Abstract

Anti-Apartheid and the emergence of a global civil society

The global anti-apartheid movement mobilised millions of people around the world. People living in various countries like Japan, Holland, India, Sweden, Guyana, Britain, Ghana, Jamaica, Cuba, New Zealand and the United States took part in transnational collective action in solidarity with the liberation struggle in South Africa. Given the number of people involved, as well as the geographical spread and the achievements of the movement, there is no doubt that it was one of the most influential social movements during the post-war era. Given the significance of this movement, the actual research that has been done on the global Anti-Apartheid movement has been meagre. Most research has focused on its national aspects, looking at the Australian, American or British anti-apartheid movement. Building on my book Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society (Palgrave Macmillan 2006/2009), I argue that the movement most crucial aspects of this movement was its construction of transnational networks and forms of action. In the talk, I will discern the crucial forms of organisation, mobilisation and processes of identification that constituted anti-apartheid as a transnational social movement. In this historical context a new, global political space emerged, constituted by three interrelated phenomena that played a crucial role in facilitating global anti-apartheid action: a) the new media which creates new possibilities for global communication, the creation of b) transnational networks of individuals, groups and organisations, made possible not only through the new media, but also by face-to-face interaction facilitated by the new possibilities of travel. Not the least important, these networks must also be seen in the context of decolonisation and post-colonial migration and, c) the rise and consolidation of new “global” documents and institutions, predominantly Human Rights and the UN.