

‘The benefits of solidarity: Swedish Social Democratic women’s experiences in the anti-apartheid struggle’

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International solidarity permeated the Swedish labour movement in the second half of the 20th century, and was particularly emphasised during the leadership of Olof Palme in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. While Swedish support for liberation movements in southern Africa, Latin America and elsewhere are well-known, this paper turns the act of solidarity activism on its head, by asking what Swedish Social Democratic women gained from its collaboration with women in the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC) from 1960 to 1994.

Based on archival research in Sweden and South Africa as well as interviews with prominent politicians, the paper will pay particular attention to connections made between women from the two organisations, and how solidarity activities came to shape their careers and, in some cases, propel them to prestigious political office.

By partially recreating SAP and ANC women’s social and political networks, the paper will emphasise the importance of cross-border activism for women’s mobilisation, and how crucial pioneering role-models are for the implementation of broadly defined feminist reforms around the world. Using the labour movement’s anti-apartheid activism as a lens, the paper will show how members of these two political organisations created an imagined community that benefited them both. It will also argue that there are links from 20th-century women’s activism to present-day discussions about feminist foreign policy.