vice chancellor of the University of Botswana, which he both declined to the great admiration of his followers (Makgala 2005).

Negotiations for Establishment of Botswana-Soviet Union Relations, 1967-1976

The Soviet Union was represented at the Botswana's first Independence celebrations in 1966 through its embassy in Lusaka. The following year (in March 1967) the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia applied for the diplomatic relations with Botswana (Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS) OP 36/1, 3 March 1967)). A year later (1968) Czechoslovakia and Botswana established non-residential diplomatic relations but the negotiations with the Soviet Union were bit protracted as we discuss below. The Soviet Union insisted on a resident mission. Initially, Botswana firmly objected to the Soviet Union's proposal to establish a resident embassy in Gaborone, and the reasons are discussed below. Botswana had no intention of establishing a resident embassy in Moscow for economic and political reasons (BNARS OP 36/1, 3 March 1967). When President Kaunda of Zambia visited Botswana in May 1968, the two countries agreed that the Zambian embassy in Moscow would do consular work for Botswana (Parsons *et al* 1995). Botswana insisted to the Soviet Union that its embassy in Lusaka should represent them in Botswana as well. The Soviet Union had wanted the two countries to exchange resident diplomats (BNARS OP 36/1, 3 March 1967).

Prior to the negotiations, confidential information had been circulating between the Botswana high commission in Lusaka and the office of the president in Gaborone. Both offices did not support the Soviet Union's proposal of establishing resident consulates or embassies. They believed that resident embassies were necessary to promote trade and both countries had no trade links at the time. Another view was that resident consulates were essential for the protection of citizens and there were no Soviet Union citizens in Botswana. On the other hand, Botswana had few students in the Soviet Union who were sent there by the opposition parties. Botswana insisted that the Zambian embassy in Moscow, Botswana's high commission in London and the Soviet Union embassy in Lusaka could do consular work for the two countries (BNARS OP 36/1, 3 March 1967). In Botswana's view, the resident diplomatic relations was unjustified. Finally, Botswana insisted on a number of conditions namely: i) acceptance of non-residence diplomats; ii) the limit on the number of Soviet Union diplomats entering the country and their length of stay; iii) restriction on their movement; and iv) advance notification of their intended visits (BNARS OP 24/38 23 November 1970). Most, if not all, of these conditions were put in place mainly because the two countries had not exchanged resident diplomats. Again, these conditions were dictated by the volatile Cold War politics and the anger from South Africa.

Botswana also needed clarity on specific issues: Firstly, Christopher Lesolle's case became critical. In 1969 Lesolle had abandoned his government sponsored statistics course in Tanzania and secretly travelled to the Soviet Union to pursue a different course as explained above. Botswana certainly believed that the Soviet Union government was implicated in his defection (BNARS OP 24/38, 23 November 1970). However, the Soviet Union ambassador in Lusaka distanced his government from the blame and promised to prevent similar cases if they were to happen in the future (BNARS OP 24/38, 23 November 1970). The Botswana government officials informed the Soviet Union that the country's manpower was too limited to be lost through 'political' defections. Botswana also wanted the Soviet Union to give as much information as possible on the Botswana students studying in the USSR because they had been sent by the opposition parties (BNARS OP 24/38, 23 November 1970).

For its part, the Soviet Union prefaced the negotiations by explaining that it offered assistance through the international agencies and bilateral agreements. It emphasized that Botswana should know that it truly supports the interests of the developing countries. The Soviet Union further informed Botswana that their proposal to establish diplomatic relations was based on similar agreements which they signed

with several African countries, including Zambia (BNARS OP 24/38, 23 November 1970). The Soviet diplomats emphasized that they considered education to be a sovereign matter and regretted that some Botswana students went to Russia secretly.

Another condition demanded by the government of Botswana was that all scholarships offered by the USSR to Botswana should be routed through the government of Botswana. However, Botswana stated that it had difficulties in sending its students to the USSR just as it could not afford to send them to the UK or the US (BNARS OP 24/38, 23 November 1970).

Furthermore, it was unclear to Botswana whether a USSR diploma meant undergraduate, post-graduate or high school certificate. It was then agreed that the Soviet Union would send its academic programmes or course outlines to the Botswana government for assessment. Botswana assured the Soviet Union that it did not undermine the authenticity of its academic qualifications (BNARS OP 24/38, 23 November 1970). The Soviet Union officials defended their education system vigorously as one of the best in the world stating that it produced top-notch scientists (BNARS OP 24/38, 23 November 1970). They explained that even some Americans study/studied in the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union noted that some high-ranking government officials in many developing countries held Soviet Union's academic qualifications. They argued that the criticisms about Soviet academic qualifications were peddled by its enemies (BNARS OP 24/38, 23 November 1970). They even offered three scholarships to Botswana (two from Patrice Lumumba University and one from the Soviet Committee of Solidarity with Asian and African countries). The Botswana government was to decide on the fields of study (BNARS OP 24/38, 15 April 1971). It should also be noted that the assessment of an institution's academic programme or courses by an institution in a different country is a normal practice which even the University of Botswana does. According to Masire, 'The Soviets offered us scholarships, and though we were desperately in need of trained manpower, we felt our people should study in English, and studying in Russian would increase their training time' (Masire 2006:299-300). Botswana's concern was not really about language, but the fear of students being baptised into the feared communism.

The USSR requested Botswana to ratify the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in line with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) mandate (BNA OP 36/1, 3 March 1967). The NPT was co-authored by the USSR and the US in July 1968 but it came into effect in March 1970 (Quester 1972:17). The IAEA promotes the peaceful use of atomic energy (IAEA 2015:1). The IAEA ensures that the non-nuclear weapon states, which had ratified the NPT, commit to it 'with a view to preventing diversion of nuclear energy from peaceful uses to nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive devices' (IAEA 2015:1). During the diplomatic negotiations, the USSR had already submitted the request to the Botswana high commission in Lusaka. Botswana ratified the NPT on 1 July 1968, but it is not clear whether it was because of the USSR's influence.

The Soviet Union also wanted Botswana to support the Declaration on the Strengthening of International Security motion it had submitted to the UN Security Council. This motion was debated and adopted at the 25th session of the UN General Assembly (BNA OP 24/38, 23 November 1970). The Soviet Union assured Botswana that her support would cement the foundation of good relations. Botswana argued that it had to study the documents first since it had no records of such. The Soviet Union also expressed its desire to establish sound trade relations with Botswana.

Before the Soviet Union ambassador to Zambia, who was also accredited to Botswana, could present his credentials to Seretse Khama, he was replaced by Dmitry Belokolos (BNARS OP 24/38, 23 November 1970). In December 1970, Belokolos became the first non-residential ambassador of the Soviet Union to Botswana until 1976. The non-residential diplomatic arrangement did not satisfy Moscow as the Soviet Union continued to press for the residential diplomatic relations, which Botswana eventually acceded to in 1976. As would be expected, South Africa was angered by the Soviet presence in Botswana (Interview with Masire 20 February 2010). The relations 'lent credence to South African fears of a Soviet-instigated "Total Onslaught" on white rule in the Republic [of South Africa]' (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2006:164). South

Africa complained about 'the danger of enslavement of the Southern African people by 'Godless Communism' (Carter and Morgan 1980:233). This resonated well with the capitalist bloc whose support for South Africa enabled her to sustain her oppressive apartheid system. Botswana had to maintain a delicate neutral position when dealing with the US and the Soviet Union. Throughout the Cold War the US employed the 'containment of socialism' policy towards Southern Africa 'to frustrate Soviet expansion attempts' (Gaborone 1994:59).

South Africa was 'intensely displeased... but we felt we had a sovereign right to have it in Botswana', notes Masire (2006:300). South Africa believed that the Soviet Union embassy in Gaborone was 'unnecessarily large' and suspected it to be 'involved in an espionage campaign' (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2006:164). After 1976, Botswana also became unhappy about the presence of a large contingent of staff at the USSR embassy in Gaborone. Before 1976, the Soviet Union was represented in Botswana through its Zambian embassy. Then the Botswana government allowed very few Soviet diplomats to enter the country from Zambia. In 1976, the Soviet Union brought in large numbers of personnel to work at its newly established embassy in Gaborone. The Botswana government had to continuously throw some out 'for meddling in our internal affairs and acting against our interest', notes Masire (2006:300). Some students who were sympathetic to the BNF politics claim to have had access to Marxist and communist literature which was freely available at the Soviet Union embassy in Gaborone. One such student is the current leader of BNF, Duma Boko (Piet 23 October 2014).

There is no evidence that the Soviet Union embassy had any special relationship with the BNF. Ambassador Belokolos became actively enmeshed in the region's liberation struggle, and particularly in the Angolan civil war (1975-2002) which pitted the Soviet Union-backed government of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) against the US and South African-supported the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) rebels led by the charismatic and elusive Jonas Savimbi. Angola had just gotten its Independence from Portugal in 1975 but soon descended into a bloody civil war. Belokolos even proposed 'a series of plans for Moscow to assist the MPLA in terms of military hardware, logistical support, and political training' (Westad 2007:218). He was ready 'to offer political support' to the MPLA in its dealing with neighbouring countries, including his host, Zambia (Westad 2007:218). He gave long lectures to the Botswana government trying to convince it to support the MPLA against UNITA 'instead of remaining neutral' (Masire 2006:299) but Botswana refused.

In 1988 President Masire's presidential jet was shot while flying in Angola. President Masire and the Chief of Protocol, Bashi Iketseng, were the only passengers who were injured (Masire 2006). Masire reflects on this incident in his memoirs: 'Angola was where I experienced my most serious brush with death... The Angolan forces had aimed four ground-to-air missiles at us while we were passing over Cuito Caanavale. They all missed, so they detailed two MIGs after us. One MIG fired a heat-seeking missile that hit the right engine... If it had hit between the two engines, we would have died peacefully, without knowing anything' (Masire 2006:294). Even though the report on the investigation of the incident was never made public it was reported that an Angolan fighter had shot the presidential jet by mistake (Nonofo-Moreboloki 5 August 2008). Interestingly, an Angolan fighter jet was a Soviet Union made MiG23, while Masire's presidential jet was a British Aerospace 125 Series 800. During the Cold War, the capitalist bloc and socialist bloc supplied weapons and military hardware to their allies and satellites.

Strengthened Botswana-Soviet Union Diplomatic Relations, 1980s

On 13 February 1984 President Masire sent condolences to the Soviet Union following the death of President Yuri Andropov (*Botswana Daily News* 13 February 1984). The minister of External Affairs, Archie Mogwe, and Botswana's high commissioner to the UK, also accredited to the Soviet Union, Samuel Mpuchane, represented Botswana at the funeral. However, it should be noted that expression of condolences is universal

among human beings and expressed even to worst of enemies. Mpuchane later paid a ten day visit to the Soviet Union from 6 to 15 August 1984. He was accompanied by a secretary in the Botswana high commission in London. The secretary's portfolio included education and student affairs. In Moscow, Mpuchane's delegation met with officials from the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Higher Education, and International Trade. They held meetings with Batswana students in Moscow, and also visited a tractor factory and the Moscow watch assembly plant (BNARS OP/13/74, 16-15 August 1984).

On 20 January 1984 the USSR embassy in Gaborone, in partnership with the Botswana Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), organised an exhibition in Gaborone on 'Dolls of the Soviet Union people' (*Botswana Daily News* 24 January 1984). The USSR's ambassador to Botswana, Mikhail Petrov (1977-1985), expressed gratitude to the BDP leadership for giving them space at Tsholetsa House (headquarters of the BDP) to hold the exhibition. It is not clear why the event was held at the headquarters of a political party. Petrov said that the exhibition promoted cultural relations between the two countries (*Daily News* 24 January 1984). For his part, the permanent secretary in the MHA, Botswelotse Kingsley Sebele, said dolls were a means of expressing innate artistic ability and promote cultural values and history (*Daily News* 24 January 1984). The exhibition was also graced by the minister of Commerce and Industry, Moutlakgola Nwako, the UB vice chancellor, Professor John Turner, representatives of the diplomatic corps, senior government officials and members of the public, including children.

On 7 November 1984 the Soviet Union embassy in Botswana celebrated the 67th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. Ambassador Petrov explained that the Botswana-Soviet Union relations were cordial (*Daily News* 9 November 1984). The BDP agonised over the close relations between the Soviet Union and the opposition parties, and it was for this reason that the award of scholarships to the opposition parties was not welcomed by the BDP (Masire 2006). On 30 March 1983, the Soviet Union invited a delegation of the BDP members to Moscow (BNARS OP 13/74, 12 April 1983). The invitation noted that the BDP had done a lot in mobilising Batswana to participate in the socio-economic and political development of their country. It also commended Botswana's role in the liberation of Southern Africa (BNARS OP/13/74, 24 January 1984). The BDP sent their woman activist Botlogile Tshireletso to honour the CPSU invitation. The relations benefited Tshireletso as she was offered a scholarship to study a diploma in political education in Moscow. She appreciated this as it broadened her political understanding (Interview with Tshireletso 19 February 2010).

Conclusion

This paper argued that Botswana and the Soviet Union entered into diplomatic relations after protracted negotiations primarily due to the Cold War politics. From the onset, the Soviet Union had wanted a resident embassy in Gaborone but the Botswana government initially rejected the request. Botswana justly feared that the Soviet Union presence would anger the militarily and economically powerful South Africa. Botswana insisted on a non-residential diplomatic relations.

In 1976, Botswana agreed to the long-standing proposal by the Soviet Union to establish its embassy in Gaborone. The paper also averred that the opposition parties' decision to clandestinely send a handful of students to study in the Soviet Union did not augur well with the Botswana government. As a result, the government became suspicious of the Soviet's intention of establishing a resident embassy in Gaborone as early as March 1967.

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