

## The Perception of Apartheid in Western Europe, 1960-1990

**Veranstalter:** Prof. Detlef Siegfried / PhD Jakob Skovgaard, University of Copenhagen; Prof. Dr. Axel Schildt / Dr. Knud Andresen, University of Hamburg

**Datum, Ort:** 07.05.2015-09.05.2015,

**Bericht von:** Andreas Kahrs, Institut für Geschichtswissenschaften, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

How did Western European societies, whose relations to South Africa varied significantly according to their respective historical and cultural ties, react to developments in the country during the apartheid era? To which extent were developments in the anti-apartheid movements connected to domestic questions and in what sense can those movements be seen as relevant actors on the way to a „global civil society“? These were some of the questions discussed at the Copenhagen Workshop.

In his keynote, CHRISTOPH MARX (Duisburg-Essen) introduced the participants to the historical background of the multi-layered relations between „South Africa and the West“, concentrating on the period of the government of Hendrik Verwoerd (1958-66). He emphasized that apartheid for Verwoerd, in contrast to a widespread perception, was not an effort to preserve remnants of the colonial era but a philosophy for the future. However, criticism from outside for Verwoerd was completely unjustified. When the off-shots of the Cold War reached Southern Africa, he took advantage of the confrontation to position his country as the „only reliable friend“ of the Western Bloc in the region. Attributing to the conflict an „apocalyptic urgency“, Verwoerd was convinced to act not only for the good of the Western world but for the continued existence of Christian and white civilization.

The second keynote was given by HAKAN THÖRN (Gothenburg). Focusing on anti-apartheid activities in Europe, Thörn presented the transnational anti-apartheid movement as part of an emerging „global civil society“. He stressed that anti-apartheid organizations could only partly be located wi-

thin the framework of the so-called „new social movements“ because important key players represented classical milieus such as labour unions and church groups. Moving to the role of the media he argued that, contrary to the perception that media coverage of events such as the massacres of Sharpeville (1960) and Soweto (1976) helped mobilize for the purpose of the movement, that the movement itself prepared the media reporting as part of the process of anti-apartheid mobilization. Thörn described the anti-apartheid movement's very characteristic action repertoire and forms of mobilization. Due its symbols, cultural productions and performances the movement could be seen as an important factor for the establishment of a „cultural turn“ in activism in the 1980s.

The panel contributions over the following two days focused on three main aspects: the relations between South Africa and Western countries, the actions of Western anti-apartheid organizations, and the issue of boycotts and sanctions. To begin with, ANDREAS KAHRS (Berlin) demonstrated how the South African government tried to influence and regulate reactions to apartheid South Africa in West Germany. By attendance of a Public Relations company and through the implementation of various PR activities, the South African government, under the leadership of the European Missions in London, Strasbourg and Bonn, aimed to establish trust-based personal relations between various political and social actors. Kahrs pointed out that the government's concern was thus not to find complete support for apartheid policies but to raise „understanding“ and „patience“ for the difficult circumstances and the necessity of implementing only gradual reforms instead of revolutionary regime change. Referring to the case of an expert hearing on the committee level in the German parliament, Kahrs showed that the South African network in West Germany reached out in almost all relevant parts of both public and political debate on apartheid.

KNUD ANDRESEN (Hamburg) focused on the conflict between „Moral and Economy“ experienced by West German and Swedish managers in South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s in the light of an emerging inter-

---

national human rights discourse. Andresen pointed out that his research project emphasizes the perspective and self-justification of the expatriate managers themselves. Andresen underlined the 1976 Soweto uprising as a turning point for the discussion on economic engagement in South Africa. Shortly after the events, the US „Sullivan Principles“ and the European „Code of Conduct“ were implemented in order to regulate certain measures towards equal job opportunities for black workers. Irrespective of political efforts to regulate economic engagement in South Africa, some businesses found the motivation to act on their own as well. The dispute about apartheid has also contributed to the fact that human rights standards in companies have become a weighty factor in the construction of a public image.

In his presentation, SEBASTIAN JUSTKE (Hamburg) focused on „West German Ministers in Southern Africa from the 1970s to the 1990s“, which is a very special form of „West European reaction“ to the apartheid system since the European actors were on site. In the early 1970s and under the organizational umbrella of the EKD (Evangelical Church in Germany), 80 per cent of the German-speaking parishes in South Africa and Namibia were looked after by West German ministers. As Justke assumed, these ministers, who experienced the „everyday life of apartheid“ over an extended period of time, formed a special type of linkage to apartheid South Africa and the occupied Namibia below the level of official and institutional relations. Justke showed how the West German ministers perceived their stay in Southern Africa as ambivalent and conflictual, often under permanent pressure to justify the job abroad in the home churches.

Applying a different approach, HANNO PLASS (Berlin) presented the case of South African Jewish activists engaging themselves in a European context. He provided an overview of his PhD project which deals with South African Jewish anti-apartheid activists in British exile. As Plass argued, their decision to combat apartheid was strongly influenced by a response to the „Jewish experience“ in the 20th century. Most of them went into exile between 1960 and 1964. Based on selected bio-

ographies he outlined the different perceptions of the emigrant's experiences. Regarding the question of „Jewishness“, Plass pointed out that many biographies contain contradictory self-descriptions. Most of the Jewish activists experienced World War II which made them more aware of racial discrimination in South Africa due to their identification with a persecuted group. He emphasized that despite the clearly recognizable impact of a South African Jewish milieu on the exile's activism and political life, it was not a feature they put on display.

JAN HANGEBRAUCK (Cologne) focused on the characteristics and effects of the international sports boycott against South Africa. Running from 1956 to 1992, the boycott's special effectiveness is a frequently discussed issue when it comes to punitive measures against South Africa from a historical perspective. After presenting a general framework for sports boycotts he stressed that especially at the beginning many big countries, such as West Germany or Great Britain, did not fully implement a boycott in terms of „banning“ South African sports teams but rather „advised“ sports institutions, themselves primarily perceived as „unpolitical“, to sever contacts with South Africa. He pointed out that sports events provided additional opportunities for anti-apartheid activists: events like the „Springbok“ Rugby tour to England were accompanied by massive protests.

In his presentation on the campaign against Barclays Bank's business in South Africa, JAKOB SKOVGAARD (Copenhagen) highlighted another aspect of the boycott question. He suggested that the consumer boycott could be understood in light of Anthony Giddens' concept of „lifestyle politics“. Although emphasizing its own position in South Africa as „anti-apartheid“, Barclays, the biggest bank in South Africa at the time, was under continued criticism from Swedish anti-apartheid organizations and the campaign against the bank was the movement's longest running campaign. Skovgaard argued that Barclays was an obvious target for everyday actions such as boycotts due to the size of the bank and the visibility of its branches. He pointed out that the self-perception of the impact of an individual's actions could be seen as an important mo-

tivating factor behind the consumer boycott. In accordance with „lifestyle politics“, Skovgaard argued, the politics expressed through the act of boycotting also serves as a channel for self-actualization.

DETLEF SIEGFRIED (Copenhagen) examined the interface between anti-apartheid activism and boycott questions. Presenting a close-up on the controversy relating to Paul Simon's 1987 album „Graceland“, he drew attention to the mutual influence between the political organized anti-apartheid campaign and the emerging global media community. When Paul Simon recorded parts of his album in Johannesburg in collaboration with a number of South African artists, he supposedly transgressed the border of the cultural boycott against the country, implemented not only by the international anti-apartheid organizations and the African Nation Congress (ANC) but also by the United Nations. Astounded by the album's success and the international media's response the exiled ANC and the British AAM delivered contradictory statements. Paul Simon's following tour, accompanied amongst others by Miriam Makeba, turned into a powerful „anti-apartheid statement“ without being explicitly political, which even reinforced the disputes inside and between the anti-apartheid organizations on this question. Siegfried advocated for an understanding of this case as an indication of the fact that it was not possible to control the world of mass media of the late Eighties in a dirigiste manner.

ROELAND MUSKENS (Amsterdam) took a closer look at the Dutch anti-apartheid movement (AABN). Due to its historical connections to South Africa and because of its size, it was one of the most important movements on the international scene. By pointing to the distinctive features of the AABN, he proposed that it ought to be regarded as „multi-“ rather than a „trans-“national movement. Following the results of his research, the initial situation in the Netherlands had been the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960. The movement consisted of church groups, Social Democrats, Communist, and Labour unions and from the onset it revealed tendencies of „pillarisation“. Yet in contrast to the global concern for democracy and equality, Muskens argued by example of

the campaign against Shell that it was very much a „Dutch fight in a Dutch arena“. International contacts and exchange, undoubtedly existent in the movement, served rather for exchange of information and network.

With reference to Jamaica's 1959 decision to introduce trade sanctions against South Africa, STEVEN JENSEN (Copenhagen) pointed out that the Western Europeans' sanction policies in this case were relatively late on the scene. Although economically an unimportant issue for the apartheid state, this decision was viewed as troublesome within the political establishment due to the fear that others would follow Jamaica's initiative. Jensen described Jamaica as a driving power in the UN debates on human rights and racial discrimination after joining in 1962. He drew attention to the fact that the European reactions to apartheid should themselves be framed within a global context. Jensen argued that the concentration on apartheid was a very „Western“ phenomenon and showed that from the perspective of other non-white countries the discussions often revolved around more general efforts to overcome racial discrimination.

In his final commentary, TOR SELLSTRÖM (Uppsala) stressed the necessity to question some alleged key assumptions, which in his opinion are still shaped by the experiences of anti-apartheid confrontations to a certain extent. He encouraged the participants to rethink, for instance, the role of actors and classical periodization. A prominent example of the former was the Swedish government, which is often portrayed as the archetype of a Western European anti-apartheid government without taking into account its very specific geopolitical policy. Regarding the latter, he argued that a shift from „reactive“ to „pro-active“ anti-apartheid politics could be a point of reference in opposition to breaks, often made along important events in South African history. In general, he stressed the significance of perceiving the international anti-apartheid movement and the international politics on South Africa in a global context where it appears as „huge but not unique“ next to Vietnam's or Chile's solidarity movements.

The debates at the conference demonstrated that the question of relations between the per-

---

ception of global conflicts and societal change inside Western Societies can be a rewarding approach. However, the usage of sociological concepts such as „global civil society“ or „lifestyle politics“ was questioned and it may be the case that these concepts are fruitful as a starting point for historical-empirical analyses only to be deconstructed or abandoned in the end. A number of contributions dealt with the relatively high impact of domestic politics on the policy formulation towards apartheid South Africa. Taking into account the fact that several presentations provided only extracts of on-going research, these aspects will be taken up again in later discussions.

### Conference Overview

Welcome and Introduction

Keynote I: Christoph Marx, Duisburg-Essen: South Africa and the West

Keynote II: Håkan Thörn, Göteborg: Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society

Andreas Kahrs, Berlin: Subsurface cooperation – the Network of West German Lobbyist for South Africa 1976-1986.

Discussant: Dorothee Wierling, Hamburg

Knud Andresen, Hamburg: Moral and Economy. West German and Swedish Managers in South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s

Discussant: Helle Porsdam, Copenhagen

Sebastian Justke, Hamburg: West German Ministers in South Africa from the 1970s to the 1990s

Discussant: Anne Folke Henningsen, Copenhagen

Detlef Siegfried, Copenhagen: Anti-Apartheid, Pop Music and the Emergence of a Global Media Community

Discussant: Andreas Eckert, Berlin

Hanno Plass, Berlin: Jews against Apartheid. The Exile in Britain 1960 to 1990.

Discussant: Louise Bethlehem, Jerusalem

Jakob Skovgaard, Copenhagen: Consumer Boycott as Private Human Rights Politics

Discussant: Alexander Sedlmaier, Bangor

Moderator: Jan Eckel, Freiburg

Steven Jensen, Copenhagen: Racial discrimination and international human rights diplomacy, 1959-1968

Jan Hangebrauck, Cologne: 'No normal sports in an abnormal society.' Characteristics, successes and limitations of protests in sport against the apartheid regime in South Africa

Roeland Muskens, Amsterdam: The Dutch Anti-Apartheid-Movement

Final Discussion

Concluding commentary: Tor Sellström, Uppsala

Tagungsbericht *The Perception of Apartheid in Western Europe, 1960-1990*. 07.05.2015-09.05.2015, , in: H-Soz-Kult 29.09.2015.