

The Liberation struggles in Southern Africa and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society: Suggestions for future research

Paper for

**Concluding workshop for Nordic Africa Institute's Documentation Project,
26-27 November, Pretoria, South Africa**

ABSTRACT

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This paper suggests that the post-war network southern African liberation movements in and solidarity movements could be seen as transnational 'movement of movements'. In my book *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society*, I argue that given the number of people that supported the transnational anti-apartheid movement, as well as its geographical dispersion and its achievements, there is no doubt that it was one of the most influential social movements during the post-war era. Existing as a transnational movement for more than four decades, its impact was not limited to the South African context, as it created transnational networks, organizations and collective action forms that made – and still makes - an impact on national as well as transnational political cultures. In line with this, I argue that the broader network of southern African liberation movements and liberation movements proves a relevant case for recent theorising and research on transnational movements and global civil society.

Most research on the liberation and solidarity movements has focused on its *national* aspects, looking for example at the *national* liberation movements of southern African countries or the *national* solidarity movements in Britain, Australia, USA or the Nordic countries. As national movements played a significant role, and national contexts were crucial for the dynamic of the struggle, this research has been important. (Considering that there were anti-apartheid activities in more than 100 countries, there is indeed even more research to do about national movements and contexts.) However, research on one of the most most crucial aspects of this movement, its construction of *transnational* networks and forms of action, is largely lacking. The significance of the transnational anti-apartheid movement has often been mentioned in the context of social movement studies and international relations, but it has only in a few cases been researched and theorised.

In this paper I will use some the findings in my own research about the transnational anti-apartheid movement in order to formulate a number of suggestions regarding further research on the transnational aspects of the southern African liberation struggle. In the first section, I will suggest a theoretical framework, drawing from globalization theory, social movement studies and postcolonial theory. The second part will focus on the relevant historical and structural contexts, including the condition of postcoloniality, the Cold War and the increasing importance of globalised media structures for post-war politics; the third part will discuss the interaction within the network, suggesting that internal power struggles ('the struggle within the struggle') and tensions were as important as consensus building for the dynamic of the transnational movement network. I will finally conclude by pinpointing important gaps in existing research on the transnational relations of the liberation struggles in Southern Africa, and underlining some research questions that has emerged from the paper's discussion.