As Christine Hatzky points out, “Cuban-Angolan cooperation was until 1991 the largest example of civil aid engagement abroad in the history of Cuba” (153). Havana’s technical assistance program had begun in 1963; over the subsequent twelve years approximately 1,000 aid workers went to a dozen African countries, South Yemen and North Vietnam.¹ Their number skyrocketed after 1975, and the largest program, by far, was in Angola.

Angola had been a Portuguese colony, but in April 1974 the dictatorship in Lisbon was overthrown and the new government moved to dismantle Portugal’s colonial empire. Angola was scheduled for independence on November 11, 1975. However, civil war broke out the previous spring among three rival guerrilla movements, pitting Agostinho Neto’s leftwing Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) against the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). By April 1976, 36,000 Cuban soldiers had arrived in Angola. With the troops came the aid workers.

The first part of Cubans in Angola provides background on Angola and Cuba in the twentieth century, and is marred by poor research. For example, Hatzky argues that the FNLA and UNITA were winning the civil war. The MPLA, she writes, “had neither the political nor the military strength to win the power struggle in post-colonial Angola” (51). The evidence – U.S. and South African documents – proves her wrong. In fact, the MPLA was winning. It had “achieved an almost unbroken series of military successes,” the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research reported in late September 1975.² It was


winning. Robert Hultslander, the CIA station chief in Luanda, wrote, because its leaders “were more effective, better educated, better trained and better motivated” than those of the FNLA and UNITA. “The rank and file also were better motivated (particularly the armed combatants, who fought harder and with more determination).” Complaining that the book misstates who was winning the civil war is not a quibble. The impending MPLA victory precipitated the South African decision, urged on by the Ford administration, to invade Angola on October 14, 1975. This, in turn, led to the Cuban decision to send troops. By April 1976 the Cubans had pushed the South Africans out of Angola.

The U.S. government claimed that Cuba was intervening as a Soviet proxy. Hatzky notes that there is disagreement on this issue among scholars. She has a point, unfortunately. Canards die hard. Even serious scholars like William LeoGrande and Peter Kornbluh argue in an excellent book that appeared just last year that Cuba intervened in part to please the Soviet Union. Hatzky identifies me as the leader of those saying that Cuba acted on its own – noting that I am “the only foreign historian to have been granted access to the archives of the Cuban government, the Armed Forces, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other institutions” (53). She misses, however, a very important point: my conclusion is based on the dovetailing of Cuban, U.S. and South African documents. It was the view of the CIA, which wrote that the intervention “was a unilateral Cuban action designed in great haste,” and also of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who conceded in his memoirs: “At the time we thought he [Fidel Castro] was operating as a Soviet surrogate. Evidence now available suggests that the opposite was the case.” This false debate – that is, a debate that should not even exist – is an example of how strong is the bias of western scholars, even the best among them.

Hatzky’s lack of a firm grasp of Angolan and Cuban history mars her account. For example, she writes that “the governments of South Africa, Angola, and Cuba were called around the negotiating table in 1981 at the U.S. government’s instigation” (166). This is wrong. The Cuban government was not invited

---


Hatzky’s focus, however, is Cuban civilian cooperation in Angola in 1976-91 in the field of education. This was one of the key areas of Cuban assistance to Angola. As the CIA noted in 1978, “The Cuban technicians are primarily involved in rural development and educational and public health projects – areas in which Cuba has accumulated expertise and has experienced success at home.”\footnote{\textit{CIA}, “\textit{Latin America Review Supplement},” Aug. 3, 1978, NLC-24-12-2-2-8, Jimmy Carter Library, Atlanta, GA (hereafter JCL).}

Hatzky is the first foreign researcher to gain access to the archive of the Angolan Ministry of Education.\footnote{The Angolan scholar Miguel Júnior gained limited access to the Angolan military archives for his book \textit{Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola: 1o Exército Nacional (1975-1992)}(Lisbon: Prefacio, 2007).} (She had no access to the Cuban archives but interviewed several Cuban and Angolan officials, as well as Cuban aid workers who went to Angola.) Her thesis is that “Not only did the Angolan government pay for the support Cuba provided but the cooperation agreements were also linked to trade agreements that benefited the Cuban economy ... It was in fact neither an altruistic undertaking nor a unidirectional relationship of dependency. It is an example of ‘internationalism with reciprocal benefits,’ as the Angolan Minister of Education defined it during my interview with him” (152).

At a certain level, no one can argue with Hatzky’s conclusion: of course there are reciprocal benefits in every human exchange. The Cubans did benefit in some ways from their civilian aid to Angola – their government gained international prestige, and many aid workers felt enriched by the experience. However, Hatzky’s assertion is also profoundly misleading. It buttresses the myth that the Cubans were out for profit. It fails to acknowledge the exceptionalism of what the Cubans did for Angola. It ignores the evidence that Cuba was, in fact, fulfilling what the Cuban leaders saw as their ‘internationalist duty.’

Before addressing Hatzky’s conclusion directly, I will clarify the origins of Cuba’s civilian assistance to Angola, which, in \textit{Cubans in Angola}, are quite nebulous. I will then discuss Hatzky’s sources.

The first Cuban aid workers to reach Angola were medical doctors in late November 1975, a few days after the arrival of the first Cuban troops. Their presence was desperately needed because virtually all the country’s few doctors had left. The following July the weekly \textit{JeuneAfrique}, not a friend of Cuba’s policy in Africa, reported: “Huambo [Angola’s second city] lives in fear that the Cuban doctors may leave. ‘If they go,’ a priest said recently, ‘we’ll all die.’”\footnote{\textit{JeuneAfrique}, July 23, 1976, 28.} A year later, the Angolan delegate to the World Health Assembly told President Jimmy Carter’s special assistant for health, “[The] most important contribution
[in health care] has been from Cuba with no strings attached. We only had 14 doctors, but now we have more than 200, thanks to Cuba.”

By the end of 1976, at least one thousand Cuban aid workers were in Angola, and more were arriving. “The Cubans not only won the war for the MPLA,” a correspondent of the major black South African newspaper wrote from Luanda, “they are now intent on pulling the country back together for them through a dozen different reconstruction programs.” Cuba was footing the bill. “We are paying for the food for our aid workers,” the head of the Cuban civilian mission in Angola, Jorge Risquet, reported, “for their salaries in Cuba, and for the cost of bringing them to Angola.”

Angola’s president, Agostinho Neto, asked the Cubans to increase the number of their aid workers. Agreements inked in July and December 1976 “stipulated that the cooperation during 1977 would continue to be free of charge and that the Angolan government would provide the board and lodging for the Cuban aid workers, and would give each of them US$30 in the Angolan currency every month as pocket money. Beginning in the second half of 1977, Angola would also pay for the international transportation of the aid workers.” By November 1977 there were 3355 Cuban aid workers in Angola. Contrary to the agreements, it was Cuba, and not Angola, that provided them with pocket money. “It was peanuts,” remarked Gina Rey, a young architect who worked in Angola for two years beginning in late 1976, “but there wasn’t anything to buy anyway.”

Hatzky disagrees with this picture of Cuban aid provided by the Cuban archives: Cuban aid, she asserts, was not free of charge. She writes that the July 1976 agreement between Havana and Luanda established that “Cuba would receive financial compensation for the civil aid it would provide in the future and had already provided” (170) Her only source is an article in the Jornal de Angola of July 31, 1976, page 2.

---

11 “Discussion with Delegates to the World Health Assembly – Peter G. Bourne, M.D., Geneva, Switzerland, May 1977: Angola,” Special Assistant to the President, box 41, JCL

12 World (Johannesburg), June 30, 1976, 8.

13 Risquet to Fidel Castro, July 13, 1976, Archive of the Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba, Havana (hereafter ACC). I have posted this document on a website hosted by the Cold War International History Project of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars at digitalarchive.org (hereafter “Posted on CWIHP”).

14 Departamento General de Relaciones Exteriores del CC del PCC, “Informe sobre la Colaboración Civil de Cuba con la República Popular de Angola,” Nov. 7, 1979, ACC. (Hereafter, “Informe sobre la Colaboración”)

15 “La colaboración entre Cuba y la República Popular de Angola,” June 1979, private collection, Havana.

16 Memcon (Levy, Dilowa), [Oct. 1977,] ACC. Posted on CWIHP.

17 Reviewer’s interview with Cuban aid worker Gina Rey, May 28, 2005, Havana.
This article does indeed refer to the cooperation agreement just signed with Cuba. It quotes President Neto saying that the agreement would be “very beneficial for the people of Angola.”18 What the article does not say is that Cuba would receive payment. There is also an editorial on the agreement. It, too, says nothing about payments.19 One day later, August 1, 1976, Jornal de Angola published a Cuban-Angolan communiqué that stated that Cuba would continue its economic cooperation with Angola and added that Cuba “considers this its duty according to the principles of proletarian internationalism.”20 The communiqué, too, says nothing about payments.

And so one wonders: what forms the basis of Hatzky’s argument?

A few pages later, Hatzky revisits the issue of payments. She writes that “According to all evidence to date, the Angolan government began paying Cuba for its aid in education in 1977 at the latest” (182). The source for this claim is an Angolan document, the Angolan copy (in Portuguese) of the agreement signed with Cuba on November 5, 1977. I have the Cuban copy (in Spanish), and I can confirm that Hatzky’s statement is correct – or almost so. The Cuban document is clear: Angola would begin to pay for the technical assistance, in education and all other civilian fields, on January 1, 1978.21 It was the first time ever that the Cuban government charged for its technical assistance abroad. A Cuban memorandum explained why: “Cuba offers technical assistance to several countries free of charge. But the assistance involves only a limited number of aid workers. Our technical assistance to Angola could continue to be free of charge, as it has been in 1976 and 1977, if it involved only a few hundred aid workers.” But Neto wanted the number to raise to almost 10,000 and “our economy cannot bear the burden.”22

Angola agreed to pay. But what does “paying” mean? Pay for what, exactly? And did the Angolans in fact pay up?

Hatzky’s answers to these questions, or lack of answers, point to the key problem of Cubans in Angola: it has a very thin source base. Judging from the gaps and the lack of clarity in her account, Hatzky had access only to Angolan documents of very limited importance (with very few exceptions). And she has no Cuban documents. Therefore, the book presents no clear idea of the financial arrangements of Cuba’s technical assistance to Angola beyond the November 5, 1977 document. She notes that “Some of my Cuban interviewees had held high administrative positions in Angola and should therefore have been able to clarify the subject of payments” (186). Her Angolan interviewees were, she believes, more helpful,

---


21 “Acuerdo especial sobre condiciones generales para la realización de la colaboración económica y científico-técnica entre el gobierno de la República de Cuba y el gobierno de la República Popular de Angola,” Nov. 5, 1977, Archive of the Ministerio para la InversiónExtranjera y la ColaboraciónEconómica, Havana (hereafter CECE). Posted on CWIHP.

22 Levy Farah, Oct. 23, 1977, ACC. Posted on CWIHP
particularly Antonio Burity da Silva, the Minister of Education when she interviewed him in 2006. “He also couched his answer to my question regarding payments in diplomatic terms, although his statement does reflect much more clearly the essence of Cuban-Angolan cooperation. According to him, there was no such thing as disinterested aid” (186).

With the Cuban interviewees mum, the Angolans offering hints but no facts, and lacking documentary evidence, Hatzky relies on secondary sources, namely my publications. She writes on page 187 that “The Cuban government’s silence regarding payment from Angola [for the civilian cooperation] served (and still seems to serve) to maintain the myth it constructs around its engagement in Angola. ... A few years ago, Piero Gleijeses indicated that payment might also have been exchanged for Cuban military operations [referring to “Moscow’s Proxy”], but he did not present evidence to back this claim.” Hatzky continues, citing Visions of Freedom, 82-84, “[Gleijeses] confirmed nevertheless in his most recent book the payment for civil cooperation.”

Let’s start with the military aid. On pages 117-18 of “Moscow’s Proxy” I write that “The Western press has asserted that the presence of the Cuban troops – ‘the rental army from Cuba’ – cost Angola a fortune, possibly as much as $500 million a year. The Economist was categorical: ‘Cuba itself is well paid for its mercenaries,’ while New York Times columnist William Safire wrote ‘Castro’s Cuba desperately needs to continue to rent out its troops.’” The Cuban documents demolish this myth.

I then go on, describing at some length how the Cubans asked Neto in 1976 whether Angola could begin feeding its own troops (whom the Cubans were feeding), and “eventually supply the Cuban troops with ‘fresh food.’” Nothing happened for two years. Again the Cubans approached Neto. “There is a subject that is very awkward for us. ... It embarrasses us, but we have to raise it. It is the cost of maintaining our troops here. ... We will pay all those expenses that we can defray with our own currency, for instance the salaries of our officers and our soldiers. But we are not in a position to spend even one cent in foreign currency, because, quite simply, we don’t have it.”

I explain in the essay that in September 1978, the two countries signed a military agreement stipulating that Havana would continue to pay the salaries of the Cuban military personnel in Angola while the


24 She cites Visions of Freedom, 82-84.


27 “Notassobre la entrevista del general de division Senén Casas y el president Neto,” May 19, 1978, Centro de Información de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias, Havana (hereafter CIFAR). Posted on CWIHP.
Angolan government would defray all other expenses. This agreement was in force until the Cuban troops left Angola. I quote Fidel Castro telling Angola’s President José Eduardo dos Santos (Neto’s successor) in 1984, “The Angolans know that we have never charged for our military aid; we cannot pay all the expenses, such as feeding our troops, but we pay their salaries ... Our soldiers are internationalists; they are not mercenaries.”

Hatzky’s contention that I “indicated that payment might also have been exchanged for Cuban military operations” distorts the very point I was making: yes, beginning in 1978, Angola paid the living expenses of the Cuban soldiers, but the much more important issue is that Havana continued to pay their salaries. These troops were not in any sense of the word mercenaries. For Hatzky to add that I “did not present evidence to back this claim” is very surprising.

As for civilian cooperation, Hatzky writes that in Visions of Freedom “[Gleijeses] confirmed ... the payment for civil cooperation” (187). This is correct, but, unmentioned by Hatzky, I also state when the payments ended. I quote a September 20, 1983, letter from Fidel Castro to Angolan president dos Santos in which Castro promised: “We will continue to help you even though we know that at present you cannot afford to pay for our doctors, our professors, our teachers and other aid workers ... We have decided that from October 1, and until the Angolan economy has recovered, we will not charge for our technical assistance.” Luanda and Havana agreed that Angola would pay only for the airfare and the board and lodging of the Cuban aid workers. President dos Santos was grateful: “Cuba has made another very important, very generous decision.” He asked Castro, “We would like to have an idea, more or less, of how long Cuba can bear this burden.” Castro replied, “We can bear it for as long as necessary. Don’t worry. We will make this sacrifice.”

In other words, while Cuba’s technical assistance to Angola lasted seventeen years, from late 1975 to early 1991, Angola paid for it for only six years, from January 1978 to October 1983. And even for those six years, Angola’s payment was stinting. The November 5, 1977 agreement established seven salary levels, with most aid workers earning between $470 and $815 monthly. Angola agreed to pay these salaries to

---

28 “Convenios obre los principios de colaboración en la ramamilitar, entre la República de Cuba y la República Popular de Angola,” Sept. 14, 1978, CIFAR. Posted on CWIHP.

29 Memcon (Fidel Castro, dos Santos), March 17, 1984, ACC.


31 “Acuerdo Especial sobre las Condiciones Generales para la Realización de la Colaboración Económica y Científico-Técnica entre el Gobierno de la República de Cuba y el Gobierno de la República Popular de Angola,” Oct. 28, 1983, CECE. Posted on CWIHP.

32 Memcon (Fidel Castro, dos Santos), March 19, 1984, ACC.

33 “Acuerdo especial sobre condiciones generales para la realización de la colaboración económica y científicotecnica entre el gobierno de la República de Cuba y el gobierno de la República Popular de Angola,” Nov. 5, 1977, CECE. Posted on CWIHP.
the Cuban government, 50 percent in hard currency, and 50 percent in kwanzas (the local currency), which were non-convertible.\(^\text{34}\)

Hatzky provides no evidence for her statement that “the cooperation agreements were also linked to trade agreements that benefited the Cuban economy” (152). In fact, Angola’s exports to Cuba were minimal throughout the 1976-91 period: its exports went to Western countries that could pay in hard currency. In February 1984, the Cuban embassy had 572,000,000 useless kwanzas.\(^\text{35}\)

Contrary to Hatzky’s conclusion, the cooperation between Cuba and Angola was an example of true internationalism: Cuba gave and Angola received.

Christine Hatzky must be congratulated for being the first foreign researcher to gain access to an archive of the Angolan government for the post-1975 period. However the evidence she has been able to cull from this archive did not allow her to present an accurate analysis of Cuba’s technical assistance to Angola. Furthermore, the book’s methodology is disturbing: as Hatzky’s treatment of the *Jornal de Angola* and of my writings demonstrates, *Cubans in Angola* distorts what the sources say. As a result, it is a deeply flawed book, marred by factual mistakes that lead to an erroneous conclusion.


© 2016 The Author.

Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 United States License

\(^{34}\) “Informe de la I sesión de la Comisión Mixta Intergubernamental para la colaboración económica y científico-técnica entre la República de Cuba y la República Popular de Angola,” Nov. 5, 1977, CECE.

\(^{35}\) Rodríguez Lompart to Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, Feb. 17, 1984, ACC.