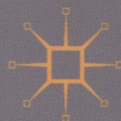


# THE FOUNDATIONS OF ANTI-APARTHEID

**LIBERAL HUMANITARIANS AND TRANSNATIONAL  
ACTIVISTS IN BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES, c. 1919-64**



**ROB SKINNER**

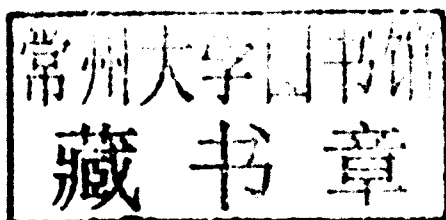


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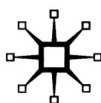
**Liberal Humanitarians and Transnational  
Activists in Britain and the United States,  
c.1919–64**

Rob Skinner

*Teaching Fellow, Department of Historical Studies, University of Bristol, UK*



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*For Jake, Jessica and Sam*

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# List of Abbreviations

AAM	Anti-Apartheid Movement (UK)
ACOA	American Committee on Africa
AEM	African Education Movement
AFSAR	Americans for South African Resistance
AME	American Methodist Episcopal Church
ANC	African National Congress
APS	Aborigines Protection Society
BCC	British Council of Churches
CAA	Council on African Affairs
CAO	Committee of African Organisations
CARDS	Campaign Against Racial Discrimination in Sport
CCIA	Commissions of Churches on International Affairs
CCSA	Christian Council of South Africa
COPAI	Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CRJ	Campaign for Right and Justice
FASA	Football Association of South Africa
FIFA	International Federation of Association Football
FOR	Fellowship of Reconciliation
ICAA	International Committee on African Affairs
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union
IDAF	International Defence and Aid Fund
IMC	International Missionary Conference
LMS	London Missionary Society
MCC	Marylebone Cricket Club

MCF	Movement for Colonial Freedom
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress (South Africa)
PSA	Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Brotherhood
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SACI	South African Church Institute
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SALP	South African Labour Party
SANNC	South African Natives National Congress
SATLC	South African Trades and Labour Council
SATUC	South African Trades Union Council
SAUF	South African United Front
SPG	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel
TUC	Trades Union Congress (UK)
UDC	Union of Democratic Control
UN	United Nations
UNIA	United Negro Improvement Association
WARS	Western Areas Removal Scheme
WCC	World Council of Churches
WSCF	World Student Christian Federation
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association



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# 1

## Introduction

### **The pariah state**

Twentieth-century South Africa is as rich, engaging and challenging a theme as any comparable field of contemporary history. It has been possible to read the broad sweep of events, the trajectory of deeper social and cultural change, and the subjective histories of individual agency that go to make up this history as emblematic of a wider struggle for human freedom, to re-shape the former world of colonialism and empire into a new era marked by universal values of justice and political liberty. It is no coincidence that the demise of the apartheid regime was a factor in the rightly derided notion that the last decade of the twentieth century constituted the 'end of history'. What better symbol for the ultimate triumph of liberal democracy than the end of apartheid?

Although we can easily set aside such a teleological model of history, an exploration of political developments in South Africa over the course of the past century continues to offer a number of challenges for the historian. Looking back over the debates, discussions and outright quarrelling that have shaped our understanding of the South African past, one is struck by the degree of political engagement and activism that has informed this process; there is almost a sense that 'doing' South African history requires a statement of intent, of political values and ideology. Perhaps this is no bad thing. It is sufficient to note, however, that behind all this fire and light has been the ever-present theme of apartheid and racial supremacy. It is this issue that has, in many ways understandably, dominated historical research, to the extent that it appears practically – and possibly morally – impossible to consider writing a history of South Africa that is not framed by the question of apartheid.

A similar argument may be applied to the way in which South Africa has been positioned within the broader history of the twentieth-century world. All too often, and not simply in popular history or media discourse, South Africa has been treated as an exceptional case, a counter-example to a generalised history of self-determination, decolonisation and the struggle for liberation. In shorthand, the apartheid regime became the pariah state against which the progressive march of democracy and human rights could be measured. In analytical terms, the position of South Africa in the world after 1945 was one shaped by the growing strength of what has been described as the 'global norm of racial equality'.<sup>1</sup> The rise of a normative standard of racial equality coincided with the elaboration of a discourse of human rights associated with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and with the declining legitimacy of colonial forms of rule. As the biological definition of race ceased to have positive value for the human sciences, so the belief in systems of differentiated sovereignty, based on racialised notions of capacity to rule, gave way to the universal right of self-determination and democratic representation. As a result, the system of apartheid, and the struggle against it, came to occupy a significant position within the moral framework of Western liberal democracy.

### **The moral cause**

The moral dimension of anti-apartheid claims is one that signals the legacy of nineteenth-century humanitarianism. As such, campaigns against apartheid must be understood in relation to a tradition of social protest and activism that may be traced back to the anti-slavery campaigns of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century. Shared values of solidarity with 'distant others' and shared tactics of consumer boycott allied to the lobbying of officials appear to indicate very real connections between the anti-apartheid and its earlier humanitarian forebears. In both cases, the appeal to moral standards of universal justice was central. However, the moral framework for anti-apartheid campaigns was not a straightforward reflection of global norms, let alone an expression of the natural right of liberty.

There are some grounds to argue that the moral dimension of anti-apartheid was as much functional as it was expressive. In the British case, the fundamentally moralist tone of anti-apartheid campaigns might be seen as a reflection of a political culture that gives special privilege to 'morally-inspired protest'.<sup>2</sup> In a system of residual rights, protest focussed on the 'higher' issue of political and social injustice in South

Africa is accorded greater legitimacy than more base motives of group interest. In this sense, the condemnation of apartheid was contingent upon the rules of public protest in Britain, rather than constituting a fundamental moral issue in itself. However, while this may provide some degree of explanation for the almost universal acceptance of the immorality of apartheid (which was of course entirely separate from debate around the methods required to bring about the demise of the system), it does not provide a sufficient answer to the powerful moral strand within anti-apartheid discourse around the world. Again, part of the answer returns us to the establishment of human rights as a norm for international relations, neatly illustrated by the text and timing of the Declaration of Conscience in 1957 (see Chapter 5).

The moral force of anti-apartheid also derived from the characteristics of the prominent individuals around whom the transnational networks of activists began to coalesce during the 1950s. Anglican priests such as Trevor Huddleston, Canon Collins and Michael Scott, although marginalised figures within the church itself, saw anti-apartheid protest as a moral obligation that was at least partly a consequence of their religious vocation. The public profile of such campaigners was also a consequence of the particular symbolic strength of the missionary figure within the South African political imagination.

Hendrik Verwoerd, speaking in a radio broadcast to the South African nation in December 1958, talked of the 'disturbance of misunderstanding' that 'foreign' missionaries had brought in the nineteenth century to South Africa.<sup>3</sup> He was reproducing a central theme of nationalist discourse: that liberal humanitarianism propagated by meddling outsiders had been fundamentally destructive to 'natural' social relations in Southern Africa. At the same time, of course, Verwoerd was passing judgement upon those contemporary critics of apartheid who had contributed to tensions between the South African government and the 'English-speaking' churches. The missionary, as an icon, was a key element of nationalist rhetoric, identified with the misguided liberal policies rejected by the planners of apartheid and seen as a dangerous and destabilising force that provoked unnecessary resistance to government policy.

The nineteenth century missionary, encapsulated in the figure of the 'notorious' John Philip, was moulded by 'settler-nationalist' histories of South Africa into a central actor in the narrative of South African history, as a symbol of the corrupting influence of the liberal tradition.<sup>4</sup> The missionary figure became the template by which to define and decry the activities of later Christian anti-apartheid activists. Alexander

Steward, for example, in his apologia for apartheid *You are Wrong Father Huddleston*,<sup>5</sup> presented missionaries in the nineteenth century Cape as the architects of a 'pattern of interference from abroad' that had continued through to the mid-twentieth century.

There was an alternate mythology, however, in which mission humanitarians became the embodiment of a lost tradition of enlightened liberalism – most extensively developed by social and economic historian W. M. Macmillan,<sup>6</sup> who presented Philip as 'the principal means of vindicating and gaining acceptance for the enlightened principles which underlie the advance towards political and social freedom in the Cape Colony'.<sup>7</sup> These notions continued to inform South African liberalism well into the 1950s. Indeed, in 1952 both Trevor Huddleston and Ambrose Reeves had identified themselves with Margaret Ballinger's public call for a return to 'the liberal tradition that prevailed for so many years in the Cape Colony'.<sup>8</sup> The anti-apartheid priests of the 1950s thus saw themselves among the defenders of the Cape tradition, and found themselves cast in a role pre-determined (if not over-determined) by competing historiographical traditions. They occupied a space in social and political networks that was already a site of conflict between two major and mutually antagonistic white intellectual positions. The activist Christian priests of the late 1940s and 1950s therefore stepped into a role that was in part pre-determined by historical convention and deeply inscribed by conflicting versions of the South African past.

The moral force of the anti-apartheid movement might therefore be seen as deriving from the nature of some of its most prominent pioneers, who were themselves cast in symbolic roles determined by the contesting political discourses within South Africa. The centrality of Christian activists in the emergence of anti-apartheid also, however, demonstrates the material importance of religious networks in the shaping and re-shaping of the moral debate around racial segregation and apartheid. Church and mission networks provided well-established international channels for the exchange of information, ideas and material resources, as well as enabling the movement of individuals between South Africa and the outside world. This was true of powerful institutions such as the Anglican Church and missionary organisations, which included (at the start of the twentieth century) black institutions such as the American Methodist Episcopal Church. It was also the case that, in the earliest stages of its formation, the transnational anti-apartheid network was able to draw particular support from Christian pacifist movements, notably the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, whose

members provided a network of contacts between the US, South Africa and Britain.

The anti-apartheid movement was thus provided with both a moral and material framework by Christian and mission networks. The movement was not a development of Christian networks alone, however, for it emerged out of the intersection between the webs of Christian, anti-colonial and the internationalist Left networks. It is clear, however, that the anti-apartheid movement provides an illustration of the ways in which networks of activists contribute to, rather than merely reflect, normative changes.

### **Anti-apartheid and global networks**

One of the fundamental aims of the anti-apartheid movement was, of course, the isolation of South Africa, politically, economically and culturally. While the degree to which this was successful, measured in terms of its tangible effect on the apartheid state, will no doubt continue to be a subject for debate,<sup>9</sup> the ambition itself demonstrates the extent to which South Africa was (or was felt to be) an integral part of global networks of power. Histories of the British empire have highlighted the strategic, cultural and social significance of South Africa, with much emphasis on the way British imperialism was crucial to the formation of the modern South African state in the years preceding, and in the aftermath of, the South African war of 1899–1902.<sup>10</sup> Discussion of Anglo-South African diplomatic relations – from Union in 1910 to the severing of Commonwealth links in 1961 – has likewise testified to the continuing importance of South Africa for British officials.<sup>11</sup> For some time now, historians have cast empire in terms of the inter-linked networks of trade, ideas and culture, marked by the movement and interaction of officials, settlers and ‘gentlemanly capitalists’.<sup>12</sup> The value of South Africa to these patterns of exchange is evident in its integration within ‘imperial networks’, which developed in the nineteenth century, but maintained their strength through to the years following the Second World War.<sup>13</sup>

The emergence of the anti-apartheid movement from the 1960s has also tended to be defined in terms of the activities of networks that created space for the development of a new ‘transnational political culture’ in the late-twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> It is even possible to argue, as Thörn does by implication, that the development of the anti-apartheid movement demonstrates the link between this new form of political culture and the process of decolonisation. In Britain, then, opposition

to apartheid – as an embodiment of the inherent racism and oppression of colonialism – may be seen as one of a series of crucial factors that shaped the emergence of a radical, anti-authoritarian, political culture during the 1960s.<sup>15</sup>

The transnational connections that were crucial to the development of anti-apartheid were not, however, without precedent. While Thörn argues, following Keck and Sikkink, that the emergence of transnational anti-apartheid networks from the 1960s transformed the power of human rights discourse, it is important to understand that these networks had long historical roots reaching back to nineteenth century humanitarianism. As Klotz has suggested, the ‘experiences of the abolitionists and anti-apartheid activists call into question the *novelty* of contemporary globalization’.<sup>16</sup> This is not to suggest that anti-apartheid was part of a golden thread of activism that stretched from the campaign against slavery, but that a history of the transnational anti-apartheid movement illustrates the transition from imperial networks to global civil society.

The transnational connections that helped shape the anti-apartheid movement developed from the array of connections – official and informal, economic and political, material and ideological – that were formed through the elaboration of imperial authority during the nineteenth century. Work on mission humanitarians, for example, suggests that networks ‘distinguishable largely by the centrality of principled ideas or values’ have long played a significant role in mediating South African connections with the outside world.<sup>17</sup> Just as Keck and Sikkink suggest that modern ‘advocacy networks’ extend opportunities for access to international systems of power and the mobilisation of resources, so interconnected networks – be they humanitarian reformers, officials, or settlers – provided access to an imperial space in which ideas about power, property and identity were contested and constructed. As Lester has shown, tensions between the ‘competing discourses of colonialism’ that circulated through imperial networks became evident when humanitarian reform and mission Christian universalism were supplanted by settler representations of inherent racial difference. In both cases, we see the intersection of metropolitan and colonial discourses within an imperial frame of reference.<sup>18</sup>

To an extent, the model of transnational networks provided by Keck and Sikkink offers a conceptual framework within which to understand the historical networks explored by Lester, Hall and others. However, there are key distinctions, not least around the ways in which networks affect notions of sovereignty. For Lester, whose work concludes with a

discussion of the extension of sovereignty in the eastern Cape, imperial networks were a space in which ideas about the technology of government were forged with reference to a developing sense of 'Britishness'. For Keck and Sikkink, advocacy networks operate in a space in which notions of sovereignty have begun to be undermined, or at least have become an issue for debate.<sup>19</sup> Imperial networks, then, helped shape ideas of 'Britishness', strengthening and extending national sovereignty. Transnational networks, meanwhile, operating in what might be called 'global civil society', undermine the value of national identities and sovereignty. The intersection between global discourses of rights and national discourses of identity and sovereignty are therefore of some significance for a study of the development of anti-apartheid. As Thörn contends, an examination of the anti-apartheid movement forces us to address the 'Eurocentrism' evident in some studies of social movements, in which movements are connected with particular stages of social and economic 'development'.<sup>20</sup> It also requires us to confront the ways in which questions about sovereignty and national identity form critical points of tension in networks that connect activists in the 'north' with those in the 'south'.<sup>21</sup>

## Nationalism and solidarity

Thörn asserts that the key principle around which transnational anti-apartheid activism formed, the 'central identity concept' of the movement, was 'solidarity'.<sup>22</sup> The concept, however, is difficult to define, and Thörn identifies a number of approaches to 'solidarity' in the testimonies of activists, ranging from a sense of collective self-interest, through Christian (or humanist) identification with the suffering of others, or a kind of ideological affinity in practice. These multiple meanings signal, for Thörn, a tension between the universalist implications of solidarity as a community of shared ambitions and ideals, and the particularism evident in the sense of solidarity defined as one group of national citizens 'working for' South African movements. Behind the assertion of solidarity there was, therefore, the unarticulated but problematic question of national identity.

One definition of nationalism sees it as a set of 'social claims' articulated in the name of a wider population.<sup>23</sup> The claims of anti-colonial nationalism focussed on political rights within particular territories, and international anti-apartheid networks could do no more than support those claims. There was, nevertheless a language of 'identification' employed by those outside South Africa who sought to further



the democratic and sovereign rights of South Africa's disenfranchised black population (and those who did so within South Africa). Thus, the transnational anti-apartheid movement incorporated a contradiction between the universalist, moral, democratic rights emphasised by international solidarity movements and the more particularist, 'people's right to govern' emphasis of Congress.

One interpretation of this contradiction leads towards an assertion of the fundamental rapacity of Western movements, both official and informal. British groups such as the Africa Bureau, for example, could therefore be seen as part of a wider process by which anti-colonial nationalism was 'recast' by a variety of means that ranged from accommodation through to outright suppression.<sup>24</sup> This argument takes us to the fringes of credibility, assuming as it does a kind of monolithic colonialist enterprise that enveloped all forms of interaction with the political movements in the south. However, there is some merit in considering the ways in which the nascent anti-apartheid movement was part of a broader metropolitan tendency to discipline anti-colonial movements. Support was, for example, linked to a series of continually monitored measures – the advocacy of non-violent resistance, the emphasis upon liberal rather than socialist internationalism, and the rejection of Communist influence. To a degree, then, anti-apartheid activism during the 1950s was marked by a form of attenuated solidarity, which privileged certain groups and figures over others – the Congress Movement, not the Unity Movement, for example. Of particular importance was the influence of Albert Lutuli, who as President of Congress represented a form of Christian, non-violent resistance to apartheid that was highly attractive to international observers. When Lutuli was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1960, it was for his 'fearless and incorruptible' advocacy of non-violent protest in the pursuit of justice.<sup>25</sup> As much as it celebrated the force of peaceful resistance, the award also signalled fears of a descent into violent racial conflict.

However, for many anti-apartheid activists, the concept of solidarity was defined by identification with the aspirations of anti-colonial nationalism. This was of particular significance in the mid-1950s, when African nationalism was viewed by many as a dangerous phenomenon. Against the example of the non-violent civil disobedience of the Defiance Campaign, for example, could be set the alleged horrors and barbarism of the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya. Solidarity with anti-colonial nationalism in South Africa was, therefore, a radical move that nevertheless sought to make demands of nationalists themselves, as the 'objects' of solidarity. Identification with a peoples' struggle for