

Christine Hatzky (2012), *Kubaner in Angola: Süd-Süd-Kooperation und Bildungstransfer 1976-1991*, München: Oldenbourg, ISBN 978-3-486-71286-5, 376 pp.

Cuba's engagement in Angola has been of decisive importance in consolidating MPLA's hold on power, both in the critical weeks before and after the formal attainment of independence in late 1975 and during the subsequent decade and a half. Specifically, the military component of this engagement has attracted attention through the drama of the initial "Operación Carlota", which ensured MPLA control of both the capital, Luanda, and the oil-rich enclave of Cabinda, and subsequently through the military and diplomatic stalemate of the 1980s, which was particularly marked by the Reagan administration's proclaimed "linkage" between the Cuban presence in Angola and Namibian independence. Other, civil components of Angolan-Cuban cooperation during this period have received far less attention. Christine Hatzky's in-depth study of Cubans sent to Angola to work both in the Ministry of Education and as schoolteachers across the country goes a long way to filling this gap. At the same time, as the title suggests ("Cubans in Angola: South-South Co-operation and Transfer in Education, 1976-1991"), the book addresses an important and quite special case of South-South cooperation.

In two opening chapters, Hatzky sketches the background of the Cuban presence in Angola, both in terms of the struggles that led to a highly conflictual transition to independence in Angola, and to the specific role of internationalism in Cuban foreign policy. One dimension of this tradition was the early contacts with African liberation movements and specifically with MPLA. However, the later construction of a "Latin-African nation" to underpin Cuba's engagement ideologically is rather an example of inventing tradition. More mundane motives, beyond the internationalist orientation of foreign policy, included substantial material compensation, as Hatzky documents to counter the official narrative.

Not least, the value of this study lies in the wealth of archival material Hatzky has consulted under difficult circumstances in both countries, and also in the massive interviewing she has carried out. These sources reveal not only the official views, but also allow for insight into underlying motives. Above all, by interviewing also rank-and-file former participants in the Cuban mission, Hatzky has been able to tap into everyday experiences and attitudes, as well as to explore retrospective evaluations. She has also interviewed a few Angolans, who were able to convey a sense of the impact of the Cuban teachers.

Several interlinked features are important to understanding the Cubans' role. On one hand, the Cubans were tightly organised: The Cuban state actually projected something like its own agency into Africa, which also implied tight surveillance of members of the mission. At the same time, the Cuban teachers, also on account of their military training, were deployed in rural regions where other co-operators from countries like the Soviet Union or the German Democratic Republic would not venture. Again, about one-third of the Cuban teachers sent to Angola were mere students without much practical professional experience. Indeed, they continued their studies in Angola under Cuban instructors. Such features resulted in controversy between the partners, not least since Angola paid quite heavily for the assistance – a fact that was hidden from the poorly paid Cubans on the ground in Angola.

Hatzky has provided a detailed account, which includes the institutional organisation of the cooperation, as also the related issue of the divergent pedagogical approaches. More rigid Cuban ideas about discipline and forms of instruction were experienced as problematic, in particular by the young Angolans who attended the boarding schools on the *Isla de la Juventud* off the Cuban coast. In Angolan schools, participants recalled relations of “distance and rejection” between Angolan and Cuban teachers, marked by “arrogance” on the side of Cubans and “inferiority complexes” on the Angolan side (282–283). One facet underscores this aspect of the relationship: Cuban teachers would leave Angola for their annual vacations in one group at a time that was completely out of tune with the Angolan school calendar. Regularly, this caused considerable confusion and difficulty with matters such as finalising exams. On the other hand, many of Hatzky's Cuban research partners recalled their Angolan experience as difficult and challenging. Hatzky even speaks of a “collective trauma”, given that these problems could never be brought into the open (326). In this way, Hatzky arrives at the concluding hypothesis that “the Angola engagement has left much deeper traces in Cuban than in Angolan society” (327), thereby opening up a whole vista of further research.

Such research could very well profit from Hatzky's own material. It would seem that much more can still be gleaned from her interviews, since the richness of this material is obviously not exhausted in a single book. The book's worth lies both in its interesting and incisive analysis and its role as a pilot study. One drawback concerns a sad and common grievance with German publishing these days, namely the poor editing and proofreading standards. Overall, one looks forward to sequels to this pioneering work, and one certainly hopes to see English and Spanish translations of it.

- Reinhart Kößler