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## The Cold War in South African History Textbooks

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A remarkable feature of the Cold War is its coincidence with the period of apartheid in South Africa, in which it played an important role. This is evident in school textbooks, where it is a major topic in the most recent years of history. But while there is a growing body of work on the Cold War in Africa, there is a very small literature on its manifestation in South Africa and, with one exception, nothing on how school textbooks may have reinforced or challenged its main precepts.

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Historians of the Cold War have shown that the new wave of ‘Third World’ revolutions during the 1960s was central to the history of global conflict engendered by the Cold War (Halliday 1986; Westad 2007, 2017). Moscow and Washington keenly observed the moment of the formation of decolonisation movements after World War I and after the ending of formal colonisation, supported competing interests and parties. Although both were rhetorically opposed to colonialism, and held up different models of development for emulation, in practice their interventions constituted ‘a continuation of colonialism through slightly different means’ (Westad 2007, 5). Westad’s work is helpful in showing that their approaches were both rooted in the same concept of modernity that was shared by previous generations of Europeans. Both believed in change and development as the solution to inherited colonial problems. Each promised the expansion of freedoms through different means. This literature also highlights the role of anti-colonial elites, buying into different models for various reasons including strategic and economic considerations and a sense of ideological closeness to the chosen ally. In the context of widespread poverty and inequality, as well as colonial states whose purposes were ill-suited to the visions of their new incumbents for emancipation and freedom from economic and social want, the correctness of the chosen path was legitimated both morally and politically (Westad 2007, 387).

Within the last decade, a number of studies have emerged casting new light on the Cold War in South Africa. These have been written from the perspective of the relationships forged between South Africa and its respective liberation movements with Eastern and Western powers in the struggle for democracy (Baines and Vale 2008; see for example Filatova and Davidson 2013; Houston 2008; Ndlovu 2008; Schleicher 2008; Shubin 2008b, 2008a; South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET) 2008; Wellmer 2008). They provide valuable insight into the nature, complexity and depth of the multi-faceted international relationships forged during this period by both the state and South African liberation movements in the struggle against apartheid. They also highlight the varied initiatives both to support and

contest apartheid that developed outside South Africa. But how contemporary generations are being introduced to this momentous history has not been adequately explored, pointing to the need for more substantial research in this area. One exception, by Halsall and Wassermann, focuses exclusively on the place of Russia in the South African curriculum, arguing that little has changed in its treatment over time, except in so far as the fear exemplified in the apartheid-era textbooks is not evident in their latter-day successors (Halsall & Wassermann 2018, 50).

But how has the representation of the Cold War changed since 1994? In order to answer this question it is necessary in the first instance briefly to consider differences in the final year history curriculum during the late-apartheid period and after 1994. In the post-apartheid period the curriculum has been revised three times; however, these changes have not substantively altered the emphasis on the Cold War in the final year of schooling. Although textbooks of the first two iterations of post-apartheid curriculum revision could be considered (see for example Bottaro, Visser and Worden 2007; Friedman et al. 2007), those textbooks selected for closer analysis here are top of the list of provincial textbook purchases following the most recent curriculum revision (South Africa, Department of Basic Education 2019, 27–28). This means that they are among the most used textbooks in schools nationally. Two history textbooks for the final year of secondary schooling were selected. After a brief comparison of the two textbooks, this chapter will hone in on one of them (Fernandez et al. 2013; Pillay, Sikhakhane and West 2013). The approach taken here is principally descriptive, pointing out the main interpretational tendencies and omissions.

Our chapter traces the treatment of the Cold War in South African textbooks, showing how this has changed. It argues that the most significant change since the apartheid period is that the convergence of anti-communism with black liberation movements has given way to a friendlier approach towards movements for decolonisation and the East than was previously evident. In this regard, they broadly ‘autobiographise’ South Africa’s changing positioning in international relations (Christophe and Halder 2018).

## Curriculum continuities and changes pre- and post-1994

As Kallaway has pointed out, the Cold War has been a subject in both the pre-1994 as well as the post-1994 senior secondary school curriculum in the final year of schooling. Kallaway, however, is less concerned with representations of the Cold War in textbooks than with the logic, coherence, chronological sequencing and ‘presentism’ of the curriculum, arguing for example that failure to provide ‘a comprehensive background to European and World History’ leaves students ill-equipped to understand the complexities of the Cold War (Kallaway 2012, 48). Given that textbooks present the official curriculum in elaborated form, it is useful to juxtapose the 1980 and 2012 syllabi and curricula relating to the Cold War, as they inform the textbook representations examined in this chapter.

An important difference is that whereas in the pre-1994 curriculum the focus of the Cold War is within a primarily European international context, the post-1994 curriculum interlaces this history with the history of racism and resistance to racial segregation, African history and South African history. In as much as South Africa saw itself as part of the Western alliance against communism, its curricular representation of this history reflected this positioning. In a context where the victors of a post-1994 settlement had actively sought alliances with the East to promote a democratic dissolution and resolution of South Africa’s racial state, the curriculum reflects this more complex positioning of the Cold War within the context of South Africa’s struggle for democracy and an end to racism and racial segregation.

While the more detailed specifications in the post-1994 curriculum accord more space and content to the role of liberation movements and their choices in the Cold War, the curriculum nonetheless specifies a treatment of the Cold War as being

characterised by conflict through proxy wars, the manipulation of more vulnerable states through extensive military and financial aid, espionage, propaganda, and rivalry over technological space and nuclear races, and sport. Besides periods of tense crisis in this bi-polar world, the Cold War deeply affected the newly independent countries in Africa and the liberation struggles in southern Africa from the 1960s until the 1990s, when the USSR was dismantled (South Africa, Department of Basic Education 2011, 25).

The curriculum requires that 'blame for the Cold War' be taught and learnt through the presentation of different interpretations and differing points of view (*ibid.*, 25). China, Cuba and Vietnam are given as case studies. The following section on 'Independent Africa' calls for comparisons to be drawn between the experiences of the Congo as 'a tool of the Cold War' whose legacy lives on into the present and the African socialism of Tanzania. The kinds of states and leaders that emerged are specified. This section ends with the way Africa became drawn into the Cold War, using Angola as an example. Here the USSR, USA, Cuba, China and South Africa became involved militarily (*ibid.*, 27). The curriculum requires study of the denouement of the Angolan War in the context of the ending of the Cold War and implications for international and regional relationships. How then do textbooks represent this version of history, that gives more weight to the Cold War in Africa and its relationship to decolonisation than earlier versions had done?

## **Representations of the Cold War in Post-apartheid Textbooks**

Apartheid curricula and textbooks reflected a Cold War mentality in which the South African state was in alliance with the West. Some key points can be made about interpretations in post-apartheid curricula and textbooks. Firstly, these explicitly include the African dimension and explore the connection between the Cold War and decolonisation. Secondly, whereas the 'baddie' in the apartheid textbooks was communism, in the post-apartheid period it is the superpowers combined. While the diversity of initiatives undertaken in the US to both support and contest apartheid tends to be glossed over, a more sympathetic picture is presented in the new textbooks of the USSR as a friend and ally of liberation movements. Thirdly, however, and in the main, a Great Man theory of history prevails in the treatment of African liberation movements. Fourthly, while the active voice is dominant throughout the texts, it is consistently used when referring to the actions of superpowers and inconsistently in relation to African liberation movements. The curriculum and both the textbooks analysed seldom elaborate on why African liberation move-

ments may have chosen one side or the other. When this occurs, it is in the context of a dependency analysis: 'Since African countries were in a state of development, they would have been tempted to accept military and economic assistance from the developed world' (Pillay et al. 2013, 116).

But there are also differences both between and within textbooks. The textbooks selected and analysed follow the curriculum quite closely. In the section on the reasons for involvement of the USA, USSR, Cuba, China and South Africa in Angola, concepts of indirect rule, non-alignment, neo-colonialism and proxy war are highlighted in one textbook, while the other emphasises key terms such as proxy, faction, pawn and zero-sum game (Fernandez et al. 2013, 123–124; Pillay et al. 2013, 116–117). Independent African states are sometimes presented as victims rather than active agents. Thus, Fernandez et al. tell students that they 'will examine how the superpowers, namely the USA and USSR, used the newly-independent African states for their own selfish reasons'. African agency is portrayed relative to the role Africans see themselves as playing on the international stage (Fernandez et al. 2013, 77). Cuba, too, is seen not as acting on its own behalf, and sometimes in conflict with the USSR, as Westad shows, but as 'intervening on behalf of the communist superpowers' (Fernandez et al. 2013, 123). The colonial dimension of the Cold War is suggested in the statement that 'the granting of independence to African countries opened up the African continent to the USA and USSR' with the aim of 'securing control over the resources, territory and people'. Moreover: 'Often a country [...] existed as an extension of that superpower' (Fernandez et al. 2013, 124). In Angola, the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (*Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*, MPLA) 'was kept alive' by the support of the USSR (Fernandez et al. 2013, 128), while the anti-communist National Front (*Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola*, FNLA) had attracted the help of the USA and of the People's Republic of China, and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (*União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola*, UNITA) had received aid from the Chinese and South Africans. How Cuba came to be involved is blurred in the sentence that 'by 1963 Angolans were receiving training from Cubans' (Fernandez et al. 2013, 137). Combined with the Great Man Theory of history employed, the relationship between leaders and followers is not examined

nor are the reasons for political choices made, and the subtleties of engagement and conflict among alliance partners are ignored. The textbook thus adds to African history but also simplifies it.

Pillay et al. combine the Great Man Theory of history with a narrative of heroic resistance. The Congo is also presented, as prescribed by the curriculum, as a tool of the Cold War and there is quantitatively more information on the superpowers than on the perspectives and approaches of MPLA, FNLA and UNITA (Pillay et al. 2013). Generally written in the active voice, there is a lapse when explaining how ‘Tanzania came to be subjected to a one-party state’ (Pillay et al. 2013, 131). However, this textbook does reveal subtleties of interpretation not present in Fernandez et al. It acknowledges, for example, that for several reasons ‘Southern Africa was never a high priority on the agenda of the Soviet Union’, thus also showing the shift in emphasis from the anti-communist narrative of the apartheid period to one more sensitive and alert to new historiographies on South Africa’s historical relationship with Russia and the Soviet Union (Filatova 2008; Pillay et al. 2013, 378; Shubin 2008a).

Although the curriculum provides the general framework within which the textbooks are written, the textbook representations tend firstly to show some differences, such as for example in the treatment by Fernandez et al. of apartheid South Africa as independent from the Cold War, and the degree of subtlety and complexity of relationships between actors, but also some commonalities in their positioning of African liberation movements. Here too, however, the picture is not unambiguous. While the curriculum provides more information about African history and involvement in the Cold War, the approach is limited by the overwhelming emphasis on the role of leaders as great men representing differences of approach, and by the positioning of African liberation movements, not as actively choosing and shaping their involvements on the basis of assumed ideological or other commonalities, but as being tools and instruments of others. When Africans are presented as agents of their own history, as in the case of South Africa’s struggle for democracy, the Cold War is invisible.

A closer examination of one of these textbooks is useful in illustrating the overall narrative and representation of the roles of the USA, USSR and South Africa during the Cold War (Pillay et al. 2013). The textbook begins and ends with this specific conflict. South Africa’s involvement in the Cold

War is only really brought in at the end, suggesting that Africa somehow stood outside the conflict. The first section, on the 'Origins of the Cold War', describes the Cold War in terms of the relationship between the USA and USSR before and after the Second World War. Their ideological differences are seen as key. Thus, 'historians hold different viewpoints and interpretations about the origins of the Cold War, but [...] due to ideological differences between the two superpowers tension and a mutual distrust became known as the 'Cold War' (Pillay et al. 2013, 2). The political and economic organisation of the two societies around the two very different ideals of democracy and capitalism are also described. Reasons for the Soviet mistrust of the West and the West's mistrust of the USSR are presented. The wartime conferences of Teheran (1943), Yalta (1945) and Potsdam (1945) trace the agreements between the 'Big Three'. In a section on the creation of 'Spheres of Interest', the nature and reasons for 'the installation of Soviet-friendly regimes in satellite states' is explored, the reaction of the West is described, and the USA's subsequent policy of containment via the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan are spelt out. Events in Greece, Turkey and Iran 'prompted the USA into taking action to combat the spread of communism. The USA feared that the Eastern Mediterranean would also fall under communist control. They therefore adopted a policy of containment'. Consequences of the Marshall Plan and responses to it in both the USA and USSR (the formation of Cominform and Comecon) are underscored, including the debate in the USA Congress on the matter as well as sources relating to the Truman doctrine and Marshall Plan. The Berlin blockade and Western responses to it and the continuation of Berlin as a focal point of the Cold War are sketched. Kennedy's speech on 26 June 1963 is presented as a source for analysis. The formation of NATO and the Warsaw Pact are considered. Following a section on the Cuban Missile Crisis the book asks who was to blame for the Cold War and answers this question in terms of three dominant perspectives: the orthodox view, revisionist/new left perspectives and post-revisionist stances. The 'orthodox view' sees it as a result of Soviet aggression, the revisionists 'placed the blame for the start of the Cold War on the USA, rather than the Soviet Union', while the post-revisionists 'tried to show that both sides had their faults' (Pillay et al. 2013, 32). The extension of the Cold War into China and Vietnam is detailed.



Between this section on the origins of the Cold War and the final section on the end of the conflict and the new world order, the textbook deals with comparative case studies of the rise of independent Africa (Congo and Tanzania), civil society protests from the 1950s to the 1970s (women's liberation, feminism and the US civil rights movement), civil resistance in South Africa from the 1970s to the 1980s, and the coming of democracy to South Africa with the processes of coming to terms with the past that this entailed. Within the section on independent Africa, the impact of internal and external factors in the form of the challenge of ethnicity, the Cold War and neo-colonialism are explored, as are the roles of the USSR, USA, Cuba, China and South Africa. Thus, 'during the Cold War both the USA and USSR attempted to increase their influence in Africa [...] The USA and USSR challenged and threatened each other for political influence, trade and military bases in Africa, for example in Angola' (Pillay et al. 2013, 117).

The USA's involvement in Angola is presented as being 'to secure vital raw materials and to prevent the spread of communism' whereas the USSR 'realised that African countries were interested in projects for development and hence they concluded trading agreements, gave technical assistance and provided capital for investment and weapons' (Pillay et al. 2013, 118). A box of quotations on the reasons for the interest of the USA and USSR in Africa points overwhelmingly to 'selfish' reasons 'to preserve their own interests' and gain access to Africa's raw materials. 'Kissinger', one quotation runs, 'saw the countries and regions of the Third World in Africa only against the problem of maintaining an American-Soviet balance of power' (Pillay et al. 2013, 119). In the Angola case-study, reasons for the involvement of the USSR, USA, Cuba, China and South Africa are also provided: details are given about the USSR's military support of the MPLA (later to become the ruling party), while the USA's covert support of the rival UNITA is presented as being suspicious of 'nationalist movements with a socialist orientation'. Reagan's prioritisation of Africa when he became president in 1981 was to allow the US 'to serve as an intermediary between Angola and South Africa on the issue of Namibian independence' (Pillay et al. 2013, 127). South Africa's interest in Angola is situated squarely within its own perception of the USSR as a hostile power that threatened the region and South Africa's own control over Namibia. South Africa thus became involved in the Angolan War 'because

of the threat posed to South West Africa by the MPLA's rapid expansion' (Pillay et al. 2013, 128). The devastation of the region by this multi-power influence is counterposed by a photograph of Princess Diana comforting landmine victims (129). The section ends with quotations from a smiling Nelson Mandela, the hand of Fidel Castro resting on his shoulder, about the significance of the battle of Cuito Canavale, which the South Africans lost, for the struggle for Southern African liberation (Pillay et al. 2013, 130). This battle, fought in Angola in 1988, was decisive in shifting the balance of forces in the region in favour of the Angolan army, aided by Cuba, the Soviet Union and East Germany and against UNITA, supported by the South African Defence Force.

In the following section on Civil Society Protests from the 1950s to the 1960s, the role of women's liberation and feminist movements in industrialised countries and in South Africa, as well as the US Civil Rights Movement and a case study of the Black Panther movement are highlighted. The section ends with an overview of 'The Progress Made Towards Racial Equality', with photographs of Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey and Muhammad Ali shown to 'bear testimony to how the Civil Rights Movement has enabled some African Americans to be successful' (Pillay et al. 2013, 200). The next section on 'Civil Resistance in South Africa' is contextualised in terms of the 'Total Onslaught' South Africa saw itself as facing mainly due to communist intervention, and the 'Total Strategy' embarked upon as official policy to attempt to control resistance. The anti-apartheid struggle inside and outside South Africa is dealt with by reference to the rise and role of opposition underground, in prison and in exile, and the role and legacy of the Black Consciousness movement in South African politics. No explicit links are drawn with the Civil Rights and Black Panther movements in the United States; nor are the range of anti-apartheid initiatives in the USA referred to later on (for this history see Grant 2017). The crisis of apartheid in the 1980s details the role of internal resistance to attempted reforms of the system during the 1980s, highlighting the role of the growing trade union movement and emergence of new forms of civic mobilisation as well as the international anti-apartheid movement and its sports, consumer and cultural campaign, and boycotts. Neither the USA nor the USSR play a part in this story. Although there is substantial evidence of the role played by the West in

the process, they and other international players are similarly absent from the account of the negotiations, lasting from 1990 to 1994, when democratic elections were held. Their role is only brought in right at the end, in a separate section on the end of the Cold War.

The end of the conflict is explicitly brought into play in the final section of the textbook. The specific relationship of the Cold War to South Africa is brought out firstly in South African propaganda that the country was a 'stable, civilised and indispensable member of the "free world" that opposed international communism' (Pillay et al. 2013, 377), and secondly in the support given by the Soviet Union and especially East Germany to the African National Congress (ANC). However, it also makes clear that Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo were not communists, despite their close relationship with the South African Communist Party (Pillay et al. 2013, 378). The narrative points to the role of international economic pressure and specifically the US Congress in imposing limited sanctions against South Africa. But there is no reference to the wider anti-apartheid campaigns in the USA. Africa is presented as having become 'caught up in the Cold War confrontation between the USA and the Soviet Union'. More detail is provided of the Cold War in southern Africa during the 1980s and the involvement of the USSR and USA in Angola, which became 'a sideshow of the Cold War' (Pillay et al. 2013, 383). The USA assured UNITA, 'to contain the spread of communism around the world and because the Angolan government was perceived to be communist', of its support 'in its attempt to overthrow the regime' (Pillay et al. 2013, 383). Source activities are again provided on the battle of Cuito Canavale, including quotations from Ronnie Kasrils, a high-ranking former member of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, the military wing of the ANC, and by the US Secretary of State for Africa, Chester Crocker. The collapse of the Soviet Union and fall of the Berlin Wall ensured, according to the textbook, that 'the ANC could no longer rely on Soviet support, and the NP could no longer pretend to be a bulwark against the spread of communism in Africa' (Pillay et al. 2013, 387). In the context of the rise of a new world order, in which the multilateral institutions of the World Bank, IMF and WTO play an important role in a new 'global apartheid', the textbook highlights the role of Greenpeace and the potential of the BRIC countries as 'emerging economies and different forms of capitalism' (Pillay et al., 2013, 404).

## Conclusion

While previous studies have paid considerable attention to representations of the history of apartheid in South Africa, both in history textbooks of the apartheid period and in more recent material, less attention has been paid to ‘international history’ and the links between international, African and South African history. Ironically, to place the importance of South Africa’s role in the Cold War in some context, in his recent world history of the Cold War, even Westad devotes only a few cursory paragraphs to South Africa in a work of 700 pages (Westad, 2017). This chapter has attempted to address this imbalance and focus on a hitherto-neglected area of the analysis of South African history textbooks. The anti-communist bias of earlier apartheid textbooks has been replaced by, it has been argued, a friendlier approach towards the Soviet Union, while the role of the USA has by contrast been over-simplified in so far as the spectrum of actions and campaigns to illustrate US domestic contestation over apartheid is arguably inadequately represented. In addition, the portrayals of Africa and Africans has changed. Although granted greater prominence than before, and despite being made much more central to the unfolding history of the time, Africa and Africans are contradictorily seen, on the one hand, as passive victims of the superpowers and, on the other, as fighters for freedom, imbued with agency and initiative.

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