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Citation

Hoog, T. A. van der. (2022). Research note: the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI) pamphlet collection. *Cold War History*, 1-6. doi:10.1080/14682745.2022.2076345

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



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To cite this article: Tycho van der Hoog (2022): Research Note: the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI) Pamphlet Collection, Cold War History, DOI: [10.1080/14682745.2022.2076345](https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2022.2076345)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2022.2076345>



Published online: 07 Jun 2022.



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Research Note: the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI) Pamphlet Collection

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ABSTRACT

During the decolonisation of southern Africa (1960s-1990s), several national liberation movements benefited from support from the Nordic countries, where they established foreign missions and mobilized international aid. As a result, a considerable amount of African primary source material has been amassed over the years. This material is now accessible through the Pamphlet Collection of the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI). The Pamphlet Collection contains over 700 boxes with (primary) source material from the entire African continent, including unique material from national liberation movements that is difficult to find elsewhere. Scholars of the Cold War can use this fascinating collection to study African agency during an era that – often wrongly – seemed to be dominated by Great Power competition. This Research Note explores contents of the Pamphlet Collection, with a particular focus on material from southern Africa.

KEYWORDS

Southern Africa; Nordic countries; Decolonisation; Cold War; Liberation archives

The Nordic countries have a special relationship with the African continent. In the twentieth century the Nordic countries assumed an active role in southern African affairs as staunch supporters of the various liberation struggles that sought to end colonialism and white-settler rule. Today, their relationship with the continent continues through development cooperation. The fraternal relations that were fostered in the previous century have been subject to an extensive study commissioned by the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), titled ‘The National Liberation in Southern Africa: The Role of the Nordic Countries’. As a result, six books have now appeared which document this history.¹

During the Cold War, African liberation movements established foreign missions in the Nordic countries, their representatives regularly travelled back and forth, and solidarity groups mobilised international support for the liberation of southern Africa. In consequence, a considerable amount of African primary source material has been amassed over the years. The guardian of this collection is the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), an independent research centre financed by the Nordic countries, and based in Uppsala (Sweden). While the aforementioned book

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¹Tertit von Hanno Aasland, ‘The Nordic Countries and the Liberation Struggle in Southern Africa’, *Forum for Development Studies* 29, no. 1 (2002): 211–35.

project and the subsequent project website are relatively well known, the NAI also curates a rich but often overlooked archive: the Pamphlet Collection.² This Research Note describes this collection and explains its relevance for the study of the Cold War, particularly in southern Africa.

The Pamphlet Collection consists of over 700 boxes with (primary) source material from Africa.³ The vast majority of the collection is in English or French (an estimated 70%), a quarter of the collection is in Portuguese or Swedish, and approximately 5% is available in other languages. The archive was organised and classified in 2002, but it has only been possible to search for individual items in the online NAI catalogue since 2019. By then, not all boxes were fully catalogued. Today, the collection is listed in full and continues to grow at a slow pace as new files are occasionally added to the archive. The Pamphlet Collection is thus a living archive. A unique feature, and of relevance to scholars of the Cold War, is the large presence of ‘documents originating from or dealing with the national liberation movements and solidarity movements’, particularly from southern Africa. This concerns a varied selection of periodicals, telegrams, brochures, pamphlets, posters, speeches, seminar proceedings, and more. Most files were published between the 1960s and 1980s.

All publications are only available in print and accessible within the physical library of the NAI. The collection is not available digitally or available through loans. The NAI is located in the charming university town of Uppsala, in Sweden, a short and sweet train journey away from Stockholm and Arlanda Airport. The library staff can be contacted in advance in preparation of a visit (email: library@nai.uu.se), and are helpful and professional. Before visiting, it is useful to understand the structure of the archive and explore the collection in order to know what one is looking for. The archive is primarily organised through boxes. Within each box, items are listed on an individual level (with title, author, organisation, and year), which greatly increases the transparency of the collection. Users can download PDF versions of Excel files for each single box via the online catalogue, and learn what is in them.

The search methodology is rather tedious. Within the online catalogue, users need to find the option ‘Advanced Search’ and choose ‘Pamphlets’ under ‘Material Type’ (<https://africalitplus.nai.uu.se>). Only then will the Pamphlet Collection be singled out, otherwise users will search the entire NAI library collection and be overwhelmed with unnecessary findings (including regular books, movies, and so on). If a relevant search item appears, one can find the description of that particular box under ‘Links’, as a downloadable PDF file (always titled ‘Table of Contents’). Unfortunately, the NAI does not provide an overview of all available boxes within the collection. This makes it difficult to assess what is actually available. At the moment, users need to guess individual

²<http://www.liberationafrica.se> (accessed May 25, 2022).

³In addition to primary material, the collection also contains grey material and secondary material. The focus of this article, however, is on the former.

search terms and have no way of surveying the breadth and depth of the archive in its entirety. The remainder of this Research Note will focus on the applications of the collection for the study of African agency during the Cold War.

Liberation movements and the Cold War

The Cold War and decolonisation intersected in southern Africa between the 1960s and 1990s. African national liberation movements were usually pushed into exile and forced to fight protracted liberation wars, while they struggled to claim international legitimacy and recognition. The aid of communist nations was important for gaining political support, military training, arms, and scholarships. Afro-Asian solidarity and anti-imperialist struggles became equally important themes during this era. The role of ideology is one of the leading questions in this area of study. Leading Africanists such as Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor, and Blessing-Miles Tendi argue that ‘African actors have been inadequately included in these debates, or have been entirely absent’; instead, studies of the Cold War often ‘bolster a view of Soviet or US manipulation of Third World Clients’.⁴ The expanding historiography on the complexities of the Cold War across the vast African continent has emphasised the importance of African agency and perspectives, whilst also demonstrating more research needs to be done. One reason for this is the difficulty in accessing primary materials from African national liberation movements. In this respect, the Pamphlet Collection of the NAI is an overlooked source of a considerable assortment of primary materials from southern Africa.

The Pamphlet Collection is generally divided between two parts: the subject collection (the minority of the papers) and the geographical files (the majority). The subject collection contains a limited number of boxes that are useful for studying the Cold War, most notably the files designated under the descriptions of ‘Socialism’ and ‘Regional Integration’. The former is an array of publications about socialism in Africa, mostly published outside Africa. The latter contains primary documents from multilateral fora such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Afro-Asian People’s Organisation (AAPSO): press releases, speeches, statements, conference materials, both from the secretariat and political leaders. In the absence of functional archives of both organisations, the NAI is an indispensable treasure trove.

The remainder of the archive is organised per geographical region or individual African country. Within each country sub-collection, files are ordered along subject headings such as ‘Economy’, ‘Religious institutions’, ‘Politics’, and more. The description of ‘General’ is reserved for miscellaneous files, and in the case of smaller countries this is usually the only box available. Those interested in southern Africa will be interested in the regional sub-collections of ‘Southern Africa’, ‘Lusophone Africa’, and perhaps also ‘East Africa’ in case of research on exile politics in Tanzania, for example.⁵ In addition, every southern African country is covered. The volume of related files largely follows the population size of each country. The sub-collection for Zimbabwe contains, for example, more files than Lesotho.

⁴Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor, and Blessing-Miles Tendi, ‘The Transnational Histories of Southern African Liberation Movements: An Introduction’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 43, no. 1 (2017): 1–12.

⁵George Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar Es Salaam: African Liberation and the Global Cold War, 1961–1974*, *African Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

The Pamphlet Collection offers much to political historians with an interest in southern Africa. Most sub-collections of southern African countries contain the subject headings 'National Liberation Movements', 'Solidarity Movements', or 'Foreign Relations'. This makes zooming in on these particular themes relatively easy and convenient. Access to 'liberation archives' in southern Africa is incredibly difficult, for reasons of political pressure, underfunding, and climatological hazards. Today, most of the region is ruled by former national liberation movements, organisations who in the decades leading up to independence fought or negotiated for independence. Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, also Tanzania, and Zimbabwe have been ruled by the same party since their respective dates of independence.⁶ These postcolonial governments have since then displayed varying degrees of authoritarianism and are, in general, not keen on critical historical enquiries into their past.⁷

Party archives are therefore especially difficult, if not impossible, to access in southern Africa. Positive exceptions are the archives of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, although these collections have been thoroughly sanitised, with sensitive intelligence files and financial files removed, and the archives of the now marginalised United National Independence Party (UNIP) in Zambia.⁸ The Pamphlet Collection, however, fills this gap to some extent. The collection includes primary materials from several former liberation movements in southern Africa. Among them are some of the contemporary political regimes in the region: the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA, Angola), Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO, Angola), South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO, Namibia), the ANC (South Africa), Tanganyika African National Union (TANU, Tanzania), and Zimbabwe African National Congress (ZANU, Zimbabwe). Not only historians, but also political scientists, will find this data useful for studying the development of these organisations, the forging of political cultures, exile politics, and related issues. A noticeable pattern is that the liberation material is often from the early stages of liberation, whereas many other archives in the world often possess material from the later stages of the decolonisation struggles. The archive contains many rare files.

In addition to covering the aforementioned ruling parties, the Pamphlet Collection also covers several 'second tier' liberation movements. Within each country, several national liberation movements competed for international recognition – particularly at the Liberation Committee of the Organisation of African Unity and the United Nations – as the only authentic representative of their people.⁹ This not only ensured access to support, funding and training, but also a larger chance at winning the first elections when independence was secured. In

⁶And Zambia was ruled by UNIP in the first 27 years of independence.

⁷Henning Melber, 'From Liberation Movements to Governments: On Political Culture in Southern Africa', *African Sociological Review / Revue Africaine de Sociologie* 6, no. 1 (2002): 161–72.

⁸T. J. Stapleton and M. Maamoe, 'An Overview of the African National Congress Archives at the University of Fort Hare', *History in Africa* 25 (1998): 413–22; and M. C. Musambachime, 'The Archives of Zambia's United National Independence Party', *History in Africa* 18 (1991): 291–6.

⁹Alexander, McGregor, and Tendi, 'The Transnational Histories of Southern African Liberation Movements'.

subsequent years, the histories of opposing liberation movements were suppressed in favour of 'Patriotic history'.¹⁰ The Pamphlet Collection, however, contains rare sources from such rivalling organisations. The collection does not only cover ZANU (ruling Zimbabwe since 1980), but also the rivalling African National Congress and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). This is significant because opposition archives were confiscated by the ruling party in the 1980s.¹¹ There are files from SWAPO, but also from South West Africa National Union (SWANU).¹² In the case of Angola, a large assortment of MPLA files is complemented by material from the Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (FNLA) and União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA).¹³

Finally, the Pamphlet Collection not only includes material from pre-independence liberation movements, but also from southern African governments in the post-colonial era. Boxes such as 'Politics – Nyerere' and 'Politics – Kaunda', together with the MPLA files, contain an extensive assortment of speeches from Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, and José Eduardo dos Santos, the first presidents of Tanzania, Zambia, and Angola. Their speeches, to name just one example, are a clear example of African agency, as they cover a wide range of domestic and international affairs. In terms of multilateral fora, a special reference should be made to the fragmented files from the Frontline States (FLS). This was a loose coalition of states that opposed the apartheid regime of South Africa and, in some cases, allowed liberation movements to set up training camps and headquarters in exile.¹⁴ The Frontline States do not have a formal archive, so again (as is the case with the NAM and the AAPSO) the files in Uppsala are valuable. Users will mostly find data from FLS meetings, which gives an insight into the debates and diplomacy of the time.

Conclusion

It is important to note that there are many more themes and geographical locations covered in this archive than mentioned in the research note. What is absent in the archive, especially with regards to the liberation material, is internal data such as minutes of meetings and correspondence. I fear this will likely remain secret until the party archives in southern Africa become accessible. The Pamphlet Collection mainly contains material produced by the liberation movements for an external audience. This is nevertheless a fascinating, comprehensive and often rare collection that is useful to study the agency of the political movements that shaped southern Africa's present. The Pamphlet Collection contains important material written *by African actors* instead of *about African actors*. Scholars of the Cold War will find this useful to study African agency in a time that – often wrongly – seemed to be dominated by the politics of Great Powers.

¹⁰Terence Ranger, 'Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: The Struggle over the Past in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, no. 2 (2004): 215–34.

¹¹Gerald Chikozho Mazarire, 'Rescuing Zimbabwe's "Other" Liberation Archives', in *Documenting Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa*, by Chris Saunders (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2010), 95–106.

¹²Chris Saunders, 'Namibian Diplomacy Before Independence', n.d., https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=d58cea79-6a30-8fff-600d-4e17742f7c7d&groupId=252038.

¹³W. Martin James, *A Political History of the Civil War in Angola: 1974–1990* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011).

¹⁴Gilbert M. Khadiagala, *Allies in Adversity: The Frontline States in Southern African Security 1975–1993* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2007).

With regard to this latter point, there is an interesting paradox at play when it comes to issues of access and representation. World-class African material is located in north-western Europe and therefore difficult to access for African academics. Travel to Uppsala is usually expensive for non-Scandinavian scholars and can be difficult for non-European Union passport holders. This not a deliberate choice of course, but a historical coincidence caused by the presence of African liberation movements in the Nordic countries during the twentieth century. In 2017 the NAI cooperated with the National Archives of Tanzania and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to digitise some 800 files of the Pamphlet Collection. This agreement was part of the Tanzania Heritage Archives Project (TAHAP) and sought to digitise files that relate to Tanzania's role in the liberation of the African continent.¹⁵ A major hurdle in this endeavour was copyright and licensing, as it was required to contact copyright owners of the material to ensure digitisation and sharing was allowed. Even though the project eventually succeeded in digitising hundreds of publications, the project website is now unavailable and it is unclear if and how the material can be accessed in Tanzania. This raises important questions about international copyright and archives, digital humanities, and access to shared cultural heritage. While the material from the Pamphlet Collection is thus not digitally available, the archive is at least digitally listed, searchable, and available on-site in Sweden. In addition, the Nordic Africa Institute offers a scholarship programme to facilitate the use of the library.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Åsa Lund Moberg for her support during my visit to Sweden and for her feedback on an earlier version of this article. Any errors in the text are entirely mine.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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¹⁵<https://nai.uu.se/news-and-events/news/2017-08-24-unesco-project-documenting-liberation-struggle.html>. (accessed May 30, 2022).