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*The Decolonizing and Post-colonial Experiences*

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## Abstracts of U.Évora International Seminar

### Transnational Connections in Southern Africa II *The Decolonizing and Post-Colonial Experiences*

#### Table of Contents

<b>I. UÉ-TCSA II PROGRAM</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>II. ABSTRACTS</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Chris Saunders</b> , <i>Kongwa and After: Camp experiences of SWAPO and the ANC</i>	<b>9</b>
<b>Arrigo Pallotti</b> , <i>The untold heroes of Southern Africa's liberation: villagers-training camp relations in Mgagao (Tanzania)</i>	<b>13</b>
<b>Heider Adegar Fonseca</b> , <i>Southern African Transnational Lives? An Angolan "Freedom Fighters" prosopography (1961-1974).</i>	<b>15</b>
<b>Christian Williams</b> , <i>Education in Exile: International Scholarships, Cold War Politics, and Conflicts among SWAPO Members in East Africa, 1961-1974</i>	<b>25</b>
<b>Corrado Tornimbeni</b> , <i>Frelimo's international diplomacy and the Italian connection. Continuities and ruptures from the liberation struggle to the peace process (and beyond)</i>	<b>27</b>
<b>Erik Kennes</b> , <i>The Katangese Tigres as a regional phenomenon.</i>	<b>31</b>
<b>Paulo Lara</b> , <i>Presentation of the Project "ANGOLA - Pathways to Independence" and the film "INDEPENDENCE"</i>	<b>33</b>

## Transnational Connections in Southern Africa II

<b>Justin Pearce</b> , <i>Global ideologies, local politics: The Cold War as seen from Central Angola</i>	<b>39</b>
<b>Jeremy Ball</b> , <i>Depicting Cold War Aggressors in Angolan Monuments</i>	<b>49</b>
<b>Maria Paula Meneses</b> , <i>From Bandung to armed struggle: solidarities that shaped Southern Africa</i>	<b>63</b>
<b>Daniel T. Kaiser</b> , <i>Transnational Cooperation and the Use of Violence in Mozambique's Struggle for National Liberation</i>	<b>73</b>
<b>Alba Martin Luque</b> , <i>The mobilizing image: Eduardo Mondlane and the information struggle for the self-determination of Portuguese Africa.</i>	<b>87</b>
<b>Hans Erik Stolten</b> , <i>Nordic Solidarity with South Africa. New Insights on Social Movements and Governments.</i>	<b>93</b>
<b>Maria Cristina Pinto</b> , <i>The making of the UPA 'Angolan Refugees' Assistance Service (SARA, 1961-1963)</i>	<b>105</b>
<b>III. SPEAKERS (BIO)</b>	<b>129</b>

## I. UÉ-TCSA II PROGRAM

I conclude that, in an attempt to influence international actors in sanctioning Portugal, Eduardo Mondlane, together with the team at FRELIMO's Department of Information and Propaganda, imagined, created and circulated what I call a "mobilizing image" for Mozambique. Finally, I would like to discuss this early definition of the concept of "mobilizing image" in the contest of Southern Africa nationalist struggles. More precisely, I will like to ask to what extent this "mobilizing image" could be a specific communication tool which characterized the information and propaganda strategies of the national liberation movements that won the state-power in the region.

***Nordic Solidarity with South Africa. New Insights on Social Movements and Governments.***

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**The History of Solidarity**

For considerable periods, important parts of the resistance against apartheid took place outside South Africa. Many of the country's most brilliant intellectuals worked from the outside in, actively involved in the anti-apartheid movements of the countries of their temporary residence. There were links from all corners of the world to the freedom struggle in the form of humanitarian and political support, and popular boycott actions. Writing as a Danish historian, engaged in the anti-apartheid movement of that time, I have had a wish to understand how this global, social movement developed in Scandinavia, to which extend it was a part of the left universe, and how this past solidarity has shown to have effects reaching into the future. It has been important for the Nordic countries, among other nations, that the history of their anti-apartheid movements should be recorded, but it is even more important for the peoples of

Southern Africa to have access to those records to be able to fully understand their history. The global part of this history is also part of their national heritage and self-knowledge.

In retrospect, everybody will agree that apartheid was an inhuman system, and the international solidarity with South Africa during the years of struggle could therefore today appear uncontroversial and as a matter of course. Periodically, it was actually a rather unproblematic and rewarding task to raise the public opinion. Feelings were easy to catch just after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, the Soweto uprising in 1976, and the murder of Steve Biko in '77. The suppression of the township rebellions in the mid-late 1980s was also met with widespread international condemnation. But to maintain a sustainable movement in western countries over long periods of time from the 1950s to 1990s, often under strain from established circles of public power, demanded great persistence.

The whole area of liberation theories and strategies is still quite underinvestigated by historians. In contrast to members of most other new or old social movements, such as trade unions; citizen's rights movements; women's liberation movements; peace movements; or environmental movements, participants in western international solidarity movements can only seldom portray themselves as directly affected victims of conflict or repression. On the contrary, the notion that some fellow countrymen, or in fact everybody, in the western native country profits by the exploitation of the third world is often more or less directly integrated in the foundation of solidarity movements.

Mobilisation of a broad host of followers to the anti-apartheid movements, therefore could not be produced out of self-interest, but had to be created on the basis of a genuine moral appeal. Histories of liberation struggle contributed to a gradual change of consciousness. However, such circumstances also create the possibility that the work of western NGOs could take the shape of charity rather than mutual solidarity. It also heightens the risk that the interest in job security within NGOs and development aid industries could become a main motivation for the support. Samora Machel once said that international solidarity is not an act of charity but an act of unity between allies fighting on different terrains toward the same objectives.<sup>30</sup> In the 1970s and '80s, many had an underlying expectation that a broad series of combined victories for the liberation- and solidarity moments could have led to fundamental changes in both the South and the North, but that kind of utopian optimism has been dwindling since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

A striking feature of the first 10 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall (however, less pronounced in the Nordic countries) was the decline in popular political solidarity with the third world. The 1990s were marked by a higher degree of eurocentrism and inward-looking individualization.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> For another definition of the difference, see Galeano, Eduardo, *Upside Down: A Primer for the Looking Glass World*, St Martins Press, 2001, p. 312: "Unlike solidarity, which is horizontal and takes place between equals, charity is top-down, humiliating those who receive it and never challenging the implicit power relations".

<sup>31</sup> Steen Christensen, *Mod undertrykkelse - for frihed: Socialdemokratiet og befielsesbevægelse i Afrika, Latinamerika og Asien efter 1945*, Fremad/AB, 2001, p. 15.

Focus was on the immediate near area and on areas of strategic interests, while brutal conflicts in Africa got less attention, after this continent had lost much of the importance it had during the Cold War confrontations. Many conflicts seemed more chaotic and difficult to label than before. Intra-African resource conflicts stretching across colonial borders, triggered by the withdrawal of western and eastern bloc stakes, made it less obvious, who to protest against.

In the field of solidarity, the triumph of neoliberal globalisation meant that transnational companies spearheaded a new confidence in trade more than in aid, which promoted foreign investment and control more than political support of national solutions (despite much talk of partnership and local ownership).

This development also had some brighter sides though. Since NGOs were no longer considered a threat to the system, more ordinary development aid was canalised this way, which resulted in paid activist positions and more professionalism. But then again, this tended to make the organisations more dependent of the national foreign ministries than of grassroots mobilisation. Nowadays Nordic trade unions do not use their own funds for political solidarity; instead, they profit from state funding by running development projects.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> This is the experience told in the corners of the NGO-world, where I set foot. To prove it lays outside the frames of this book, although, I am convinced it could be done through comparisons of evaluations of aid agencies, UN statistics, NGO-balance sheets, foreign policy accounts of export subsidies, bilateral aid versus multilateral, budget support versus project support, tax policies in "recipient"-countries, investment patterns, etc.

### **The Character of the Global Anti-Apartheid Movement**

The anti-apartheid movement of the 1970s and 1980s was a truly transnational social movement, however, one pillar of strength was actually the determination of most AAMs to ensure that they had a broad domestic appeal. The AAMs' essential quality was to be potential mass movements inside their own country. Boycotts and sanctions-demands came to be an essential element in the international movement's strategy. Economists and economic historians will continue to argue over the extent to which sanctions distorted the South African economy and over how heavily economic difficulties weighed in de Klerk's decision to approach the negotiating table, but former apartheid cabinet members have admitted that disinvestment effectively helped immobilise apartheid.<sup>33</sup>

### **A Typical Representation: The Life of a Nordic AAM**

What were the typical characteristics of a popular, political, solidarity organisation, then? The Danish AAM, Landskomiteen Sydafrika-Aktion (LSA, later Africa Contact) found itself in a distributing frame between the irritability and aversion of the established political system and the strains stemming from the organisation's own wild-growing, partly

<sup>33</sup> Finance Minister Barend du Plessis estimated in 1985 that shortfall in foreign investment capital has reduced annual growth rate from possible 5.5 percent to 3.5 percent "in recent years" in *Washington Post*, 1 September 1985. See also F.W. de Klerk, *The Last Trek - A New Beginning. The Autobiography*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1999, p. 114. See also George W. Shepherd Jr. (ed.), *Effective Sanctions on South Africa: The Cutting Edge of Economic Intervention*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1991.

uncontrollable mobilisation of engaged youth.<sup>34</sup> The activities of the movement alternated between levels of the desk and of the street, between blockades and conferences, between paroles of the street theatre and substantiated requests to the government about a change of policy. The aim was to bring the liberation struggle into ordinary peoples' everyday life by creating a broad participation, which exceeded the narrow forms of the traditional political system. The movement succeeded in the sense that only very few Danes were not moved by the basic optimism of freedom struggle and international solidarity. Even if there was broad sympathy for actions, which aimed to discredit any kind of support to the illegitimate South African regime, it was the clear desire of the LSA to avoid forms of action, which, if generalised, could have isolated the movement. This often became a theme of discussion between leadership and activists. Also the question of political broadness, common touch, and real influence versus demonstrative marking of thorough socialist perspectives, together with a possible widening of the agenda to support of other kinds of liberation movements or to saving the world in general, lead to internal conflicts. Lack of patience and expressionistic attitudes to politics among the activists sometimes put the leadership in the role of a social educator. Through reading of

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<sup>34</sup> Patrick Mac Manus, "Mellem kreativitet og kriminalisering. Landskomiteen Sydafrika-Aktion 1986-1990" in Kathrine Toftkær Larney, Patrick Mac Manus, Gorm Gunnarsen and Morten Nielsen (red.), *Aktivister mod Apartheid - Dansk Solidaritet med Sydafrika, Sydafrika Kontakt*, København, 2004. This is an anthology with departure in papers from a seminar organised by Gorm Gunnarsen at the English institute at the University of Copenhagen.

historical texts in study groups and subcommittees, the movements closed in on its official aim of "democratic, non-violent traditions and a high level of information". The substance of most political protest is to a high degree of symbolic nature. The aim of the boycott campaign against Shell in Denmark was not only to undermine the apartheid economy, but just as much to demoralise, isolate, and weaken the legitimacy of the regime. Also in their concrete aims and means, solidarity organisations had to be particular. In the case of LSA in Denmark, undisciplined protests in 1989, including a break-in at the South African Embassy, gave the right wing an excuse for demanding severe counter action. At one point, 21 members were arrested in a police raid, and the police tried to deploy severe laws of internal security, which could give up to six years of prison.<sup>35</sup> The public debate over this event has parallels to more current discussions on "war against terrorism," as the ANC was then still labelled a terrorist organisation by some western government institutions.

#### **The use of Solidarity Histories in connection with the Transitional Aid of the Nordic Countries**

After 1990, and especially after 1994, political solidarity changed to other, more official and direct state-to-state forms of transitional aid, even if many of the former, international, anti-apartheid organisations continued their activities as private aid organisations, consultants, friendship societies, contact organs, or service providers. From time to time,

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<sup>35</sup> The Danish Criminal Act, paragraph 114, nowadays called the terrorism act.

especially in the first 5-10 years after 1994, official interest in the matters of the new South Africa from the surrounding world was rather high. It was, at times, marked by a turbid compound of philanthropic aid and business interests. During the transformation process, the Nordic governments succeeded in establishing their respective traditions/histories of support by following up the popular, political solidarity with a continued, more official, transitional aid and by pointing out their own national merits in a favourable light. Goodwill was established, which have shown to be worth its weight in gold. This development has hardly been to the disadvantage for South Africa, but it has probably been even better for the donor countries.<sup>36</sup> A kind of Janus Head of solidarity, one could say. A breach between intentions and realities can be traced in the transitional aid of the Nordic countries.<sup>37</sup> Officially, it has all been about positive employment effects in South Africa, but in reality “more important” considerations were in play. For the Nordic manufacturing enterprises, the bargain has been over state subsidised profits; for the Nordic trade unions, not only international solidarity, but also workplaces at home and reformist influence on the industrial scene in South Africa were at stake. Even the Nordic NGOs cannot be considered unselfish. Their idealistic mobilisation of former

<sup>36</sup> Sweden for instance, exported for 3.31 billion rand to South Africa and imported for 736 million rand from there in 2002 according to South African Yearbook 2002/03 p. 333.

<sup>37</sup> Danida, Analysis of the Spin-Off effects of Danish Development Support (in Danish), T&B Consult, Copenhagen, Oct. 1994.

times increasingly became mixed with professional considerations concerning career positions and prestige.<sup>38</sup>

In the case of solidarity history, it has shown possible to build the legend, that the anti-apartheid support of the Nordic countries was especially protracted, loyal, and heroic. However, despite that Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark can call attention to particular areas where they came first with support to anti-apartheid activities; it was only after prolonged political pressure from domestic solidarity movements that the Nordic countries, in the last years before 1990, became champions regarding sanctions policies against the apartheid regime. A change of policy that domestic business opposed to the end. The later, official writing of this history has, in combination with the transitional aid, shown to be an asset for Nordic export industries, and in the first post-apartheid years, Nordic export to South Africa rose significantly.<sup>39</sup> Trade delegations from Nordic countries headed by cabinet ministers and royalties repeatedly visited South Africa to discuss combinations of aid and export. Even former de facto enemies of the freedom struggle were embraced by the South African government in a way that undermines the history of solidarity. One Danish export attempt that did not succeed was aimed at selling Danish corvettes in hard competition with other countries. Sweden

<sup>38</sup> In my opinion, this can be read out of publications like this: Niels Bentzen, Josette Cole, and David Sogge, “Funding for transformation in times of transition. A report of a midterm review of the INTERFUND/Ibis Transitional Development Assistance Programme in S.A. 1994-98”, Ibis, 1998.

<sup>39</sup> Udenrigsministeriet (Danish Foreign Ministry), *Markedsorientering Sydafrika og Sydafrika Markedsprofil*, 1995.



had more luck. As part of an arms deal, which is still very controversial in South Africa, the Swedes got an order from the South African government, which included a portion of JAS Gripen fighter planes.<sup>40</sup> Most people from the former solidarity movements would probably agree that South Africa had very little need for these advanced jetfighters and that the many billions of rand would be better spend on poverty reduction. Economic promises in the shape of extensive, but unreliable, counter purchases spoke for the deal. So did the history of solidarity. It is an intriguing question, if the more convincing documentation of Sweden's solidarity history has played any role in the matter of export goodwill. For some, this may seem trivial or provincial, others may see it as pure speculation, but actually, it is worth an independent historiographical study in its own right. There were real differences in Danish and Swedish foreign policy. Sweden directly supported the ANC. Denmark only indirectly and discreet. But, there were also differences in the way in which history was used. In the possibilities, in the levels of consciousness, and in the resources allocated for the purpose. The more harmonised agreement between NGOs and Foreign Affairs Department also gave the Swedes a better hand.

### **The end of solidarity?**

It looks to me as if genuine international solidarity has grown weaker in today's world. The relation, where a solidarity movement could be seen

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<sup>40</sup> [http://www.gripen.com/index\\_2.asp](http://www.gripen.com/index_2.asp).

as an external dimension of a liberation movement's national struggle, seems be out-dated, partly because the possibilities of national liberation policies as such appears to have reached an end. Nevertheless, the task of the oppositional, social movement is essentially the same: To create empathy, to make people identify with others, to question the legitimacy of an established order under which people suffer.<sup>41</sup> Or as some German researcher-activists have put it: "*Solidarität ist die Zärtlichkeit der Völker*".<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, Robbie Shilliam (eds.), *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line*, Routledge, 2014.

<sup>42</sup> "Die Zukunft der Solidaritätsbewegung: Tema, Internationale Solidarität", *Blätter Des lz3w*, pp. 23-46, 1994.