

Perceptions of Apartheid in Western Europe 1960–1990

Veranstalter: Knud Andresen / Sebastian Justke, Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte, Hamburg; Detlef Siegfried, University of Copenhagen

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For several decades, South African apartheid was a crucial concern for governments, social movements and artists in Europe as a political and societal system as well as a symbol. Investigating the reactions to apartheid as proposed by the conference thus promises insights into European societies and the manifold connections that were established by these responses.

The conference examined European responses to apartheid and their historiographical significance on three levels: First, the speakers asked how Western European societies reacted to apartheid and how these reactions changed over time. Second, the participants investigated whether it is appropriate to speak of a distinctly Western European way of perceiving apartheid. Finally, the conference aimed to contribute to a 'globalization of European contemporary history'. Examining perceptions of apartheid, so the organisers presumed, could enrich our knowledge about the international entanglements of European societies and about the changes that might have been provoked or catalysed by these perceptions. In addition, as DETLEF SIEGFRIED (Copenhagen) stressed, analysing 'perceptions' not only includes interpretations and discourses but also offers a starting point for studying the practices that followed those interpretations.

ANGELIKA EPPLÉ's (Bielefeld) keynote was a methodological contribution in which she claimed that one should understand comparisons as practices of ordering the world. Instead of simply othering those societies that are being compared one should reflect upon the *tertia comparationis*, thus becoming aware of the underlying categories and of the fact that comparisons are never neutral.

Searching for a *tertia comparationis* for the perceptions of apartheid in Western European societies, Siegfried proposed that concepts of a Western European identity were crucial for the way people reacted to Apartheid.

The first panel illustrated how experiences of Europeans living in South Africa as well as references to apartheid influenced debates on immigration, racism or international solidarity in Great Britain and West Germany. SEBASTIAN JUSTKE (Hamburg) showed how knowledge systems and ways of life formed the opinions on apartheid of West German ministers and German-speaking congregations abroad. ANDREA THORPE (Grahamstown) argued that apartheid became a point of reference in the works of Linton Kwesi Johnson, Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi in order to highlight racism in Great Britain or to fuel transnational solidarity. Similarly, TAL ZALMANOVICH (Jerusalem) demonstrated how opinions on the South African regime influenced British discussions on racism and immigration by examining the 1969 television debate on apartheid between Tory MP Enoch Powell and Bishop Trevor Huddleston. The panellists shed light on how writers and politicians decontextualized apartheid and thus paved the way for 'apartheid' as a catchphrase that could be used as a powerful political argument.

The apartheid regime on the other hand attempted to improve its image and expand its scope of action via seemingly unpolitical realms like science or economy. SAUL DUBOW's (Cambridge) keynote focused on South African relations with the world by analysing scientific cooperation in the field of astronomy. According to Dubow, the ostensibly neutral sciences could be used to showcase a process of normalisation of South African international relations. In addition, the sciences could even provide protected spaces for secret diplomacy and strategic cooperation. Dubow claimed to differentiate between apartheid-science and science under apartheid – that is between a politicised and a neutral science. However, the following discussion illustrated the controversial nature of the assumption of a neutral science in general.

The second panel pointed to the relevance of apartheid in the economic sphere. The

presentations turned to the role of companies and the effects of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Codes of Conduct (CoC) which companies, governments and the EC issued from the mid-1970s on. KNUD ANDRESEN (Hamburg) examined political influences and regulatory interventions on Swedish and West German companies that traded with South Africa. Even though companies, especially from West Germany, were rather reluctant to implement CoCs, the codes succeeded in sensitising them to discrimination. When the companies began to see apartheid as an obstacle for generating profit, Andresen argued, they accepted the political role of independent trade unions and even began to champion fundamental changes in South African race policies from the mid-1980s on. He could thus trace significant changes in practice that were caused by changing perceptions. JAKOB SKOVGAARD (Copenhagen) analysed the conflicts between Shell and anti-apartheid activists and the relevance of CSR in these discussions, claiming that CSR should be understood as a 'continuous renegotiation of responsibility' between companies, state, stakeholders, activists and consumers.

The panellists argued that the companies' and the private sector's roles in changing discourses about apartheid were previously underestimated; yet in the discussion they underlined the fact that CoC and CSR should not be misunderstood as factors leading to a straight-line success story. Andresen suggested that a critical stance could be used as a 'performance ideology' for generating profit and Skovgaard added that not implementing a CSR did not inevitably lead to negative consequences.

SIMON STEVENS (Sheffield) questioned the importance of moral motivations for economic strategies against apartheid. Stevens examined anti-apartheid boycotts in the United Kingdom and showed how the anti-apartheid movements (AAMs) popularised boycotts as an individual way of protesting. However, he emphasised that the boycotts served mainly as image politics for the Labour Party and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

The following panel shifted the focus to the

AAMs and their international entanglements. HANNO PLASS (Hamburg) analysed the role that Jewish exiles from South Africa played in the British AAM. According to Plass, Jewish exiles exercised crucial influence until at least 1975 when the movement began to transform from an expat movement into a civil rights movement. The French AAM by contrast consisted mainly of left militants who had previously been active in anti-colonial movements, as NAMARA BURKI (Paris) showed. However, Cold War divisions within the French left ultimately weakened anti-apartheid solidarity. ANNA KONIECZNA (Paris) examined the governmental perception of South Africa in France and demonstrated how both the French colonial experience and postcolonial relations to the francophone regions of Africa shaped views on apartheid. South Africa was not only considered as a partner in trade relations and the Cold War, but also as a role model and an expert for development. Nevertheless concerned about South African racism, the French government hoped to change the discriminatory regime through cultural contacts. A similarly ambivalent attitude emerged in GEORG KREIS' (Basel) presentation on attitudes towards South Africa in Swiss politics, economy, media and society. According to Kreis, many Swiss believed that the similarities between Switzerland and South Africa – such as anti-communism, federalism or elitist and racially charged assumptions of being a small 'chosen people' defending themselves in a hostile world – outweighed the differences.

VINCENT KUITENBROUWER (Amsterdam) scrutinised feelings of kinship between Dutch and Afrikaners based on the assumption of a common culture, history and race ('*stamverwantschap*'). Analysing the Dutch South African Society (NZAV) as a counterpoint to the AAM, he challenged the view of the Netherlands as a 'left-wing progressive model country' which has been equally widespread in the Netherlands of the 1970s and in recent historiography. Kuitenbrouwer drew a more nuanced picture by emphasising continuities between the colonial and the postcolonial era as well as the struggle within the Netherlands for the 'correct' interpretation of the South African regime. He il-

illustrated how discussions about the South African regime served as a background for negotiating Dutch self-conceptions and societal value systems. Interpreting the AAM as a 'very white movement', Kuitenbrouwer also pointed to colonial and racist stereotypes that continued to have effects in the post-colonial era. This may have been due to the fact that the colonial past was not negotiated within the AAM, as JAN ECKEL (Tübingen) and Kuitenbrouwer highlighted in the discussion. Andrea Thorpe and Vincent Kuitenbrouwer explained this missing historical sensibility with a lacking awareness amongst the older generation of the AAM as well as with the absence of people of colour in the AAM.

The final panel contrasted anti-apartheid efforts in popular culture with pro-South African lobbyism. Detlef Siegfried analysed the Mandela Concert in 1988, aiming at the deconstruction of the linear success story that is usually told. He presented the quarrels between the AAM and the organizer Tony Hollingsworth about the concert's degree of politicisation. Hollingsworth prevailed with his concept of global coverage and a depoliticised concert focusing on Nelson Mandela. Siegfried argued that the concert and popular culture protests triggered discussions about the nature of politics, ultimately broadening the latter to include music and lifestyle. In addition, merchandise became a means of mobilisation. Turning to national differences in Western Europe, he pointed out that the combination of pop and politics stayed strangely marginal in the West German AAM's strategy although German pop music of the 1980s was highly politicised. In the discussion, Detlef Siegfried and Jan Eckel linked the pop culture protests to the broader history of social movements, stating a shift in the movement's character from serious and angry during the 1960s and 1970s to the cheerful event-activism in the 1980s.

TAL SELA (Jerusalem) took a closer look at the paradoxical relationship between public intellectuals and protest movements. Sela argued that Jean-Paul Sartre was received as a leading voice of the French AAM, although he was not extraordinarily active compared to other intellectuals or his involvement in other liberation struggles. The AAM, how-

ever, strove to use Sartre's authority in order to make its cause more popular.

ANDREAS KAHRS (Berlin) took a genuinely different angle. Analysing the South African propaganda efforts in West Germany, he showed the formation of a pro-South African lobby – or in Saul Dubow's words: the manifestation of 'anti-anti-apartheid'. In cooperation with the South African government, this lobby organised for instance 'information tours' that claimed to give the participants 'unbiased information' about South Africa. The participants should get a feeling of discussing change instead of supporting apartheid. These efforts changed significantly when they started to reach out to non-conservative circles during the 1970s. In his concluding remarks, CHRISTOPH MARX (Duisburg-Essen) added that the African National Congress and the apartheid regime mutually learned from each other's propaganda strategies.

Opening the final discussion, Knud Andresen pointed to two dominating debates during the conference. Firstly, he stressed the matter of 'whiteness' in the AAMs, taking up Dubow's thesis that many Western Europeans understood the apartheid regime as an example of a Western capitalist democracy gone wrong. Sebastian Justke argued that perceptions are crucially framed by images of the self and questions of belonging. HÅKAN THÖRN (Gothenburg) underlined the discrepancy between discussing racism abroad and ignoring racism at home. Secondly, Andresen highlighted the impact of popular culture, emotions and lifestyle on forming perceptions, identities and self-images. Two more topics were discussed intensely: the question of effective ways of interference and the question when the end of apartheid began.

The final discussion outlined fields for further research. Firstly, Western Europe as the entity of reference could be scrutinised by analysing perceptions of apartheid in Southern or Eastern Europe or outside of Europe. It could also be asked whether the contemporaries did or did not simply other the South African system, thus avoiding discussions regarding their own racially charged presuppositions. The idea of a distinctly West-

ern European way of perceiving apartheid remained debatable, with most contributors holding a sceptical view. Secondly, while the Cold War was present in the discussions, perceptions of apartheid should also be linked to interpretive patterns like the „North-South divide“ and matters of decolonization. South Africa seemed to transcend these international conflicts in multiple and particular ways. Whether the assumption of South Africa as a special case transcending the usual divides is applicable to perceptions of apartheid is an issue for future examination. Thirdly, the conference called attention to colonial legacies, continuities to the colonial past and matters of ‘whiteness’ within the AAMs.

Overall, the conference illustrated the potential of ‘perceptions’ as a research approach by proving that it enables to examine a broad scope of actors and to scrutinise how events are interpreted, reframed and utilised in debates on adjacent topics. However, the discussions also made it apparent that the analysis of perceptions has to go hand in hand with the analysis of actions that those views inspired. Perceptions can be both an indicator for changes in groups or societies that have already begun and a factor for societal developments. Thus, further research on perceptions should pay special attention to the relationships between changing perceptions, actions and changing societies.

Conference Overview:

Detlef Siegfried (Copenhagen): Introduction

Keynote I

Moderation: Kirsten Heinsohn (Hamburg)

Angelika Epple (Bielefeld): Beyond Othering. Analyzing the Practices of Comparing

Panel 1: Paths of Perceptions

Moderation: Christoph Marx (Duisburg-Essen)

Sebastian Justke (Hamburg): Perceptions On-site, Apartheid and Lifestyles. West German Ministers and German-language Congregations Abroad

Andrea Thorpe (Grahamstown): Apartheid in the Black British Imaginary. Literary Solidari-

ties and Transnational Touchstones

Tal Zalmanovich (Jerusalem): Screening Solidarity in Late 1960s Britain. Racism, Anti-Apartheid, and a Televised Debate

Keynote II

Moderation: Michael Wildt (Berlin)

Saul Dubow (Cambridge): Northern Platforms, Southern Vistas. Astronomy and Apartheid

Panel 2: Conscience or Capital? Human Rights, Ethics & Economy

Moderation: Jan Eckel (Tübingen)

Knud Andresen (Hamburg): Multinational Corporations in South Africa and the Code of Conduct. Commitment or Political Intervention?

Jakob Skovgaard (Copenhagen): Naming and Shaming. Anti-Apartheid and Corporate Social Responsibility

Panel 3: International Entanglements in the Apartheid Conflict

Moderation: Alexander Sedlmaier (Bangor)

Hanno Plass (Hamburg): Jewish Exiles in London and the Beginnings of the Anti-Apartheid Movement

Simon Stevens (Sheffield): The Turn to Boycotts and Sanctions in the Struggle against Apartheid

Anna Konieczna (Paris): Entangled Perceptions? France, Francophone Africa and (Anti-) Apartheid

Panel 4: Experiences, Memories and Apartheid

Moderation: Dorothee Wierling (Berlin)

Vincent Kuitenbrouwer (Amsterdam): Lingering Feelings of Kinship between Dutch and Afrikaners during the Apartheid Era

Namara Burki (Paris): Beyond Perceptions. A Study of the French Solidarity Movement with the Anti-Apartheid and Liberation Struggle in South Africa, c. 1970-1990

Georg Kreis (Basel): The Swiss Perception of Apartheid-regime. More Similarities than Differences?

Panel 5: Reactions. Public Awareness of

Apartheid

Moderation: Axel Schildt (Hamburg)

Detlef Siegfried (Copenhagen): Anti-Apartheid and the Politicization of Pop Music. Controversies around the Mandela Concert 1988

Andreas Kahrs (Berlin): Defending Apartheid or Fighting Anti-Apartheid? South African Lobbyism and Propaganda in West Germany

Tal Sela (Jerusalem): Intellectuals and the Public Debates on Apartheid. The Case of Jean-Paul Sartre

Concluding Remarks & Final Discussion

Moderation: Knud Andresen (Hamburg)

Christoph Marx (Duisburg-Essen) / Håkan Thörn (Gothenburg)

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