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Bartering Coffee, Cocoa and W50 Trucks: The Trade Relationships of the GDR, Angola and São Tomé in a Comparative Perspective

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This article offers a comparative examination of trade relations between the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and two former Portuguese colonies—Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe respectively—within the context of the global rivalry of political systems during the Cold War. As part of the socialist bloc, the GDR gave considerable support to pro-Marxist regimes in both countries which sought to consolidate their rule after achieving independence in 1975. In both instances, the countries bilaterally agreed on direct commodity exchanges, fueled by the GDR's manifest need to retain its foreign currency reserves in the face of sky-rocketing commodity prices in the 1970s. However, as my archival research reveals, Angolan and São Toméan officials exercised significant influence in negotiations by effectively appealing to the GDR's "anti-imperialist solidarity" and successfully shaping the terms of trade in both arrangements. These agreements were accompanied by other forms of "socialist aid," like constructing industrial facilities and the work of so-called East German "Friendship Brigades." Angolan negotiators pushed for a comprehensive assistance package for the coffee harvest as well as for "Friendship Brigades" to repair the imported W50 trucks whereas the São Toméan President Manuel Pinto da Costa secured fixed prices for his country's primary export, cocoa, at a time when decrease in global demand threatened to devastate the country's economy.

Introduction

Recent studies which emphasized a "multipolar" interpretation of the "Global Cold War"¹ triggered a fresh interest in "the Second World's Third World."² By emphasizing the agency of Third-World-actors, these works distanced themselves from the prevailing bipolar superpower discourse and went beyond the North-

¹ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

² David Engerman, "The Second World's Third World," *Kritika*, 12 no.1 (2011): 188–211. From a less Eurocentric perspective it would read "The Third World's Second World."

South paradigm.³ In the context of “development” trade constituted an ideological battlefield during the era of system competition.⁴ Rejecting the “imperial exploitation” of the capitalist states, the socialist states of the COMECON⁵ viewed their trade relations as “mutually beneficial.” Countries such as the GDR made no clear distinction between development aid and regular, bilateral trade relations.⁶ This article focuses on a particular and widespread instrument of trade relations in the socialist sphere—in this case, between the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe—namely, barter agreements. The concept of barter trade, referred to by East German officials as “*Prinzip Ware-gegen-Ware*,” was entangled with other forms of “socialist aid,” like constructing industrial facilities, and sending East German “Friendship Brigades” (“*Brigaden der Freundschaft*”)⁷ to assist in coffee harvests and repair East German W50 trucks. The promotion of barter trade is inextricably linked with the GDR’s political elites’ re-orientation to countries of the periphery in the second half of the 1970s. Sky-rocketing prices for coffee⁸ and, to a smaller extent, cocoa, seriously strained the GDR’s already scarce reserves of ‘*Valuta*,’ as hard currency was usually termed in the GDR. Barter was a crucial option to import raw materials without spending hard currency.⁹

³ Christine Hatzky, *Cubans in Angola: South-South Cooperation and Transfer of Knowledge, 1976–1991* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015); See also: Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Krushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁴ Hans-Joachim Spanger and Lothar Brock, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten in der Dritten Welt. Die Entwicklungspolitik der DDR—eine Herausforderung für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland?* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1987), 243–44.

⁵ Council for Mutual Economic Assistance.

⁶ Berthold Unfried, “Instrumente und Praktiken von ‚Solidarität‘ Ost und ‚Entwicklungshilfe‘ West: Blickpunkt auf das entsandte Personal,” in *Die eine Welt schaffen: Praktiken von ‚Internationaler Solidarität‘ und ‚Internationaler Entwicklung‘*, ed. Berthold Unfried and Eva Himmelstoß (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 2012), 77.

⁷ The “Friendship Brigades” (“*Brigaden der Freundschaft*”, also “*Freundschaftsbrigaden*”), were joined by young men and (much less) women of various occupational backgrounds, mostly between the age of 21 and 30. Founded in 1963, the brigades were sent as collectives (“*Kollektive*”) into countries of the periphery to assist in different fields. The work of the ‘Friendship Brigades’ was usually free of charge for the recipient government that was responsible for food and accommodation. During their service, the members of the brigades received their salary at home, an allowance in local currency and a small amount of hard currency every month that was transferable to an account in the GDR. See: Eric Burton, “‘Stark abhängig vom Partner:’ Solidarität und ihre Grenzen bei den Brigaden der Freundschaft der FDJ,” in *Globales Engagement im Kalten Krieg*, ed. Frank Bösch, Caroline Moine and Stefanie Seng: *Globales Engagement im Kalten Krieg* (in publication), 20–21.

⁸ In view of sky-rocketing prices for raw coffee, the SED regime introduced “*Kaffee-Mix*,” a soluble mixture with a significant lower amount of raw coffee. In spite of an orchestrated media campaign, “*Kaffee-Mix*” can be considered a failure since East Germans were protesting against the new brand. This put serious pressure on high-ranked officials to secure coffee imports on a barter basis. For a detailed account on the ‘crisis’ see: Volker Wunderlich, “Die ‘Kaffeekrise’ von 1977,” *Historische Anthropologie* 11/2 (2003): 240–261, accessed July 6, 2017, doi:10.7788/ha.2003.11.2.240.

⁹ Anne Dietrich, “Zwischen solidarischem Handel und ungleichem Tausch: Zum Südhandel der DDR am Beispiel des Imports kubanischen Zuckers und äthiopischen Kaffees,” *Journal*

Barter agreements were not new in the socialist world; in 1960, Cuba traded 80% of its sugar with socialist countries of the COMECON—including the GDR—for tools, industrial plants and industrial equipment.¹⁰ Ghana's President Kwame Nkrumah oscillated between East and West to secure financial means for his envisioned industrialization agenda. Nkrumah's decision to barter cocoa with the Soviet Union enabled Ghana to receive technical equipment against the backdrop of rapidly deteriorating terms of trade, since the Soviet Union offered prices 15 to 20% above the world market price in exchange for its machines.¹¹

What was new, however, was that the tumultuous 1970s reshuffled the power constellation on the African continent and new trading partners for the GDR—itsself only recently internationally fully recognized¹²—emerged: Ethiopia saw a Marxist-inspired revolution in 1974 and in the same year the Portuguese *Estado Novo* collapsed, after being involved in a decade-long guerilla war in its colonial territories. The leadership of the leftist liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies¹³ adapted Marxist-Leninist theory to their own means and were able to secure considerable material, financial and personal support from the socialist bloc.¹⁴

Acknowledging the political background amid an era of a global rivalry is a necessary precondition for the analysis of the bilateral trade relationships, which were part of political and economic cooperation between these self-declared socialist one-party states. The GDR, based on its proclaimed imperative of “anti-imperialist solidarity,”¹⁵ had supported those “progressive forces” of national libera-

für Entwicklungspolitik 30 (3/2014): 48–67. Also see: Hans-Joachim Döring, “*Es geht um unsere Existenz: Die Politik der DDR gegenüber der dritten Welt am Beispiel von Mosambik und Äthiopien* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2001).

¹⁰ Dietrich, “Zwischen solidarischem Handel,” 53.

¹¹ Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization*, 228–233.

¹² The FRG's “Hallstein-Doktrin” (Hallstein Doctrine), in place from 1955 to 1969, viewed the establishment of official diplomatic relations with the GDR as an “unfriendly act” and aimed to isolate the GDR internationally. Chancellor Willy Brandt's “*Ostpolitik*” led to the signing of the Basic Treaty (“*Grundlagenvertrag*”) in 1972, the FRG and GDR now recognizing each other as sovereign states. See Gareth Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 [1990]), 33–84.

¹³ The African Lusophone colonies were comprised of present-day Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, the Cape Verdean archipelago close to Guinea-Bissau and the two small islands of São Tomé and Príncipe that are located in the Gulf of Guinea 250 kilometers off the coast of Gabon.

¹⁴ For the Soviet Union and Southern Africa, see: Natalia Telepneva, “Our Sacred Duty: The Soviet Union, the Liberation Movements in the Portuguese Colonies, and the Cold War, 1961–1975” (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2014); for Czechoslovakia, see: Philip Muehlenbeck, *Czechoslovakia in Africa, 1945–1968* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

¹⁵ The imperative to support “the struggle [...] against imperialism and her colonial regime” was enshrined in the 1974 constitution of the GDR. See: Klaus P. Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität: Militärbeziehungen und Militärhilfen der DDR in die ‚Dritte Welt‘* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2012), 575.

tion from an early stage on,¹⁶ hoping that once in power, they would pursue a path of “socialist orientation.”¹⁷ Thus, following formal independence, the new elites in power could point to a long and “friendly”¹⁸ relationship with the East German “*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*” (SED), the GDR’s ruling party.

Based on archival research in Berlin,¹⁹ this contribution highlights discursive strategies and motives of Angolan and São Toméan officials, showing how they used Cold War rhetoric and ideological promises to make material claims.²⁰ My research will firstly demonstrate how Angola and São Tomé significantly shaped the (trade) relationship with the GDR by brokering for more “mutually beneficial” terms of trade and, secondly, how the political relationship between the East German SED and its “sister parties”²¹ and other forms of “socialist aid,” that accompanied the barter trades, were an important determinant and must be taken into account when evaluating the trade relationship as a whole. Interviews²² with members of East German “Friendship Brigades” in Angola provide valuable in-

¹⁶ According to former GDR diplomat Hans-Georg Schleicher, the SED’s support for cadres of the later MPLA dates back to 1956. Throughout the 1960s, MPLA-members secured material support on their frequent visits to East Berlin. From 1967 onwards, the SED decided to supply the MPLA also with weapons. Direct party relations were established in 1971 and wounded fighters of the liberation war received treatment in East German hospitals. The MPLA’s proclamation of independence on 11th November 1975 was recognized by the GDR as one of the first governments. See: Hans-Georg Schleicher, “The GDR and the National Liberation Movements,” in *Southern African Liberation Struggles: Contemporaneous Documents 1960–1994. 9 vols. 8: Countries and Regions outside SADC*, ed. Arnold J. Temu (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota, 2014), 503–4.

¹⁷ Spanger and Brock, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten*, 150–157.

¹⁸ “Friendship” (“*Freundschaft*”) conveyed an important meaning in the GDR. Consequently, Erich Honecker’s visit of Libya, Zambia, Mozambique and Angola in 1979, that marked the climax in the GDR’s relation with African states, was crowned with the signing of “Friendship Treaties” (“*Freundschaftsverträge*”) with each country.

¹⁹ The bulk of research was carried out in the Bundesarchiv Berlin, “*Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR*” (SAPMO-BArch).

²⁰ However, this should not disguise the existent asymmetries based on structural disparities between socialist countries in the Global North and socialist oriented countries in the Global South. See: Dietrich, “Zwischen solidarischem Handel,” 62.

²¹ The basic political model of most state socialist countries like the GDR, but also of many countries with “socialist orientation,” was characterized by the dual structure of the communist party and the state administration, whose key positions were personally interwoven. The decision making process was highly centralized and the “mass organizations” were subjugated to the party line of the “vanguard party.” The MPLA’s first party congress in 1977 signaled its transformation to a “worker’s party”, whereas in a small Creole country like São Tomé and Príncipe on the other hand, there was little scope for the formation of a “vanguard party.” Notwithstanding the different implementations and cultural peculiarities, in all three countries the government was in effect “an arm of the party.” See: Patrick Chabal, “Lusophone Africa in Historical and Comparative Perspective,” in *A History of Postcolonial Lusophone Africa*, ed. Patrick Chabal et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 52, 61, 63; as well as: Joachim Becker, “Anatomie der Sozialismen. Wirtschaft, Staat und Gesellschaft,” in *Sozialismen. Entwicklungsmodelle von Lenin bis Nyerere*, ed. Joachim Becker and Rudy Weissenbacher (Wien: Promedia, 2009), 35–40.

²² I conducted five biographical interviews, lasting two to five hours, with four mechanics and an electrical engineer. All interviewees worked during different periods as members of the “Friendship Brigades” in Angola. Two of them later returned to Angola for six months a year to work as experts in the car repair workshops.

sights into how their work as an instrument of “socialist aid” was interlocked with the coffee commodity chain and the export of the W50 trucks.

Historical Context and Comparative Perspective

On April 25 1974, Portuguese armed forces of the *Movimento das Forças Armadas* (MFA), demoralized with their seemingly pointless fighting in the colonies,²³ overturned the right-wing dictatorship in Lisbon. By 1971, Portugal had only been able to maintain its colonial wars by spending 40% of its national budget on the military,²⁴ while also receiving military²⁵ and political²⁶ support from other NATO members due to the strategic importance of Portugal’s possessions within the Cold War order.²⁷ The *coup d’état* in Lisbon also marked an important watershed for the ‘Second World,’ because socialist countries²⁸ were staunchly supporting the pro-Marxist national liberation movements in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Angola.²⁹

²³ For the importance of the colonial wars as a motive for the revolting MFA, consult: A. Rodrigues, C. Borga and M. Cardoso, *O Movimento dos Capitães e o 25 de Abril—229 Dias para Derrubar o Fascismo* (Lisbon: Moraes, 1974), 104–109; see also: Chabal, “Lusophone Africa,” 3, 15.

²⁴ Westad, *Global Cold War*, 218. According to Basil Davidson, Portugal committed nine tenths of all its available military resources to its colonial wars in Africa by 1972, totaling 17,000 men in the army, 18,000 in the navy and 21,000 in the air force. See: Basil Davidson, “Portuguese-Speaking Africa: With an Appendix on Equatorial Guinea,” in *The Cambridge History of Africa: Volume 8. From c. 1940 to c. 1975*, ed. Michael Crowder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 782.

²⁵ It is well documented how France and West Germany provided substantial material help for the Portuguese armed forces in Africa. See for example: A. Jose Telo and H. de la Torre Gómez, *Portugal e Espanha: nos Sistemas Internacionais Contemporâneos* (Lisbon: Edições Cosmos, 2000), 127–132 and Davidson, “Portuguese-Speaking Africa,” 781.

²⁶ Based on extensive archival research, Rui Lopes shows that despite proclamations of isolation, Portugal’s right wing dictatorship in reality was still a member of a number of key multilateral institutions and “fully integrated in the Western bloc.” Lopes Rui, “Accommodating and Confronting the Portuguese Dictatorship within NATO, 1970–4,” *The International History Review* 38 no. 3 (2016): 506, accessed July 6, 2017, doi:10.1080/07075332.2015.1046388.

²⁷ Portugal’s most valuable assets were the archipelagos of Madeira and Azores, providing a strategically important air base for the United States. In addition, NATO fleets used the seaports of Luanda and Lobito. See: Lopes, “Accommodating,” 505; Westad, *Global Cold War*, 220.

²⁸ Outside the socialist bloc, independent African countries, Yugoslavia, China and the governments of Scandinavian countries, as well as the Netherlands committed themselves to support “progressive” anti-colonial movements in Southern Africa. See for example: Temu, *Southern African Liberation Struggles*.

²⁹ Contrary to those three countries, there had been no armed resistance on São Tomé and Príncipe (and the Cape Verde). Due to the isolation and small size of the two islands, Portuguese security forces and secret police had no difficulty in suppressing political opposition to colonial rule. Thus, the nationalist grouping operated from exile in Accra, Libreville and later Santa Isabel in Equatorial Guinea. See Gerhard Seibert: “São Tomé and Príncipe 1975–2015: Politics and Economy in a Former Plantation Colony,” *Estudos Ibero-Americanos*, 42/3 (2016): 990–91, accessed July 6, 2017, doi:10.15448/1980-864X.2016.3.22842.

After independence in 1975, the leftist *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) and *Movimento de Libertação de São Tomé e Príncipe* (MLSTP) sought to establish their rule by leaning on mainly political and diplomatic assistance from the socialist bloc. Consequently, they established their political structures in formal accordance with the Soviet model.³⁰ The MLSTP succeeded relatively easily with the creation of a socialist one-party-state on the small islands São Tomé and Príncipe after formal independence. In Angola, however, the perpetuated strife for political and economic power between the competing “liberation movements”³¹ MPLA, FLNA, and UNITA,³² was fueled by a complex set of antagonistic ideological factors,³³ influenced by ethnocentrism and interests of neighboring states,³⁴ and at the same time firmly embedded in the “Global Cold War.”³⁵ Consequently, with the help of Cuban troops and Soviet military assistance, the MPLA was able to keep hold of Luanda and installed itself as the ruling party amidst an invasion of South African troops, together with UNITA soldiers from the south and FLNA fighters from the north. Notwithstanding their support from the CIA, both UNITA and FLNA as well as the South African troops, finally were forced to withdraw.³⁶

Aside from historical, economic, political and cultural differences, there are a number of similarities between São Tomé and Príncipe and Angola, especially regarding the relationship with the GDR and the socialist bloc, in whose view both countries pursued a “non-capitalistic path of development” (“*nicht-kapitalis-*

³⁰ For Angola see: Keith Somerville, *Angola: Politics, Economics and Society* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1986), 78–130; Chabal, “Lusophone Africa,” 60–61, 66. For São Tomé and Príncipe consult: Gerhard Seibert, *Comrades, Clients and Cousins. Colonialism, Socialism and Democratization in São Tomé and Príncipe* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 136–138.

³¹ Unlike the MPLA, the FLNA and UNITA hardly aimed to “liberate” Angola from the Portuguese and were more engaged in fighting against MPLA troops. According to Patrick Chabal, “the FLNA never seriously engaged in armed action against the Portuguese nor did it try to establish ‘liberated zones’ inside the country,” and would rather wait for the Portuguese to leave. Chabal, “Lusophone Africa,” 7, 16. By the early 1970s, UNITA’s leader Jonas Savimbi was secretly negotiating with officers in the Portuguese army “over the possibility of obtaining a neocolonial settlement of the liberation stalemate.” See: David Birmingham, “Angola,” in *A History of Postcolonial Lusophone Africa*, ed. Patrick Chabal et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 147.

³² On the competing nationalist movements *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA), *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (FLNA) and *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA) see for example: Chabal, “Lusophone Africa,” 3–16 and Westad, *Global Cold War*, 210–11.

³³ For an in-depth analysis of ideological and ethnic antagonisms consult: Chabal, “Lusophone Africa,” 3–136.

³⁴ The most detailed account on the Angolan liberation war is: John Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: The Anatomy of an Explosion (1950–1962)* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1969); John Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Exile Politics and Guerrilla Warfare (1962–1976)* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1978). For a more personally involved and sympathetic view on the MPLA see: Basil Davidson, *In the Eye of the Storm: Angola’s People* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972).

³⁵ Westad, *Global Cold War*, 207–249.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 228–230, 236.

tischer Entwicklungsweg”), as conceptualized by Soviet and GDR theoreticians.³⁷ Formally non-aligned, both countries saw their “natural” (political and military) allies in the community of socialist states, although their foreign trade continued to be dominated by relations with Western capitalist countries.³⁸

Both countries entered into barter agreements for their agricultural commodities, and the GDR became an important, at times leading,³⁹ trading partner. Whereas prices for Angolan coffee were set by the world market for most of the trading period, São Tomé and Príncipe proposed fixed prices for its cocoa as a strategy to mitigate the deteriorating terms of trade.

In both instances, prices for additional trading goods, construction facilities and other forms of assistance⁴⁰ were negotiated by the parties on a US-Dollar basis, and entailed “virtual” credit exchanges, handled by the central banks of each country.⁴¹

Angola and the GDR: A High Priority ‘Coffee Line’ and W50 Trucks for a Loyal Partner

On their travels to Angola in 1976 and 1977, East German officials praised the “anti-imperialist solidarity” and good party relations between the SED and the MPLA, based on the GDR’s support during the liberation struggle and shared ideological views.⁴² Angola’s prime minister at that time, Lopo do Nascimento, underlined his country’s will to collaborate in the sectors of agriculture, transportation and vocational training. Angola would expect “the utmost possible commitment of the socialist community to support her, fast acting of every country is

³⁷ Spanger and Brock, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten*, 114–157. For a classification of Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe see: 131.

³⁸ In both countries, the foreign trade of non-military goods with socialist countries never exceeded 20% of the overall trade volume, mostly ranging between 10 to 15%. One exception may be the year 1983, when the GDR was São Tomé and Príncipe’s main trading partner due to the cocoa trade. Tony Hodges and Malyn Newitt, *São Tomé and Príncipe. From Plantation Colony to Microstate* (Boulder: Westview, 1988), 117, 123.

³⁹ As noted above, in the year 1983 the GDR was São Tomé and Príncipe’s main trading partner. Concerning Angola, the GDR ranked 6th in 1984, serving as the major trading partner within the socialist bloc. See: SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/1464, 294–95.

⁴⁰ The work of experts (“Spezialisten”) in various sectors, such as engineering, motor mechanics, agriculture or education was paid by the Angolan government. The solidarity work of the “Friendship Brigades” on the other hand was paid by the GDR and the Angolan government had to provide food and accommodation. See: Bettina Husemann and Annette Neumann, “DDR–VR Angola: Fakten und Zusammenhänge zur bildungspolitischen Zusammenarbeit von 1975 bis 1989,” in *Engagiert für Afrika: Die DDR und Afrika II*, ed. Ulrich van der Heyden and Ilona Schleicher and Hans-Georg Schleicher (Münster: Lit, 1994), 169.

⁴¹ “Virtual” means that barter trades and loans were issued without the use of hard currency on both sides, since the US-Dollar functioned as an accounting unit only for the stock list (“Warenliste”) and certain other services. If the debit exceeded an agreed threshold, interest on the negative surplus had to be paid back either in additionally provided goods or in US-Dollar. In some instances, the interest rates for loans of GDR machinery had to be paid back in US-Dollar as well.

⁴² SAPMO-BArch DE 1/57595, 2.

important.”⁴³ In this quote, the prime minister approaches the socialist community with Angola’s (or the MPLA’s) high expectations; effectively, each state in the socialist bloc had different domains within the country, determined by national interests and capabilities.⁴⁴ The GDR itself was interested in a stable supply of raw coffee on a barter basis to avoid spending hard currency, similar to the agreement it secured with Ethiopia on June 16, 1977.⁴⁵

A special agreement in June 1977—coinciding with the height of the East German domestic “coffee-crisis”—guaranteed the GDR 5,000 tons of Angolan raw coffee within the same year, symbolizing the ‘socialist’ structure of the trade relationship, as was also the case with São Tomé and Príncipe, which was handled by high-ranked political actors of the party. The foreign trade monopoly of the state enabled the initiation, regulation, and negotiation of commodity flows. In both cases, the alternating meetings within a special board, the “*Gemeinsamer Wirtschaftsausschuss*”⁴⁶ (GWA), acted as the main forum for negotiations and the coordination of the economic, technical and cultural cooperation between the representatives of the GDR, Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe respectively.⁴⁷

In February 1978, high-ranking officials of the SED handed over tenders for export, mainly W50 trucks and agricultural machines, to Lopo do Nascimento.⁴⁸ Following a field report by the East German ministry of transport, from erstwhile 25,000 trucks before independence roughly 4,500 were countrywide operational, 450 of those belonging to the new Angolan government. The small amount of trucks would meet only 15 to 20% of the economy’s capacity.⁴⁹ Having earned a reputation as an excellent off-roader with reliable technology which was easy to repair, the comparatively cheap W50 produced in the GDR seemed a good option for a post-colonial transportation sector with a shortage of skilled mechanics.⁵⁰

⁴³ SAPMO-BArch DE 1/57596, 6. All translations in the quotes by the author.

⁴⁴ The Cubans, for example, were not only present with troops, but also sent thousands of teachers, medical personnel and civil engineers to Angola. The Soviet Union mainly supplied military and economic advisers, as well as the bulk of military equipment, but was also involved in fishery. Bulgaria was active in setting up agricultural state farms and Yugoslavia was responsible for construction of bridges and residential buildings. See: M.R. Bhagavan, *Angola: Prospects for Socialist Industrialisation* (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1980), 33.

⁴⁵ However, unlike Angola, due to high prices on the world market, Ethiopia canceled the barter with the GDR already in 1979 and decided to sell coffee for hard currency only. While coffee accounted for most hard currency earnings before Angola’s independence, oil outstripped coffee from the mid-1970s onwards. See: Dietrich, “Zwischen solidarischen Handel,” 56, 59–60.

⁴⁶ “Common Economic Council.”

⁴⁷ Husemann and Neumann, “DDR–VR Angola,” 161.

⁴⁸ SAPMO-BArch DE 1/57596, 6.

⁴⁹ SAPMO-BArch DM1/8287, np.

⁵⁰ Christian Suhr, *Laster aus Ludwigsfelde* (Reichenbach/Halle: Kraftakt, 2015), 205. Also based on an interview with a former IFA-mechanic who was in Angola from 1982 until 1989. The first two years he worked as a member of the ‘*Brigaden der Freundschaft*’ mainly in the car workshops in Luanda, and later returned to Angola as an expert with better conditions and

After the Portuguese exodus, there was a scarcity of functioning harvest machines, means of transportation, and trained personnel. In confluence with the GDR's interests, the MPLA prioritized the construction of a "coffee line." The production level after independence significantly dropped in all sectors of the economy; coffee production fell from over 200,000 tons prior to independence to a mere 25,170 tons in 1978.⁵¹ Unsurprisingly, the party leadership was anxious to curb this trend with a program for national reconstruction. Including social reforms and an education campaign, this program was not only supposed to lead the way to social modernization along socialist lines, but also consolidate the precarious position of power of the MPLA.⁵² Thus, following the plea of the MPLA, the GDR sent four "Friendship Brigades" made up of coffee experts, master roasters, truck drivers, civil engineers, and economists—130 people in total—to assist with all parts of the commodity chain and repair the exported trucks.⁵³ Initially, the Angolan side requested up to 380 people.⁵⁴

Regarding personal cooperation between Angola and Cuba in the same period, Christine Hatzky identified the characteristic mechanism as one of "demand" and "supply,"⁵⁵ a pattern which is also apparent in the relationship between Luanda and East Berlin. Lopo do Nascimento's high expectations of contributions from socialist countries and the plea of the MPLA for the "Friendship Brigades" are only two examples of how these demands were framed in an ideological rhetoric. Whereas the "coffee line" on the spot and the work of East German "Friendship Brigades" was continuously praised by Angolan officials on different levels, the following years brought about numerous failures, often caused by the inexperience and disorganization of the GDR.

First and foremost, due to a lack of coordination, customer service on the spot for the W50 trucks was insufficient in the first years, and workshop managers from the GDR frequently complained about missing spare parts in the repair garage.⁵⁶ In addition, already contractually tied amounts of raw coffee were left to rot in the seaport of Luanda. Far worse, due to its strategic importance, was that the delivered and invoiced radio network ("*Funknetz*") for military purposes ceased to work in almost all provinces in summer 1982—a catastrophe, since the MPLA government suffered from military raids of South African troops and

payment ("*Dienstreisender*") for 6 months every year. Jens R., interview by the author, May 23, 2017.

⁵¹ M. R. Bhagavan, *Angola's Political Economy, 1975–1985* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1986), 67.

⁵² Hatzky, *Cubans*, 73.

⁵³ Anne Dietrich, "Kaffee in der DDR: Ein Politikum ersten Ranges," in *Kaffeewelten. Historische Perspektiven auf eine globale Ware im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Christiane Berth, Dorothee Wierling and Volker Wunderlich (Göttingen: V&R, 2015), 230.

⁵⁴ SAPMO-BArch VD MR–845/77, np.

⁵⁵ Hatzky, *Cubans*, 152.

⁵⁶ Numerous biannual reports of the East German workshop managers from 1980 to 1986 are to be found in SAPMO-BArch DM1/12157.

UNITA rebels in the southern and eastern parts of Angola. “The patience of the Angolan partner with the GDR is remarkable,”⁵⁷ applauded a dismayed East German official. However, in March 1981, the Angolan side had committed to barter 11,000 to 15,000 tons of coffee per year⁵⁸—equating around 20% of the GDR’s total import quota⁵⁹—instead of selling on the world market. Wolfgang Rauchfuß, chairman of the GWA meetings, tried to reason that the Angolan decision to barter is “a political decision of the Angolan party leadership.” It was stated in the negotiations “...that coffee, oil, and quartz crystal as strategic goods are usually only sold for convertible currency.”⁶⁰ Since strategic goods were usually not bartered with other countries, can we therefore assume a special role for SED regime of the GDR?

There are two major interconnected factors which explain the MPLA’s decision to keep the barter agreement with the GDR. The first factor is the political dimension, namely the early solidarity of the SED leadership with the MPLA. The GDR supported the MPLA during the long years of struggle, even before the liberation committee of the *Organisation of African Unity* (OAU) presented its views on the issue.⁶¹ The MPLA was the first liberation movement in Southern Africa to maintain official party relations with the SED, and President Agostinho Neto alone visited East Berlin at least five times before independence.⁶² The leftist leader of the Angolan delegation in the GWA and former prime minister, Lopo do Nascimento, was also a frequent visitor in the GDR, not only for negotiations. Nascimento spent his holidays in small towns in the countryside and received medical treatment in East German hospitals twice.⁶³

The second factor lies in the work of the East German “Friendship Brigades,” the truck specialists and other involved forms of “socialist aid” that were accompanying the barter agreements, as well as including the delivery of basic consumer goods worth several millions by the GDR’s “solidarity committee” (“*Solidaritätskomitee*”).⁶⁴ The MPLA leadership and province commissioners were continuously expressing their satisfaction with the “Friendship Brigades”⁶⁵, whose work encompassed a wide variety of tasks. According to one former mechanic of the brigade, he and his colleagues were responsible for disembarking

⁵⁷ SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/1464, 152.

⁵⁸ “Abkommen über die Lieferung von angolanischem Kaffee im Zeitraum 1981–1985.”

⁵⁹ SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/1464, 99.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, italicization added by the author.

⁶¹ Bernard von Plate, “Afrika südlich der Sahara,” in *Drei Jahrzehnte Außenpolitik der DDR: Bestimmungsfaktoren, Instrumente, Aktionsfelder*, ed. Hans-Adolf Jacobsen et al. (München: Oldenbourg, 1979), 662–3.

⁶² Schleicher, “The GDR,” 504.

⁶³ SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/1463, 407.

⁶⁴ A detailed statistical overview on the solidarity deliveries can be found in Ilona Schleicher, “Statistische Angaben zur Solidarität für Befreiungsbewegungen und Staaten im südlichen Afrika,” in *Engagiert für Afrika: Die DDR und Afrika II*, ed. Ulrich van der Heyden, Ilona Schleicher and Hans-Georg Schleicher (Münster: Lit, 1994), 152–157.

⁶⁵ SAPMO-BArch DE 1/57609; DY 3023/1463, 233; DY 3023/1464, 103; DY 24/20213.

the trucks from the East German ships in Angolan ports and driving them to the garage,⁶⁶ where the trucks were inspected and prepared before they were handed over to the Angolan ministries. In the workshop, Angolan workers received their vocational training from GDR specialists, and the best Angolans were offered an advanced training course in the GDR. This form of training was especially honored by the government, since skilled workers were scarce. Additionally, apart from semi-voluntary “red Saturdays” once a month, on weekends some members of the “Friendship Brigades” provided “solidarity services” on their own, such as the provision of drinking water to municipal facilities with W50 water tankers, or voluntary labor stints on agricultural cooperatives with the MPLA’s youth organization JMPLA.⁶⁷ After being requested by the Angolan side, one brigadier and his colleague repaired a generator in a SWAPO⁶⁸ military camp in Southern Angola on their weekend.⁶⁹

This was also dangerous. Ever since 1975, the presence of SWAPO camps was a pretext for the apartheid regime in Pretoria to carry out air raids and military incursions far into Angolan territory.⁷⁰ However, the devastating economic effects and human suffering that the military attacks of South African troops and their companions of UNITA (with covert US support)⁷¹ caused in Angola’s Southern and Eastern zones were not the only reasons for a decline in agricultural production. The MPLA’s mismanagement of the state farms, the urban ruling elites’ total neglect of the peasantry and labor shortages in all parts of the commodity chain led to a further decrease in Angola’s coffee production in subsequent years. While in 1977 around 68,000 tons were harvested, the amount oscillated between lower levels in the subsequent years, amounting to only 24,000 tons in 1984.⁷² Faced with further decreasing output, the state-owned marketing board *Cafeangol* decided to follow a new policy of maximizing returns in May 1984. The GDR was now requested to pay “heavily inflated prices”⁷³ for Angolan coffee within

⁶⁶ There were garages in Luanda, Viana, Lubango, Uíge, Huambo, Gabela, N’Dalatando, Luena, Malanje and Cabinda.

⁶⁷ Considering the “solidarity work” on the ground, one has to be cautious, since the diaries of the brigades (“*Brigadetagebücher*”) were semi-official documents, and the self representations followed certain patterns and norms that are apparent in most of the diaries. See: SAPMO BArch DY 24/20213, DY 24/20214, DY 24/20215.

⁶⁸ The South-West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO) was the liberation movement in Namibia, occupied by South Africa and basically “ruled as its fifth province.” Shortly after independence, the MPLA set up camps for SWAPO soldiers and their families, where they received military training from Cuban and Soviet instructors, as well as medical treatment. See: Piero Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom. Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976–1991* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 10–11.

⁶⁹ Jens R., interview by the author, May, 23, 2017.

⁷⁰ Gleijeses, *Visions*, 199, 201.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 163, 179–80.

⁷² Bhagavan, *Angola’s Political Economy*, 67; Somerville, *Angola*, 141.

⁷³ Original quote: “*stark überhöhten Preisen*,” the prices were up to a 150% higher than the GDR could attain with hard currency purchases from other countries outside the International

the barter agreement, although 80% of the harvest seemed to be of low quality. As *Cafeangol* argued, other buyers—such as Poland—would comply with those raised prices. Instead of the agreed 13,000 tons, the Angolans would only be able to provide 10,000 tons. If the GDR wanted this amount, it would have to accept the new prices.

Declassified archival documents reveal that GDR officials decided to accept the new conditions, taking into account Angola's "difficult economic and military situation," as well as the need to decrease Luanda's debit with the GDR.⁷⁴ Therefore, before prices were again gradually adjusted to the world market level, the GDR paid 'preferential prices' for Angolan Robusta coffee. Returning to Christine Hatzky's terminology, we can observe Angolan "demand" for higher prices and GDR officials—considering the difficult economic and military situation of their trading partner—"supplying" the demanded prices.

In view of the intensified security situation due to increased looting and killing of UNITA rebels and South African air raids, some of the "Friendship Brigades" and experts were evacuated in the mid-1980s, while others found their activities severely constrained.⁷⁵ To reduce the negative balance of several thousand East German W50 trucks and agricultural machines, the next agreement⁷⁶ included crystal quartz and Angolan raw oil in addition to 10,000 tons of raw coffee.

Due to Angola's extreme dependence on oil revenues, the steep fall in oil prices 1985/86 seriously exacerbated the mounting debt crisis. The MPLA government accepted a structural reform program, orchestrated by the IMF and World Bank, towards a more market-oriented economy.⁷⁷ However, actual implementation of "structural adjustments" was stalled by the governing elites of the MPLA, who continued to enrich themselves via the "complex triangular relationship between [the national oil company] SONANGOL, the Treasury and the central bank."⁷⁸

The imposed means of economic liberalization further reduced the modest trade turnover with the socialist countries,⁷⁹ which experienced themselves drastic economic shortfalls and technological leeway.⁸⁰ Occupied with peace negotiations with South Africa and orienting stronger towards the capitalist states, Angola dis-

Coffee Agreement. See: SAPMO-BArch, DY 3023/1464, 218.

⁷⁴ SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/1464, 218–220.

⁷⁵ SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/998, np.

⁷⁶ SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/1005, np.

⁷⁷ Hatzky, *Cubans*, 168.

⁷⁸ Tony Hodges, *Angola: From Afro-Stalinism to Petro-Diamond Capitalism* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001), 124, clarification added by the author.

⁷⁹ As mentioned earlier, in both Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe capitalist countries dominated the foreign trade turnover. In 1984, 94.4% of Angola's exports went to capitalist countries and 72.9% of imports came from there. The share of socialist states was 3% of Angola's exports and 23% of its imports. See: Gleijeses, *Visions*, 333.

⁸⁰ Already in the late 1970s the Soviet Union and other Eastern countries experienced a significant reduction of economic growth. The further decline in oil prices in the 1980s worsened the situation for the inflexible planned economies and monolithic power structures in communist one-party states. See: Westad, *Global Cold War*, 335–337.

continued the barter trade with the GDR in 1988, recording a debit balance of 113 million US-Dollar.⁸¹ However, over the course of eleven years, the import of raw materials—such as coffee and raw oil on a barter basis, which amounted to a total of 546.8 million US-Dollar in 1987⁸²—enabled the GDR to save precious hard currency, while at the same time being able to stimulate its own manufactured exports.⁸³ Altogether, more than 13,000 W50 trucks of various models found their way to roads from Luanda to Lubango, making Angola the leading export destination for W50s in Africa.⁸⁴

Cocoa Exports from São Tomé and Príncipe: a São Toméan Initiative for Fixed Prices

By African standards, the two small islands of São Tomé and Príncipe experienced a comparatively long colonial domination by Portugal, which was based on plantation complexes of first sugar and then cocoa. At the end of the nineteenth century, African slave labor was substituted by “contract labor,” mostly from Angolan *serviçais*, whose work kept the cocoa plantations running until the 1970s and cemented the importance of cocoa for the two islands.⁸⁵ Perceived as *the* symbol of colonial oppression, President Manuel Pinto da Costa announced the nationalization of the cocoa plantation complex only two months after independence, which effectively took place in 1978.⁸⁶ In the same year, the first 500 tons of cocoa were exported to the GDR, following a visit of an East German delegation several months before. March 1979 saw the establishment of the first trade agreement with a further 300 tons, and stipulated the construction of a brick manufacture by the GDR in exchange for future cocoa shipments. Protracted negotiations and insufficient means of carriage on both sides delayed the construction of the East German facilities. In December 1979, the GDR’s debit balance amounted to 1.4 million US-Dollar. Combined with the reluctance of São Toméan

⁸¹ SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/1011, np.

⁸² The imports between 1977 and 1987 consisted of 1,196,200 tons of raw oil, 101,360 tons of coffee, 73,000 tons of iron ore and 750 tons of melting quartz (“*Schmelzquartz*”). See: SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/1464, 396.

⁸³ Apart from W50 trucks the GDR exported agricultural equipment, machines and industrial complexes as well as consumer goods.

⁸⁴ Angola was ranked as the eight export destination worldwide. The majority of W50 trucks (98,000) were exported to Hungary, followed by Iraq (72,209), China (69,337), the USSR (49,311), CSSR (27,501), Vietnam (19,202) and Bulgaria (16,660). Numbers from: Frank Röncke, *Schrader-Typen-Chronik: IFA W50/L60, 1965–1990* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch, 2013), 93.

⁸⁵ Seibert, *Comrades*, 2, 4–5, 46–48.

⁸⁶ Martina Berthet, “São Tomé e Príncipe: Teflexões sobre alguns Aspectos de sua História Agrícola no pós-Independência,” *Estudos Ibero-Americanos* 42, 3 (2016): 961–986, accessed July 6, 2017, doi:10.15448/1980-864X.2016.3.23107, 970–71.

officials to transfer balance for the agreed GDR constructions, East Berlin stopped the import of cocoa in the same month.⁸⁷

December 1979 also witnessed a turning point at the domestic level. Former Prime Minister Miguel Trovoada was expelled from the party and imprisoned for connivance of an alleged *coup d'état*. A few months earlier, in April 1979, President Pinto da Costa increased his personal power by liquidating the position of prime minister.⁸⁸ Gerhard Seibert interprets this not only as a personal struggle for power between the childhood friends Pinto da Costa and Trovoada, but also as a signal for future policies: Trovoada opposed the introduction of a planned economy and the nationalization of domestic trade. After Trovoada's imprisonment, Pinto da Costa radicalized his regime and ruled with an iron fist.⁸⁹

Meanwhile, the short-lived boom of high cocoa prices in the late 1970s collapsed and export earnings fell by over 70% between 1979 and 1981.⁹⁰ Confronted with this sharp decline in cocoa prices from 1980 onwards, the São Toméan side approached the GDR in April 1981 to ask for support against the devastating effects of the “general economic crisis of the capitalist system.”⁹¹ The leader of the São Toméan delegation, Fausto Soares da Vera Cruz, saw the only viable solution “to guard economic independence” of his country in the expansion of relations with the socialist states. Therefore, Soares da Vera Cruz proposed fixed prices for the cocoa trade, valid for five years, to neutralize the fluctuations of the world market. Based on the average world market price of the previous year, the fixed prices would be elevated by 15%, if the world market prices would rise.⁹²

This discursive strategy of the São Toméan delegate leader—insinuating “socialist solidarity” against a devastating capitalist system—must be seen against the background of rapid declining prices for cocoa, whose importance for the countries' economy was tremendous. During the 1980s, cocoa's contribution in earning hard currency always exceeded 80% of total exports.⁹³ In August 1981, president Manuel Pinto da Costa, who had studied economics at the Humboldt-Universität in East Berlin, personally addressed chairman of the SED, Erich Honnecker. Pinto da Costa renewed the request for fixed cocoa prices, arguing that São Toméan officials had not yet acquired sufficient knowledge of socialist planning, and were thus forced to plan over a longer period of time. Besides better calculability, fixed prices and an East German government credit would be necessary to realize economic and social development.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/1478, 219.

⁸⁸ Seibert, *Comrades*, 145–148.

⁸⁹ Seibert, *Comrades*, 149–152.

⁹⁰ Hodges and Newitt, *São Tomé*, 135.

⁹¹ SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/1478, 236.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Hodges and Newitt, *São Tomé*, 135.

⁹⁴ SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/993, 226.

The president's plea had its intended effect, and in February 1982 a new agreement⁹⁵ was signed with fixed prices for cocoa and East-German consumer goods, with 1980 as the reference year. This fixed price was untouched by the fluctuations of the world market, leading to a "lagging" price, which was frozen and not directly concerned with possible crises that could occur.⁹⁶ A 15 million US-Dollar government loan with 4% interest for GDR constructions and facilities⁹⁷ accompanied the barter agreement, thus providing a comparatively huge sum for the small island economy.⁹⁸ The GDR, on its side, was able to obtain cocoa without the use of hard currency.⁹⁹ Starting with 1,250 tons in 1982 and peaking at 1,750 tons in 1984, the exported amount of cocoa decreased to only 500 tons in 1985.¹⁰⁰

Due to a combination of factors, including a lack of qualified personnel and investments, mismanagement, and drought, the productivity of the state-owned farms on São Tomé and Príncipe decreased further. In addition, plantation labor was associated with the coercive labor regime of the colonial era, and from the nationalizations onwards the government failed to provide incentives for plantation workers, who were almost exclusively contract workers from Angola and Cape Verde.¹⁰¹ Notwithstanding the poor performance in the cocoa production, the mechanisms for the price fixing were not altered in a new agreement, which was signed in 1985.¹⁰² Overall, the prices São Tomé and Príncipe received for its cocoa from 1982 until 1987 were approximately 10% higher than the world market price.¹⁰³

The example of São Tomé and Príncipe shows how high ranked political actors like the president himself considerably shaped the terms of trade for the countries' most important export commodity, cocoa. Similar to the Angolan case, the deci-

⁹⁵ "Abkommen über die Entwicklung der ökonomischen Beziehungen im Zeitraum 1982–1985."

⁹⁶ Kunibert Raffer, "Ost-Süd: Vorbild oder Abklatsch der West-Süd-Wirtschaftsbeziehungen?," *Journal für Entwicklungspolitik* 2/2 (1986): 9.

⁹⁷ The government loan was mainly reserved for the construction of a brickyard as well as the reconstruction of a brewery and a soft drink factory with the help of GDR specialists up to a sum of 15 million US-Dollar. The loan had to be repaid within eight years. See: SAPMO BArch DY 3023/1478, 252.

⁹⁸ SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/1478, 245. However, since the credit was reserved for GDR goods and services, the US-Dollar again served as an accounting unit only and it is difficult to assess how much hard currency was effectively involved.

⁹⁹ In August 1981 the secretary of economics of the central committee of the SED, Günter Mittag, stated that given a world market price of 2,400 US-Dollar per ton of cocoa, the actual price for the GDR if financed by a hard currency loan would amount to 3,456 US-Dollar. See: SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/993, 226.

¹⁰⁰ From 1978 to 1987 São Tomé and Príncipe exported 7,500 tons of cocoa to the GDR, amounting to 18.5 million US-Dollar. See: SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/1464, 406.

¹⁰¹ See Pablo B. Eyzaguirre, "The Independence of Sao Tome E Principe and Agrarian Reform," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 2/4 (1989): 676–77, and Seibert, "São Tomé," 1001–2.

¹⁰² "Abkommen über die Entwicklung der ökonomischen und wissenschaftlich-technischen Beziehungen im Zeitraum 1986–1990."

¹⁰³ SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/1464, 406.

sion to barter was a political decision, informed by the party leaderships and the presidents of both countries.

Conclusion: Discursive Strategies to Maximize “Mutual Benefit”?

By drawing on minutes of the negotiation process of the examined barter agreements, this contribution highlighted discursive strategies of Angolan and São Toméan political actors as they negotiated the terms of trade with East German officials. As we have seen, the uttered pleas for economic and political support were immersed with appeals to the socialist countries’ duty to solidarity. Angolan and São Toméan politicians expressed high expectations on the abilities of the socialist states to remedy their own countries’ socioeconomic state, inherited from the era of colonialism, and to guard their economic independence.

The discursive strategies of Angolan and São Toméan political actors that were portrayed here in the context of their countries’ barter agreements with the GDR must be seen within the wider perspective of a global system of competition during the Cold War. They illustrate how the ideological trench warfare opened spaces and possibilities for actors in the periphery to maximize their gains. Angolan and São Toméan politicians appealed to the officially proclaimed East German “anti-imperialist” solidarity and denounced deteriorating terms of trade as the outcome of an exploitative capitalist world economy. Socialist countries were pinned down in the negotiations not to reproduce these exploitative conditions. Accompanying the trade agreements, the negotiators requested help from East German “aid instruments” like the “Friendship Brigades” and experts to remedy the colonial inheritance, asking for the construction of facilities or government loans.

Concerning the gains of the negotiating strategies, the São Toméan agreement with the GDR on fixed cocoa prices can be perceived as a form of “mutually beneficial” trade, made more evident by the accompanying government loan with favorable conditions for São Tomé. As we have seen, both measures—the treaty for fixed prices and the government loan—followed a direct request by President Manuel Pinto da Costa to the Chairman of the SED, Erich Honecker. Bartering was thus a matter of high politics, of negotiations and invocations on the highest political level. Looking at the period from 1982 to 1987, the fixed-prices clause for São Toméan cocoa secured prices which were approximately 10% higher than the world market price.

On the other hand, we have Angola’s decision to maintain the trade of its coffee, and later raw oil, for East German goods, which helped the government in East Berlin a great deal to save its scarce foreign currency reserves, while additionally providing a safe market for the GDR’s industrial manufactures, such as the W50 trucks. By virtue of this beneficial exchange along West-South-patterns, and in face of East German shortcomings in the past, it was the East German officials

that were repeatedly pleading with the Angolan side to retain the barter trade. Angolan motives for this “political decision” to keep the barter were based on several factors: personal political links of the party leadership, solidarity deliveries of the East German solidarity committee, as well as the continuously praised work of the East German “Friendship Brigades,” that were directly linked to (Angola’s) export of coffee and import of W50 trucks.

When examining the portrayed trade relations from a strictly structural point of view, there is no doubt that the pattern of raw materials for manufactured goods strongly resembles the West-South trade, despite all assertions from socialist states¹⁰⁴ that their trade relations were inherently different to “neocolonial” forms of trade. However, a look at the broader canvas of the trade relationship during an era of global system competition with all the interwoven measures—like the work of the “Friendship Brigades”, the solidarity deliveries, preferential prices and, above all, the political and diplomatic support for the MPLA since long before independence—enables us to make a much more nuanced and multifaceted evaluation of these bilateral East-South barter agreements.

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¹⁰⁴ Spanger and Brock, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten*, 244–45.