Introduction: national politics in a global context

Any analysis of the role of the nation state must consider the process of globalization. Although the concept of ‘globalization’ was quite recently established in the social sciences, it must be regarded as a historical process intrinsically connected with the history of colonialism and modernity. Contrary to many assertions, globalization does not by definition equal the erosion of the nation state. Rather, the global dissemination of the nation was a crucial aspect of a certain phase of globalization, originating in the late eighteenth century, and culminating during the decades that followed the Second World War. The era of the anti-apartheid movement was marked by the contradictions between processes of nation state building (predominantly in the South) and transnationalization.

The dominant perspective in social movement studies, focusing on political opportunity structures (POS), has tended to focus on a national level, underestimating the relevance of a global perspective on social movement interactions, networks and contexts. It is not just the issues and the networks of new movements that have become increasingly global during the post-war era. The structural processes that created the preconditions for the emergence of new forms of collective action were transnational, rather than bound to any specific nation state. Further, looking at the case of anti-apartheid, the different opportunities and constraints facing anti-apartheid organizations in the context of specific nation states, were to a large extent determined by the belongings of those states to different international communities and their interests, as well as by their locations in wider global and historical contexts. Thus, the analysis of the national contexts in this chapter will not stop...
at the national level, taking the opportunity structures of the two nation states as the ultimate reference point, but rather shift emphasis, relating the analysis to the different positions of the two states in a historically instituted global context.

As with the transnational movement, the national anti-apartheid movement’s internal relations were marked by internal struggles as well as consensus building. The ‘common ground’ of the solidarity anti-apartheid movements in Britain and Sweden was largely national identity. This might contradict the fact that a crucial element of anti-apartheid identity was internationalism, as movement spokespersons claimed universal values and spoke in terms of human rights. It might even be argued that in relation to certain discourses of British and Swedish nationalism, the anti-apartheid movement was explicitly anti-nationalist. Nevertheless, inherent in the construction of national solidarity movements is an appeal for the solidarity of one nation with another. This is for example recognized by Christabel Gurney, key movement AAM activist from the 1970s and onwards, as she in an article on the emergence of the British AAM states that the South Africans that initiated AAM in Britain ‘had the vision to see that, if it was to grow, the Movement must put down British roots’. Another way to put it is that international solidarity in Britain at the time would come easier if the persons appealing for it had a white face – and spoke with a British accent. The same goes for Sweden. Anyone seeking as broad support as possible in order to build and sustain a movement in the context of a national civil society must find strategies that in one way or another appeals to ‘the nation’. This could however be done in various ways, and the identities of the movements in the two countries were shaped through articulating relations to allies and enemies in different ways, under the influence of differing national historical and cultural contexts.

In this chapter, I will investigate these processes through discussing and analysing the practices and the relevant contexts of two key anti-apartheid organizations in Britain and Sweden, the British AAM and the Africa Groups in Sweden (AGIS) – focusing on four themes: (1) the (changing) relations of the two states to South Africa in connection with their positions in relation to the global contexts of post-coloniality and the Cold War (2) the relations between the movements and the states in the respective countries (3) the relations between the dominant national political culture and the movement culture of which anti-apartheid action was part (4) the relations and tensions between the two organizations and other national and international anti-apartheid SMOs.