



Håkan Thörn. *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. xiv + 251 pp. \$74.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4039-3937-1.

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A Movement of Movements: From Anti-Apartheid to Global Justice?

Focusing on the apartheid opposition in Britain and Sweden, this study by Håkan Thörn (Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology, Göteborg University, Sweden) discusses the emergence of transnational social movements, globalization, and “mediatization” in the post-colonial period. In so doing, Thörn makes a significant contribution to the expanding literature on these contemporary political phenomena. Through a historical review of the anti-apartheid movement—described as “no doubt one of the most influential social movements during the post-war era” (p. 5)—and with empirical examples from the two countries, the author renders the often abstract discussions on globalization tangible. Taking issue with the hyper-globalizationist view that national politics and states no longer matter, he advances our theoretical understanding of the contexts in which transnational movements appear and develop.

A principal purpose of the study is “to find out how transnational communication in the context of the anti-apartheid movement was carried out, what made it possible and how transnational strategies, experiences and identities were articulated in the discourses of the movement” (p. 19). As a contribution to the analysis of the organized global mobilization against apartheid South Africa from a sociological perspective, in addition to treating the dimensions of globalization, this study highlights the power of the media and of collective action.

The book is divided into two major parts, respectively discussing anti-apartheid as a social movement, focusing on different contexts and levels of action, with an emphasis on the boycott campaigns against South Africa; and the press debate on apartheid/anti-apartheid in Britain and Sweden, choosing five particular moments in South African history, with a fo-

cus on the presence of the anti-apartheid movement in the debate. While the second part, obviously, draws from established British and Swedish newspapers, the discussion of the anti-apartheid movement in a global context is largely informed by archival material and interviews with prominent activists. For the study, Thörn carried out interviews with no less than fifty-five representative members of the anti-apartheid movement in the two countries and elsewhere, including the United States as well as the United Nations.

The author builds upon the works on transnational advocacy networks and social movements made by Margeret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, as well as by Ron Eyerman and Andy Jamison, although placing the emergence of the new social movements earlier than the former and broadening the approach of the latter.[1]

Tracing the roots of the transnational opposition to apartheid in established “old” social movements (such as the labor and church movements) and their increasing internationalization during various campaigns in the post-war era, Thörn characterizes the wider anti-apartheid movement as “a movement of movements” (p. 8), emerging from a combined political globalization from both “below” and “above” (p. 48) and consisting of “an extremely broad alliance of groups and organizations involving varying ideological commitments and collective identities” (p. 69). Whereas the broad alliance regularly gave rise to tensions and “struggles within the struggle,” the constituent parts of the transnational movement were held together through “a shared collective identity” and “the construction of an imagined community” (p. 69). “Solidarity” was the central identity concept, defining the anti-apartheid movement’s ideas and practices (p. 207). In addition, while the role of

the media certainly was important, Thörn concludes that it “must not be over-emphasized, as so often is the case in studies of transnationalism and globalization” (p. 196). Instead, he argues that increasing mobility across borders by “activist travellers” (who paved the way for “extended face-to-face interaction” [p. 197] and were involved in exchange of information and experiences) played an important role for the development of the global anti-apartheid movement.

Following the author, globalization in this sense does not mean that the nation as a political space is fading away. On the contrary, different national political traditions and institutional conditions shaped the anti-apartheid expressions in Britain and Sweden, just as they, at the national level, are influencing the present transnational social movements. In this respect, Thörn joins political scientists such as Jean Grugel, who argue that processes of democratization in spite of increasing global pressures are still nationally determined.[2]

It is, however, also in this connection that the major weakness of the study appears. Although Thörn criticizes Eurocentric assumptions in the literature on new social movements, referring to the “lack of a theoretically developed global perspective on contemporary collective action” (p. 8), the author himself falls into the Eurocentric trap by including the South African nationalist movements—primarily the African National Congress (ANC), but also the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)—within the global anti-apartheid movement alongside the European solidarity formations (p. 13). Individual members of the liberation movements in exile did, as he points out, take part in the activities of the anti-apartheid solidarity organizations and the South African, British, and Swedish formations were united in the common goal of ending the apartheid system. As political entities and governments-in-waiting, driven by a quest for state power (in the case of the ANC and the PAC including by military means), the role, agenda, strategy, and tactics of the national liberation movements were, however, essentially different from those of the international solidarity organizations.

A number of weak comparisons and arguments would have been avoided had this distinction clearly been made. It is, for example, hardly meaningful to compare the ANC’s skills in “venue shopping” (p. 69), i.e. the practice to adapt the political discourse to dif-

ferent institutions or arenas, with that of the British and/or Swedish solidarity movements. More importantly, the marginalization of the anti-apartheid issue from the public space in Britain and Sweden in the late 1960s and early 1970s was not, as argued by the author, a consequence of the solidarity organizations’ “loss of respectability” due to an emphasis on direct action (p. 157), but of the “silence of the graveyard” following upon the crushing of the internal ANC and the wider anti-apartheid opposition in South Africa, as well as of the dominance of the wars in the Portuguese colonies and, above all, in Vietnam. By putting the pro-active South African political formations on a par with the re-active European solidarity organizations, the dividing lines between subjects and objects, as well as between causes and effects, become unclear. In the process, the generalization of the findings from this study on the anti-apartheid movement to the present anti-globalization movement, which is not influenced/guided by political formations aiming at the seizure of power in a given nation state, and which shares less of a collective identity and is considerably more heterogeneous, also becomes less relevant. In this respect, Thörn’s concluding sentence that there are “continuities between the transnational anti-apartheid movement and (...) the global justice movement” (p. 214) seems rather far-fetched. Nevertheless, as also noted by him, “action forms and networks that were formed and developed in the anti-apartheid struggle are present in this contemporary context, making the transnational anti-apartheid movement an important historical resource” (p. 206).

Well researched and referenced as regards works on globalization and social movements, the study, unfortunately, contains a number of factual errors. While most of them are of no consequence to the author’s conclusions, they nevertheless constitute unnecessary flaws in an otherwise very readable text. Some of the errors refer to the ANC or to South African events. As the author is Swedish, surprisingly many also refer to Sweden.

This is not the place to proofread the text. With regard to the ANC, it should, however, *inter alia* be noted that the South African liberation movement, naturally, never belonged to the Conference of Nationalist Organizations in the Portuguese Colonies (CONCP), as stated on page 54. It is further incorrect that the co-operation with the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) “collapsed” in 1970 (p. 55), and that the ANC was given time by radio stations in

Tanzania and Zambia “in the early 1970s” (p. 100). To the movement’s great frustration, this was only granted later in the decade.[3] (As Thörn comments that the PAC lacked a similar facility, it could also be noted that both the ANC and the PAC, from the 1980s, had access to UN radio transmissions to South Africa.) On page 115, it is said that the first UDF activists visited Britain in 1981, while the launch of the United Democratic Front only took place in Cape Town in August 1983. In addition, the ANC’s cultural ensemble Amandla was not “developed out of Mayibuye” (p. 120), a group set up in London in the mid-1970s, but formed as a separate entity among Umkhonto we Sizwe trainees in Angola at the very end of the decade.

With regard to Sweden, it is stated that the Social Democrats “came to power” in 1932 (p. 87). While it is true that their long reign, which was to last until 1976, began that year, the Social Democratic Party held government power as early as in 1920, and again in 1921-23 and in 1924-26. The Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden, is not funded solely by the Swedish government (p. 44), but by all the five Nordic governments, i.e. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Moreover, it was not the official aid agency SIDA (Swedish International Development Authority) that, in 1964, set up the influential CCHA (Consultative Committee on Humanitarian Assistance) (p. 84), but the Social Democratic government. More important is the fact that the conservative Moderate Party, contrary to Thörn’s remarks, did not form part of the Swedish government that, in 1979, passed legislation banning new investments in South Africa (p. 77). Neither was it a “non-socialist coalition,” but a minority government formed by the Liberal Party. In the case of Sweden, it is, finally, surprising to read that it was a rock concert held in Göteborg in November 1985 which “definitely re-established the ANC as the main South African movement organization” (p. 184). In reality, the ANC’s position in the anti-apartheid debate and with regard to both non-governmental solidarity and official assistance had been hegemonic since around 1980. As the sole recipient of government funding the annual disbursements to the ANC, for example, had grown from 16 million to 49 million Swedish Kronor between 1979-80 and 1985-86.[4]

These critical comments, however, should not dissuade those interested in the emergence of transnational social movements, globalization, and mediation from reading this important contribution. The

history of the global anti-apartheid movement has only begun to be written. As more and more empirical data become available, there will be increasing opportunities for testing the validity of Thörn’s theoretical conclusions, which, in the book under review, are almost exclusively based on the British and Swedish examples. A significant publication in this regard is the forthcoming volume in the the Road to Democracy series by the South African Democracy Education Trust, covering the international dimensions of the anti-apartheid struggle. To be published in late 2007 or early 2008, this comprehensive volume will include national studies on Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, India, the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic, Cuba, and the People’s Republic of China, as well as case studies on the United Nations and IDAF.

Notes

[1]. M. E. Keck and K. Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998); and R. Eyerman and A. Jamison, *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1991).

[2]. J. Grugel, *Democratization: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[3]. In addition to Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), the ANC’s Radio Freedom established regular transmissions from Luanda (Angola) and Lusaka (Zambia) in 1978. Similar facilities were in 1979 granted by the government of Madagascar and later by the government of Ethiopia. The radio units received financial support from the Swedish government.

[4]. The text contains several other factual flaws and/or points missed. Quoting (p. 223 n. 28) an interview with Denis Herbstein, the author states that the London-based International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF) did not receive any state funding, although he then adds that “through the UN” IDAF “received funding from other governments, including the Swedish.” In reality, however, IDAF—where SIDA’s Director General Ernst Michanek and the Swedish anti-apartheid activists/opinion-makers Gunnar Helander and Per Wästberg played prominent roles—was almost entirely dependent on financial assistance from Sweden and the other Nordic countries. The annual allocations from the Swedish government alone covered roughly half of IDAF’s budget. Moreover, they were not channeled via the

United Nations, but extended directly to the organization. On page 89, Thörn compares the British Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) with the Africa Groups in Sweden (AGIS), finding that the former, at the end of the 1980s, had 184 local groups and 14,000 members, while the corresponding figures for the latter were only 33 groups (plus 10 for the Swedish Isolate South Africa Committee) and around 2,000 members. However, he does not relate the figures to the populations in Britain and in Sweden. Had he done so, he could have reached an interesting conclusion. As the population of Britain was roughly seven times bigger than that of Sweden, the relative weight of both local groups and membership was thus

more or less the same in the two countries. A final comment could, for curiosity's sake, be made with regard to Danny Schechter, the well-known U.S. media and anti-apartheid activist. According to Thörn, who met Schechter in New York in 2000, he first went to South Africa in 1968. However, while at the London School of Economics, Schechter had paid a visit to the country the previous year. After contacts in London with Ronnie Kasrils of the ANC (today Minister of Intelligence in the South African government), he covered the funeral of the ANC President-General Albert Luthuli in Groutville north of Durban in July 1967. Communication by Danny Schechter to Tor Sellström, Durban, July 2007.

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