

# OSA Visegrad Fellow Report

(Asymmetric) practices and (mis)representations of Cold War higher education exchange

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This pilot project is part of my broader research on alternative models of higher education (HE) policy development and travel in historical perspective, which started with my dissertation fieldwork in Venezuela (2008-2011). During my research, I realised that my main informants, the Venezuelan HE policy makers and academics involved in the establishment and running of the Bolivarian University of Venezuela, were not referring to past socialist experiments in the HE field, or the dissemination of HE policies and models around the world. Yet, the HE model developed under late President Hugo Chavez in Venezuela entailed features as massifying higher education, providing distance learning alternatives, and municipalising universities with campuses in remote locations: all features influenced by either Western universities or – more often – by socialist HE experimental institutions in the Eastern bloc or in the Global South, especially Cuba (see Ivancheva 2017). On this basis, I realised that an important background study to my research would be to understand not only the alternative models of HE developed in the former socialist world, but also the role of internationalisation and internationalism of HE in socialist countries, broadly defined.

Meanwhile, over the last two decades a growing scholarship has emerged on higher education and expert exchange during the Cold War, exploring the global connections of the HE field in that era. Focusing on African American and African students coming to the Soviet Union, the majority of books and articles in this research field discuss in depth a number of topics: the institutionalisation of a socialist internationalism; the opening/closure of exchange opportunities and institutions; the symbolic and material benefits for students; the ideological training they were exposed to; the racism they faced and their anti-racist mobilisations (see e.g. Filatova 1999; Hessler 2006; Matusevich 2008; Djagalov and Evans, 2009; Nash 2016; David-Fox 2016; Katsakioris 2017 *inter alia*). Written mostly by historians of the Soviet era, this research does not focus on policy travel or alternative higher education models. More recent research done about exchange students in East

Germany (Pugach 2018; Burton 2019) or Czechoslovakia (Holeckova 2018) has been similar in focus. An emphasis on policy travel has been present in the work on Cuban exchange with other socialist countries, yet with a strong focus on South-South developmentalist aid and exchange (see Hatzky 2012; Hickling-Hudson et al 2012). The role of the East European socialist countries in relation to Latin American or African regimes has so far remained mostly outside of this latter discussion.

At the same time, current research on the internationalisation of higher education (Frank & Meyer 2007, Marginson 2008) is often based on the premise that intensive internationalisation and competition only really started with introduction of the global rankings in the 1980s and through international competition over attracting talent, funds, research awards and academic excellence. This approach, focused on developments in the Global North misses the more obvious statement that during the Cold War a significant effort was placed on both sides of the Iron Curtain and by non-aligned countries to enhance the scientific cooperation within blocks and competition across dividing lines (Romano & Romero 2014). On this basis, my study was set to explore see if and how the competition between Cold War blocs in terms of HE policy was framed in journalistic representations and official reports: was it only seen through the competition for technological domination, or was it also a question of demonstrating more equitable (HE) system and better model of social organisation? My working hypothesis was that during the Cold War era competition was framed in different terms to current scholarship and policy in the HE field.

To do that, I intended to carry out a preliminary study of archival materials on HE policy and exchange during the Cold War, exploring how socialist bloc-led cooperation efforts were portrayed by Radio Free Europe, Western and Socialist block outlets and reports present in the Open Society Archive (hereafter OSA) collection. In what follows I first report the research done in the OSA and the limitations encountered on the intersection of my own research design and the materials available at OSA. These concerned the absent or rather formalistic reporting on the subject on both sides, that challenges my anticipation to discover an alternative and nuanced framing of competition or focus of reports different than what was already present in the current scholarship. I then go on to discuss some interesting findings from the research and insights into the field of knowledge exchange during the Cold War that I was able to access thanks to my stay at the OSA. Finally, I propose some theoretical reflection on what ways further scholarship on these subject can address and theorise such findings by engaging with concepts as decoloniality (Santos 2013, 2014), cognitive justice (Vivanathan 2006), extractivist capitalism (Gómez-Barris 2017), paternalistic vs. mutually beneficial internationalism (Alamgir 2013) and post-colonial semi-peripherality (Ginelli 2018).

While this study did not produce the initially expected results, it helped me to start unpacking questions of the role of the international HE exchange among socialist countries during the Cold War. It has helped me come closer to a tentative answer to the question if such exchange was aimed to transgress the hierarchies of knowledge production posed by the dominance of Euro-centric knowledge or did it reinforce them? How did the geopolitical positions of different socialist countries – more or less proximate to Eurocentric science and knowledge production – rely on their ability to frame the terms of and benefit from international HE cooperation?

#### [OSA materials consulted](#)

Given the big number of countries that a study like this could entail, and in given my own language skills, I narrowed down the topic to a number of links developed between countries during the Cold War. I was particularly interested in how HE reform have been portrayed when it comes to countries in the socialist block, and how HE exchange with Latin American socialist countries and African socialist countries were reflected in that light.

While I explored documents on other countries and subjects, I eventually focused my attention, in particular for the purpose and within the limits of this report, on the exchange between Bulgaria, Cuba, and Angola. Even if I also explored other countries, topics, and international links, I made this choice for two reasons. On the one hand, the language issue made my reading of documents around

Bulgaria – my country of origin and of the national language of which I am a native speaker – easier and allowed me a bigger depth of exploration into both the subject files of the Bulgarian Unit, and into the card files. I was interested to examine the documents and see how a country like Bulgaria intervened in this space, given its peripherality within the socialist system, while being very subservient to Soviet foreign policy throughout the Cold War. It was in the Bulgarian subject file as well, that a high concentration of mentions of African socialist countries could be observed which was an interesting discovery attesting its active role in the East-South exchange.

Having identified Bulgaria as a concentric point of my inquiry, I looked at the ways that its HE reforms were reported; and at its relations when it came to higher education exchange in two directions: on the one hand with Cuba, and on the other with African socialist countries. Cuba was interesting as it has been the longest lasting socialist regime in Latin America starting from the 1950s, which had unparalleled intensive connections to both Eastern European socialist countries and African such. I also looked into the connection of Bulgaria and Cuba to African socialist countries, exploring what the archive held on their links to different regimes. While I explored links with all African socialist countries, for this report and in the last, most intensive part of my study, I focused especially on Bulgaria's links with Angola. The reason for the focus on this country was two-fold. On the one hand, Angola was one of the two African socialist countries (together with Mozambique) best represented in the archive in relation to its Bulgarian connection. What is more, in a document from November 1977 Bulgaria was reported to have developed most intensive cooperation with Angola among all sub-Saharan African countries (HU OSA 300-20-1:191/7, 11/11/77). Interestingly, the Angolan knowledge exchange with Cuba was also a matter of recent scholarly work (see e.g. Hickling-Hudson et al 2012). Cuba's educational mission in Angola has been called "the largest, longest, and most varied civil cooperation in Cuban history and ... a unique example of South-South cooperation" (Hatzky 2012: 141). Thus, by the choice of Angola I was interested to explore if there was any bilateral, or even trilateral development in HE exchange between these three countries. On the other hand, as I would like to extend my research to national archives and through life-story interviews of beneficiaries of the HE exchange, beyond Bulgaria and Cuba, the choice of one or a relatively politically stable country in a region of Africa I am more familiar with (Southern Africa), allowed me to consider Angola as a case study. I did, however, look into files of all African socialist countries to cross-examine divergent trends in their relation to Bulgaria, but no significant such were to be found.

To explore these links at the OSA I consulted a number of collections that appeared relevant. I first explored the RFE Subject Files with focus on the Bulgarian Unit Subject Files (**HU-OSA-300-20-1**, details of archival boxes used, quoted under the text). There I examined the files concerning Party Education; Culture and People's Education; University Education; Foreign Relations; Relations with other countries; Labour Bulgarian workers and Specialists in Foreign Countries; Trade Foreign; Youth Student Organisation. I also consulted the RFE Bulgarian Unit Subject Card Files (**HU OSA-300-20-2**). I studied files related to HE policy (general, public and foreign universities; foreign students). There I also explored the materials on foreign policy when it came to Cuba and African socialist countries. I also examined RFE Records of Index on Censorship: (**HU OSA 301-0-3**) Country Files with focus on Cuba, and Angola and focused especially on General, Background, and Education information files.

I also consulted individual files that had the combination of country name+education, and there were some interesting individual entries, however the majority were from the subject files. I also went through the subject files that spoke of education, higher education, universities. Given the specific of this collection, gathered as interviews of individual migrants escaping the socialist block toward the West, it provided an interesting but rather subjective perspective on the developments in the socialist countries. The information was collected often from people – often students in HEIs or workers at popular/workers collegest – with first hand experience with educational institutions, but little institutional responsibility, so without a source of triangulation, the documents could hardly serve as source of institutional policy direction.

Additionally, I checked the files from two different collections. I went through the files on the international communist youth movement (**HU OSA 300-7-9 Subject Files Relating to the World Communist Movement, archival box 55**), in case discussions of higher education policy or reform were accounted for there. This was not the case. It was interesting and instructive for my wider study, however, to understand from the documents collected around the international Youth Meeting in Sofia in late July-early August 1968 (i.e. in the direct aftermath of the Prague Spring) how brutally repressive the Bulgarian police was to foreign students present and openly expressing discontent with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia at the meeting. On the other hand I consulted the documents under the heading 'academic' (**HU OSA 300-7-9 Subject Files Relating to the World Communist Movement, 'East-West' and 'international', archival boxes 41-43**). Where focusing on academic, rather than political exchange, these materials had a specific subheading 'East-West' and focused particularly on scholars from Eastern Europe going to conferences or undertaking longer exchange stays in the West, and more rarely – of Western scholars contributing to conferences and knowledge exchange in the East. Yet, exchanges with scholars from the developing world were not mentioned in this collection. This lack is perhaps telling more of how 'academic exchange' was framed in documents collected in both state socialist and liberal democratic polices – with reference mostly to Eurocentric science and knowledge production. I develop further thoughts on this subject in the last section of this report. Last but not least, I benefited from my stay at OSA by the chance to consult secondary materials related to both HE reforms in the Soviet and socialist block countries and Cuba both the OSA collection, and at the Central European University library.

### Preliminary findings: (asymmetric) practices and (mis)representations

The findings in the OSA collections were not what I expected on some level and were very intriguing and interesting from another perspective. I had expected that there would be much more detailed analysis of the advances and weaknesses of the socialist regimes' higher education policies on the RFE and Western journalist sides; and that such reports would be supplemented with counterframing in terms of achievements within the Western liberal democracies. I had also expected that the materials from the socialist press would detail policy moves and would be framed in competition to Western successes or failures in HE massification. I was wrong to anticipate that.

Instead, most reports that I encountered on both sides were concerned with rather dry reporting about the developments in the socialist block and never – definitely not in the documents I read – in comparison with developments/ competition with the other side of the Iron Curtain. Beyond such usually brief reporting in the passing, concrete policies were not discussed – not even to be criticised or praised – in detail. The rare occasions when this happened, the analysis confirmed already established ideological cannons on both sides.

An interesting example in that respect was the reporting on Cuba. Scholars have discussed both the internal HE policies and the alternative practices of HE exchange as rather based on solidarity and thus breaking up with an over-ideologised developmentalist approach (Hatsky 2012; Gonzalez et al 2012). Yet the discussion on Cuba's education policy as seen by RFE did not acknowledge such achievements (Figure 1). Whereas the policy was reported at times verbatim, with its "focus on individual existence, a permanent process of study and work, personality development and integration and communication with society", the judgment of what this meant was read as unequivocally 'authoritarian', despite the liberal human development philosophy that such statements evoked, and which was not in contradiction to the trends in Western pedagogy:

Education should reflect and encourage the changes which result from the revolutionary transformation, both material and of the mind; it should also, especially, guide and direct the creation of the new man and new people, who are capable of creating superior conditions of social and individual existence while shedding the hangovers of the past... the process of formation through education is to exist from childhood to the postgraduate level through a permanent process of study and work, personality development, integration and communication with society and other factors.... (4)

Several months after the Congress, an authoritative article in Cuba's official Party daily provided the following concise list of principles governing the Cuban educational system:

- 1) Channeling education toward concrete objectives.
- 2) Establishing close links between the school and life.
- 3) Training the new generations for work and in work.
- 4) Educating for the collectivity.
- 5) Combining conscious but firm discipline with the most strict respect for the personality of the student. (5)

On the basis of these brief representative statements of Cuban educational philosophy, there is little doubt that the country's educational system is predicated on authoritarian principles and organized along totalitarian lines. [REDACTED]

Figure 1: "Educating the "New Man" in Cuba", 9 February 1973. HU OSA 300-8-3-1460, p.3  
[Electronic Record]: <http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:cb605364-afbe-468f-b6a1-7861cc8615ac>

At the same time, for me particularly revealing were the documents, which I explored especially in the Bulgarian Subject file, and especially when it came to foreign trade (300-20-1, archival boxes #191-192). In a way, the reporting on the relations between Bulgaria and Cuba and Angola are very similar and reveal asymmetric and arguably exploitative relations between the former 'second' and the 'third' world that have only recently been explored in other areas as workers exchange (Apostolova 2017) and expert exchange in the field of urban planning and technology (Ginelli 2018). To illustrate and discuss the findings that I found most intriguing while looking for HE exchange, I explore a few revealing excerpts below, that manifest patterns represented also in other documents in the same file. They concentrate around the rather asymmetric form of bilateral exchange that, unless indicated below, did not change over time. In the case of Angola, similar patterns I found in the communication, trade and knowledge exchange with other African socialist countries with which Bulgaria was involved in technology and expert exchange, most notably Mozambique and Ethiopia. These findings made me see in new light and reflect on the power dynamic underpinning Cold War internationalism and solidarity: an insight that will most definitely illuminate my subsequent studies on the subject of Cold War HE policies, and which I would indeed like explore in further depth.

#### Bulgaria-Cuba: exerts, technology vs. sugar and debt

In the case of Bulgarian-Cuban relations, a report from the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency (BTA) from 1975 speaks of the economic cooperation between the two countries in terms of "mutual advantage". This advantage, however, is expressed in rather asymmetric ways. On the Bulgarian side, the Eastern European socialist country supplied its Caribbean partner with technologies ("basic machines for the needs of agriculture"), as well as goods ("foodstuffs, chemicals and medicaments"). Bulgaria also supplied Cuba with high-skilled labour in the form of over 500 experts, mostly



engineers and doctors. HE cadre exchange did not seem to be an explicit priority zone of exchange between the two countries, unless it went under the rubric "science and technology" (which, as signalled above, was most probably the continuation of technology and expert exchange for industrial production). Other areas of exchange were tourism, veterinary medicine, and communications (Figure 2).

✓ BULGARIAN-CUBAN RELATIONS.  
SOFIA, MAY 15 (BTA) -- ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN BULGARIA AND CUBA IS ONE OF THE MOST ELOQUENT EXAMPLES OF MUTUAL ADVANTAGE IN THE SPHERE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST DIVISION OF LABOUR. BULGARIA IS SUPPLYING CUBA WITH A GREAT VARIETY OF MACHINES FOR THE NEEDS OF THE AGRICULTURE WHICH IS ONE OF THE BASIC BRANCHES OF THE CUBAN ECONOMY. BULGARIA ALSO SECURES OTHER TYPES OF MACHINERY, FOODSTUFFS, CHEMICALS AND MEDICAMENTS. OVER 500 BULGARIAN EXPERTS, PHYSICIANS AND ENGINEERS PREDOMINANTLY, ARE WORKING IN VARIOUS SPHERES OF THE CUBAN PUBLIC AND ECONOMIC LIFE. IN ITS TURN CUBA SUPPLIES BULGARIA WITH CONSIDERABLE AMOUNTS OF SUGAR AND SUGAR PRODUCTS, MOLASSES, CIGARS, TOBACCO LEAVES AND OTHER GOODS. IN THIS MANNER THE TWO COUNTRIES ARE HELPING EACH OTHER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.  
THE ACTIVITIES OF THE BULGARIAN-CUBAN COMMISSION FOR ECONOMIC SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL COOPERATION, SET UP EIGHT YEARS AGO, ARE AIMING AT ITS ADVANCEMENT TOO. BULGARIA AND CUBA SIGNED A NUMBER OF AGREEMENTS IN THE FIELD OF TRADE MOSTLY BUT AS WELL IN OTHER SPHERES OF THE PUBLIC AND ECONOMIC LIFE - AIR COMMUNICATIONS, TOURISM, VETERINARY ACTIVITIES, SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY, ETC.

Figure 2 300-20-1:192/10 RFE Subject File Bulgarian Unit Subject Files, Trade Foreign: Cuba 1967-1992, 15/05/72

Another report from BTA from May 1982 speaks of the interview with Agricultural Banner (Zemedelsko Zname) of José Ramírez Cruz – a leading figure in the Cuban Politburo and of the National Association of Small-Scale Agriculture (ANAP). The Cuban official and militant discusses how agricultural workers were invited to and taken around Bulgaria to be exposed to the latest technology and organisational development, which then allowed them to set up cooperatives back in Cuba. Such exchange, happening in the 1980s, twenty years after the Cuban Revolution and their experimentation with agriculture, speaks of continuous understanding of Cuba's need to 'catch up with' and learn from a more 'advanced' country as Bulgaria. The question of exchange of knowledge, in this case vocational and organisational rather than educational and scientific, remains one-sided, with the assumption that one country (Cuba) can learn from the other (Bulgaria), but not vice-versa.

MR JOSE RAMIREZ CRUZ STRESSED THAT FOR YEARS NOW CUBA HAS BEEN SENDING MOST ACTIVE AND MOST AUTHORITATIVE FARMERS TO BULGARIA. "THEY ARE SHOWN ROUND A NUMBER OF AGROINDUSTRIAL UNIONS AND ARE MADE FAMILIAR WITH THE ORGANIZATION OF LABOUR, ATTEND LECTURES, PRACTICE IN THE VERY FARMS, AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER RETURNING HOME, THEY BECOME ORGANIZERS OF THE COOPERATIVES IN CUBA", MR CRUZ UNDERLINED. (BTA IN ENGLISH, MAY 14/82)jm

Figure 3 300-20-1:192/10 RFE Subject File Bulgarian Unit Subject Files, Trade Foreign: Cuba 1967-1992, 14/05/82

This is also shown in a report from the following year 1983, BTA again (Figure 4). There it becomes clear that Bulgaria was heavily involved in trade with Cuba: an intensity of trade second only to

Cuba's relations with the Soviet Union. Yet, whereas it exported machinery and developed infrastructure, there was no similar activity of Cuba in the exchange. Cuba, instead exported mostly sugar, molasses, citrus fruit, cigars and alcoholic drinks. While the exchange was commended as very beneficial for both parties, it is clear that by the 1980s it remained quite asymmetric. Despite the ongoing cooperation and technical exchange, Cuba had not broken up with the single-crop economy developed during the Spanish colonial era (Galeano 2009) or with its role of export of trademark entertainment consumption goods for which the island had become world (in)famous during its pro-US rule before the coming to power of the Communist Party (Perez 2018).

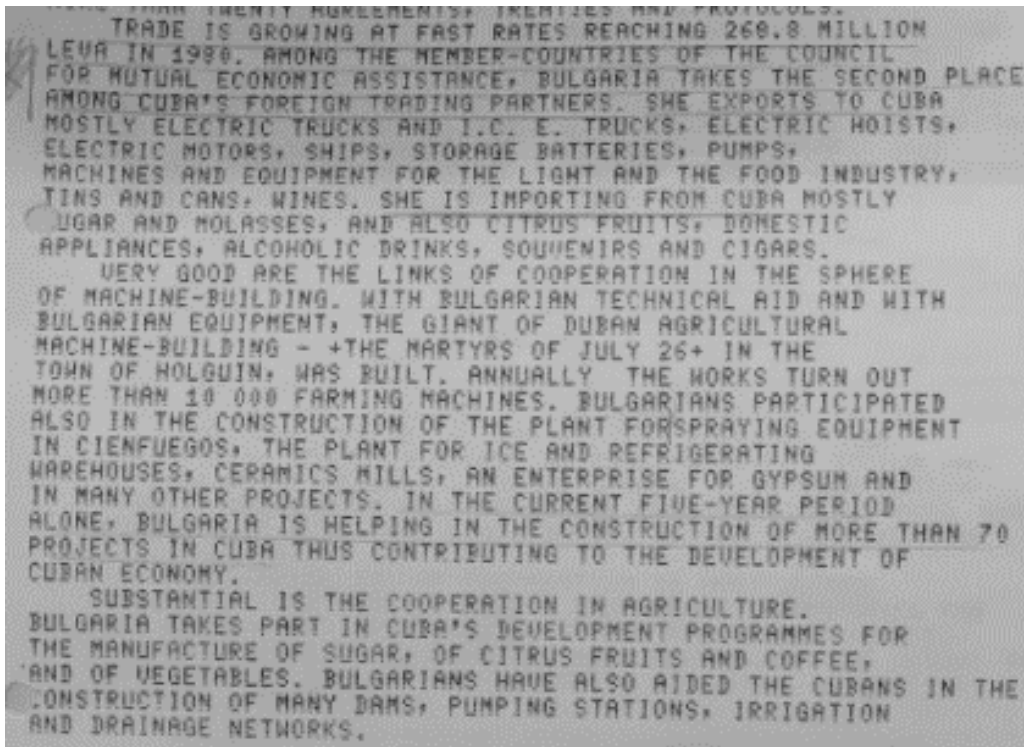


Figure 4 300-20-1:192/10 RFE Subject File Bulgarian Unit Subject Files, Trade Foreign: Cuba 1967-1992, 18/05/72

At the same time, beyond the extraction of primary sources in terms of both natural goods and food harvest, Bulgaria was also involved in specific debt relations with Cuba. A significant, if low interest, debt was accumulated by the island-country already in 1961 when it was granted 5 million dollars in form mostly of the purchase of industrial installation from Bulgaria (Figure 5). In this situation Cuba can be seen as positioned at a relative disadvantage – while it imported machinery to develop its agriculture, its produce was dedicated to debt repayment to its creditor (Bulgaria) from which it both bought the machinery and sold the agricultural produce with little endogenous production of new technology or possible revenue for reinvestment.

Bulgaria is known to have granted at least two long-term credits to Cuba. The first, amounting to 5,000,000 dollars, was agreed in January 1961; the second, whose value and conditions of repayment are unknown, in May 1968. It is believed that both loans are at the usual 2 per cent interest rate and, as Radio Havana indicated on 19 May 1968, are intended for the purchase of Bulgarian industrial installations, such as ice factories, and the construction of cold storage warehouses.

Figure 5 300-20-1:192/10 RFE Subject File Bulgarian Unit Subject Files, Trade Foreign: Cuba 1967-1992 18/05/72

It is only in the late 1980s, when upon a meeting between the heads of communist parties of both countries Fidel Castro and Todor Zhivkov (and in a program document optimistically dated 2000), that the two countries started speaking of qualitatively new more equal and symmetric forms of scientific cooperation. This document states as central “the holding of joint research and development, exchange of technical documentation and information, the establishment of joint institutes, scientific research centres and laboratories ...[and] training of their personnel and exchange [of] specialists (Figure 5). It is interesting to trace what follow-up policies and institutionalised practices were put into action in both countries after the signing of this agreement. The crisis state of their economic and political development and skyrocketing international debt of both countries at that stage makes the prediction of effervescent exchange activity seem unlikely.

PROTOCOL PART THREE

THE PROGRAM IS AIMED AT IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF PRODUCTION, AT BROADENING THE VARIETY OF THE PRODUCTS, AT THE MORE EFFICIENT USE OF THE MATERIAL, FINANCIAL AND WORK-FORCE RESOURCES OF THE TWO COUNTRIES. A NUMBER OF FORMS OF TECHNO-SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION (THE HOLDING OF JOINT RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT, EXCHANGE OF TECHNICAL DOCUMENTATION AND INFORMATION, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF JOINT INSTITUTES, SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH CENTERS AND LABORATORIES) ARE ALSO ENVISAGED. THE TWO COUNTRIES WILL ASSIST EACH OTHER IN THE TRAINING OF THEIR PERSONNEL AND WILL EXCHANGE SPECIALISTS. THE BILATERAL COORDINATION OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC PLANS WILL BE CONTINUED. CONSULTATIONS WILL BE HELD ON LONG-TERM PLANNED PROJECTS WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION BEING PAID TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TIES IN THE FIELD OF PRODUCTION AND TRADE.

Figure 5 300-20-1:192/10 RFE Subject File Bulgarian Unit Subject Files, Trade Foreign: Cuba 1967-1992 05/03/86

### Bulgaria-Angola: academics and students vs. phosphates

For the most part, a similar tendency as with the cooperation with Cuba can be noted when speaking of the Bulgaria-Angola relations. The exchange, that starts in the 1970s after Angola's liberation from Portuguest colonial rule, was more clearly related to exchange of academic cadres specifically defined in the documents. What it meant was that Bulgarian lecturers were coming to teach academic subjects at some Angolan colleges, while Angolan students could enter Bulgarian academic establishments. In terms of expertise, Bulgaria extended self especially in the field of construction and town-planning, mechanical engineering, water, and forestry (Figure 6).



THE FAVOURABLE RESULTS OF THE TALKS HELD HERE FOUND EXPRESSION IN THE BULGARD-ANGOLAN SCIENTIFIC, TECHNOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION PROTOCOL SIGNED LAST NIGHT HERE AND IN THE COOPERATION TO BE ESTABLISHED IN CONSTRUCTION AND OTHER SPHERES OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMY.

THE PROTOCOL LAYS DOWN THE BULGARIAN CAPACITY OF RENDERING ASSISTANCE TO THE PEOPLE OF ANGOLA IN VARIOUS SPHERES OF THE ECONOMY, SUCH AS TRANSPORT, THE WATER ECONOMY AND FORESTRY, MECHANICAL ENGINEERING AND MOST OF ALL IN CONSTRUCTION, ARCHITECTURE, TOWN- PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT.

BULGARIA IS READY TO OFFER LECTURERS AND SPECIALISTS FOR THE TRAINING OF CADRES AND TO ACCEPT ANGOLAN STUDENTS IN BULGARIAN EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS.

THE PROTOCOL WAS SIGNED BY MR IVAN SAKAREV AND MR HORATIO BRAS DA SILVA.

LAST NIGHT THE DELEGATION LEFT BULGARIA.

(BTA/English, Sept 6/79) hh

Figure 6 300-20-1:191/7 RFE Subject File Bulgarian Unit Subject Files Trade Foreign: Africa; Angola 06/09/79

At the same time, what was clear in this exchange throughout the period, was that the main Bulgarian interest behind this effort in terms of trade and knowledge exchange relations, was framed around it trying to extract natural resources phosphates from Angola's rich natural reserves. This exchange, happening with a very high intensity, meant the presence of Bulgarian companies and experts in Angola, exploiting deposits in different parts of the country (Figure 7). In this, it was clear that a one-sided extractivism was at place from an Eastern European socialist country, toward a post-colonial country in the Global South. Framed as solidarity and aid, this exchange also showed that the African country was mostly considered by the Bulgarian government as a viable partner for its primary resources, and not as an equal partner in a trade and knowledge exchange.

CM124 1981 182111/81  
BRIEF -- BULGARIAN COMPANY PRODUCING PHOSPHATES IN ANGOLA |  
LISBON, NOV 18, REUTER -- A BULGARIAN COMPANY HAS BEGUN PRODUCING  
PHOSPHATES AT A NEW MINE IN NORTH-WESTERN ANGOLA, THE ANGOLAN NEWS  
AGENCY ANGOP SAID TODAY. ANGOP QUOTED THE LUANDA DAILY JORNAL DE  
ANGOLA AS SAYING THE OPENCAST MINE HAD BEGUN WORKING RECENTLY WITH AN  
ANNUAL PRODUCTION CAPACITY OF 15,000 TONNES.  
AN ANGOLAN STATE PHOSPHATE MINING COMPANY, FOSFANG, WAS SET UP  
EARLIER THIS YEAR AND CONTRACTED THE BULGARIAN FIRM BULGAREOMINA TO  
EXPLOIT THE KINDONAKASI DEPOSITS, WHICH COVER AN AREA OF 30 SQUARE KM  
(11.6 SQUARE MILES). THEY ARE ESTIMATED TO HOLD 200 MILLION TONNES OF  
TOP-QUALITY PHOSPHATE. EH

Figure 7 300-20-1:191/7 RFE Subject File Bulgarian Unit Subject Files Trade Foreign: Africa; Angola: 18-21/11/81

Yet, oddly enough, it is in this situation – unlike the dryer and more factual reporting of the meetings between the Bulgarian and Cuban Party heads – the Bulgarian government went out of its way to engage in performing ardent anti-imperialist solidarity. In an agreement from October 1978 signed between the heads of the two countries, Todor Zhivkov (Bulgaria) and Agostino Neto (Angola), and cited by Bulgarian daily newspaper People's Deed (Rabotnichesko Delo), the Bulgarian First Secretary of BCP stated the country's similarity with Angola. He emphasised Bulgaria's commitment to stand against imperialist forces until "the final liquidation of colonialism, imperialism, racism and apartheid" (Figure 8). Yet, while the Bulgarian authorities performed equality in the exchange, one

cannot help but asking what were the exact theoretical and historical definitions of neo-colonialism that the Bulgarian leader was using. To what extent his and his Party's analysis included self-reflection of the dominance over knowledge production and the extraction of primary resources in the post-colonial world as performed by socialist states during the Cold War?

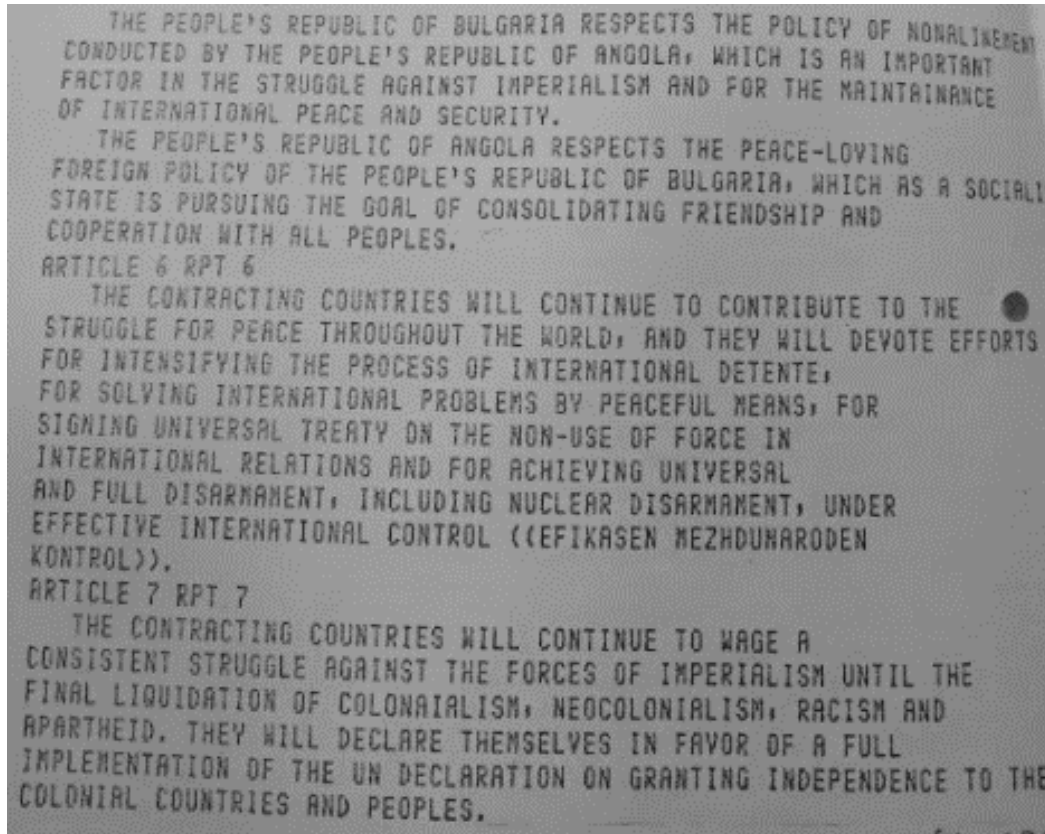


Figure 8 300-20-1:191/7 RFE Subject File Bulgarian Unit Subject Files Trade Foreign: Africa; Angola: 22/10/78

### Preliminary reflections: (de)colonial socialist extractivism?

In his important contribution to the theorisation of post-colonial states, late anthropologist Fernando Coronil explained a mechanism that perpetuates the neo-colonial dependence of post-colonial countries:

Even when these nations try to break free from their colonial heritage, that is, their dependence on the export of primary products, through the implementation of development plans directed at diversifying their economies, they generally need foreign currency to achieve this. But they can only access foreign currency by exporting primary products, which again increases their dependence on exports. Paradoxically, by trying to exploit their comparative advantages, these countries that are exporters of natural assets, are frequently reassuming their colonial role as exporters of primary products- a role now redefined in terms of the neoliberal rationality of globalising capitalism. For them, neocolonialism is the next step on from post-colonialism (Coronil 1997: 7).

It is a model that kept coming to my mind while reading the archival materials on OSA when it came to foreign trade between Bulgaria on the one side, and Cuba and Angola on the other. Socialist solidarity and internationalism, of course, meant that the interest rates of loans and prices on machinery and labour were low and exchanges happened in the spirit of solidarity and with mutual

benefits. And clearly, such soft extractivism did not perform the same level of symbolic and physical violence and economic warfare as the extractivist capitalism suffered by the post-colonial world. In their dealing with the post-colonial world Eastern European socialist countries did not engage in extractive capitalism i.e. “an economic system that engages in thefts, borrowings, and forced removals, violently reorganizing social life as well as the land by thieving resources from indigenous... territories” (Gómez-Barris 2017: xvii). The latter paradigm of colonial and neo-colonial rule was the negative background, against which socialist efforts of solidarity were framed. Yet, keeping this distinction in mind, it is still important to reflect on what does the asymmetry of the trade and knowledge exchange between Eastern European countries and the Global South during the Cold War mean. How do we explain the one-sidedness of the education exchange, in which “expertise” and technology continuously only came from those positioned in Europe, and raw materials only came from those positioned outside of it? How, then - to return to and rethink the initial question of my study - can we speak of alternative modes of knowledge production and exchange, if its exchanged depends on and reproduces a neo-colonial economic model?

Alena Alamgir (2013) speaks of three types of internationalism that drove relations between state-socialist countries in Eastern Europe as Czechoslovakia and ‘third world’ developing economies in the Global South as Vietnam at different stages of the development of the Cold War. These three types were constructed through bilateral trade contracts and debt agreements. Alamgir calls them paternalistic internationalism, mutually advantageous internationalism, and beleaguered internationalism (Alamgir 2013). Based on this definition and temporalisation, Raia Apostolova’s analysis of the Bulgarian-Vietnamese relations suggests that Bulgarian initially took a mixed model between paternalistic and mutually advantageous internationalism (Apostolova 2017: 106). The latter followed a model of workers as practitioners, symbol of internationalist duty and solidarity. Gradually, however, by the 1980s Apostolova demonstrates, this model transformed into one that instrumentalised and racialized workers and reduced them to tools of debt repayment (Apostolova 2017: 108). Apostolova also shows, that while initially the research-informed state policy solicited an equal exchange between workers from both countries, so that Vietnam was not an inactive recipient of aid, the exchange became growingly asymmetric as years went by (Apostolova 2014: 204). Zoltan Ginelli’s work (2018) has also showed the workings of what he has called ‘semi-peripheral post-colonialism’. In his recent article on expert exchange between Hungary and Ghana, Ginelli argues that while allowing for socialist interconnectivity and infrastructural development of African countries, such exchange was not necessarily equal in benefits. While semi-peripheral experts developed transferable knowhow and careers that had transversal currency across the first, second, and so-called ‘third’ world, they did that by reinforcing the presumed dominance of Eurocentric knowledge. He also explains that the ambiguities of a semi-peripheral position also meant East European countries embraced rather than challenging, the ‘civilizational’ mission of Europe in the post-colonial world, that compromised their anti-imperialist decolonial commitment (Ginelli 2018).

This discussion connects to the most recent scholarship on the student exchange between the socialist and the post-colonial world during the Cold War, developed especially in works focused on East Germany (e.g. Pugach 2018; Burton 2019). For instance, Sara Pugach (2018) has reminded that not only governments in Western liberal democracies, but also those in state socialist countries proved to be true believers in scientific modernity’s developmentalist premise and promise that technological solutions and expert knowledge would solve the problem of ‘underdevelopment’ in the Global South. Students from post-colonial countries, often internalising the same values that put them at disadvantage, came from nations where few were exposed to the luxury of higher education and mostly in Western institutions. As such, Pugach’s argument goes, they saw Eastern European countries as sufficiently advanced to offer the education at Western standards (Pugach 2018: 1). Such education, however, also entailed the modern secular outlook that went with it (Pugach 2018: 11) often at the expense of upholding local systems of knowledge, science and tradition that does not fit into the Western canon (Santos 2013). At the same time, socialist countries in the North also controlled the number of students they would receive from their Southern counterparts and which

subjects they would train them into (Pugach 2018: 15), which gave them more power over planning of knowledge and technology transfer than the countries sending their students to be trained abroad. And, while students and worked from developing countries were often exposed to hygienising and civilising in Northern socialist societies (Apostolova 2017; Ginelli 2018; Pugach 2018), they often had to face racist violence that state socialist countries put a blind eye to (Hessler 2006) or sometimes even institutionalised (Apostolova 2017).

Added to the extractivist effort, the 'civilising' and often racializing practices show significant compromise with an anti-colonial agenda. Together, they merit the discussion, finally, of a concept that nowadays gains significant currency in the discussion of past and present internationalist efforts especially when it comes to education and knowledge exchange. The subject of decoloniality of knowledge has recently become prominent within and outside the field of HE studies. In relation to the discussion above, it is important to remind the words of one of the leading voices on the subject, Brazilian philosopher Boaventura de Sousa Santos: '[T]echno-scientific knowledge... owes its hegemony to the credible way in which it discredits all rival knowledges, by suggesting that they are not comparable, in terms of efficiency and coherence, to the scientificity of the market laws' (Santos 2013: 13). This type of knowledge, traditionally connected to and produced in countries in the Global North, perpetuates their dominance by presenting itself as universal, while discarding the value of alternative knowledges produced outside these countries. At the same time, this means that some knowledges are rendered visible and valuable while others are invisibilised, marginalised, and seen as lacking value (Santos 2013; Guzman-Valenzuela and Gomes 2019). Standing in an ambiguous relationship to the semi-periphery and the former socialist world (Ginelli 2018) decolonial thinking has more recently been appealed to as "helpful in appreciating [Eastern European]'s imperial and (quasi-)colonial legacy, in analysing contemporary forms of domination, hierarchy and resistance, and for identifying their corresponding practices of complicity and collaboration, but also of struggle, protest and reversals of the current neoliberal trajectory" (Kusic et al. 2019: 8). Bringing the discussion of decolonial thinking to the HE exchange and knowledge production during the Cold War, in this line of thinking, it is also important to consider concepts as cognitive justice (Visvanathan 2006) i.e. the recognition of the plurality of knowledges in dialogue, rather than imposing one as universally valid. In this, if the East-South exchange remained a one-sided training and expert exchange, it is worth examining its asymmetries in further depth. It is worth doing that especially by asking the question, did the HE exchange and knowledge production go beyond the arithmetic of economic exchange or did it follow its main premise: instrumentalising human and natural resources to its benefit while casting alternative knowledge systems into its mould.

Against this background, I now see my OSA pilot study as a first step in a bigger study: one that traces HE expert cadre and student exchange between countries in the socialist block as Bulgaria and of countries in the postcolonial world as Cuba and Angola. Such study should ask was this exchange based on the premise of superiority of Eurocentric knowledge and expertise or did it have an alternative epistemology to offer? Did the extractive and asymmetric nature of the exchange render alternative epistemologies negligible and opaque in the archived documents, under the layers of official rhetoric and ideologically-heavy interpretation? Were there, still, alternative projects and practices that a different, perhaps truly decolonial and solidarity-based optic, could reveal about the exchange between the socialist countries during the Cold War? What are the heuristic tools that can allow such an exploration to take place, allowing a more nuanced reading while avoiding the usual traps of total celebration or total rejection of the achievements of state socialist internationalism? Further research on these topics should explore the East-South and South-South socialist HE exchange on two levels. First we need to study the exact agreements that individual countries signed and the framing of qualification levels and position of experts and students in the process. This could be related to the framing of travel regimes of high- and low-skill labour, capital (debt) and commodities (both primary goods and technologies). Second, it would be interesting to trace if there was different periodization in the exchange between countries when it came to HE experts and students and if so, what were the turning points that changed the frame of this exchange.

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- #18, Communist Party: Party Education
- #42, Culture: People's Education; Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
- #56 Education: Universities and Colleges; Vocational Schools; Education in Other Countries
- #79 Foreign Relations: Relations with other countries: Africa;
- #80 Foreign Relations: Relations with other countries: Angola; Burkina Faso; Cape Verde;
- #90 Foreign Relations: Relations with other countries: Cuba
- #91 Foreign Relations: Relations with other countries: Ethiopia
- #97 Foreign Relations: Relations with other countries: Ghana; Guinea; Guinea Bisau
- #109 Foreign Relations: Relations with other countries: Mozambique
- #116 Foreign Relations: Relations with other countries: Tanzania
- #129 Foreign Relations: Relations with other countries: Zaire; Zimbabwe
- #160 Labour: Bulgarian Workers and Specialists in Foreign Countries
- #191 Trade Foreign: Africa; Angola
- #192 Trade Foreign: Cuba; Ethiopia
- #193 Trade Foreign: Ghana
- #196 Trade Foreign: Mozambique
- #197 Trade Foreign: Tanzania
- #202 Trade Foreign: Zaire; Zimbabwe
  
- #206 Youth Students; Organization

### **HU OSA-300-20-2 - RFE Bulgarian Unit Subject Card Files, archival boxes**

- #48-49 Higher Education (general); public universities; foreign students;
- #58 Foreign Policy: Angola; Burkina Faso;
- #59 Foreign Policy: Ghana; Guinea, Guinea Bisau
- #60 Foreign Policy: Ethiopia; Zaire; Zimbabwe
- #61 Foreign Policy: Cuba
- #62 Foreign Policy: Mozambique
- #65 Foreign Policy: Tanzania

### **HU OSA 301-0-3 – RFE Records of Index on Censorship: Country Files, archival boxes:**

- #8-9 Africa: Angola: General; Education
- #118-119 America: West Indies: Cuba: Background Information; General; Education

### **HU OSA 300-7-9 Subject Files Re: World Communist Movement, archival boxes:**

- #41-43 Conference: East-West Academic; International
- #55 Youth Movement: Communist

### **HU OSA 300-55-10 Subject Files**