

Non-Traditional Diplomacy: Cultural, Academic and Sports Boycotts and Change in South Africa

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Introduction

The academic, cultural and sports boycotts imposed on South Africa in the last half of the 20th century were sustained international efforts to press the country to accept fundamental political change. The boycotts arose from concerns over specific apartheid policies, but eventually became part of a much larger, multi-textured effort to achieve far-reaching alterations in South Africa's political dispensation. Proponents saw the boycotts as efforts based on moral principles. Their goal was to bring home the costs of apartheid to white South Africans, thereby encouraging them to withhold support for apartheid and instead promote a radical restructuring of the South African political order. The boycotts emerged from a tradition of efforts to achieve decisive political change without recourse to the coercive power of military-style force. Boycott proponents evolved their tactics — and their goals — over time, in response to changes in the larger picture of political and security order in Southern Africa.

Boycotts by individual countries, multilateral national groups — and most especially non-state actors — have a long historical lineage. Americans can easily recall the 1773 'Boston tea party' — the dumping of British imported tea into Boston harbour as part of a larger boycott of British goods and taxes in the years before the American Revolution. (This occurred 100 years before the word 'boycott' became the term for such actions.)

¹ JB SPECTOR was, at the time of writing this chapter, an American diplomat who had worked extensively on international cultural and educational exchanges as well as press relations in South Africa in 1975–76, 1989–92 and 2001–03. The views expressed in this paper are solely the views of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the US government. This paper also represents an initial treatment of a longer work now in progress. The author looks forward to the opinions, insights and observations of readers to assist in the preparation of the larger work.

Since the 20th century, boycotts have included international coalitions of states acting upon non-state actors to affect yet another state; non-state actors seeking to persuade a group of states to act to promote change in the internal policies of yet another state; and efforts by coalitions of international non-state actors (sometimes with the assistance of individual states or international organisations) to bring pressure to bear on the government of a particular state. An example of the first category is the Arab League's attempts at retaliatory action against American firms trading with Israel. An example of the second is the campaign by international human rights/civil rights non-governmental advocates to press for a boycott of Zimbabwe in the 2003 Cricket World Cup, so as to compel Zimbabwe to change its internal policies. For the third, one could look to campaigns by various European academic associations to end educational exchanges between the rest of Europe and Austria when a neo-Nazi party entered into a coalition with the ruling government.

Alternatively, domestic non-state actors can initiate an internal boycott organised around a particular economic activity, in order to induce policy alteration or even a regime change, while drawing upon international public opinion to sustain their efforts and add pressure on that regime. Examples of this include Gandhi's 'March to the Sea' to protest a British monopoly tax on salt in British India, and the Southern Christian Leadership Council's bus boycotts in the American South — a campaign that effectively heralded the start of the American civil rights struggle. In both cases, while the actions of internal actors did not immediately produce fundamental domestic change, they contributed to a much broader campaign that did, even as they also elicited significant international opprobrium directed against the ruling structures. The table shown below offers a simple typology of boycotts by type, actors and objective.

Despite variations, policy-directed boycotts appear to share several central features. First, they aim to achieve a change either in government policy or in the actual regime. Second, they believe in the efficacy of working beyond the usual international legal order — or the formal texture of the domestic legal system — to achieve such results. Third, they hold a broad, often unvoiced, belief in the efficacy of boycott techniques over the long term in producing policy or regime change without overt physical coercion. In that respect, boycott proponents draw upon a body of doctrine holding that such

transformation can be achieved through non-violent, collective means if enough people and groups can be brought to act in concert. Moreover, there is a conviction that the power of the boycott derives from both from the actions of its proponents and from its impact on the larger body of public opinion — first nationally and then globally.

| Proponent's goals vis-à-vis regime | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| <i>Actors</i> | <i>Change policy</i> | <i>Punish regime</i> | <i>Isolate regime</i> | <i>Change regime</i> |
| Intra-state non-state group/s | Montgomery bus boycott | Boston tea party | Cyber protests against US over Iraq | Gandhi's march to the sea |
| | | | | → |
| External non-state group/s often in association with, or in support of, domestic groups | Academic and cultural boycotts against SA Sports boycott | Sports boycott | Olympic expulsion Rugby tour boycott | Post 1983 UN cultural boycott (includes UN listings) |
| External state and multi-state group + external non-state actors? + internal non-state actors? | Putative academic boycotts against Israel re Palestinian policies in 2002-03 | Putative sports boycotts against Zimbabwe in 2002-03 | Arab League trade boycotts against firms dealing with Israel | Academic boycotts against Haider's Austria in 1990s |

Academic, sports and cultural isolation of South Africa — in sync with economic sanctions, dis-investments

Proponents of boycotts — whether they acknowledge it or not — are heirs to a theory of public action that takes shape in modern times as a fusion of eastern and western political (and religious) traditions. Henry David Thoreau's *Essay on Civil Disobedience*² (written to explain his protest against a tax to support the Mexican War) was probably the first document to articulate this theory in its modern guise. Thereafter, Mahatma Gandhi drew upon such ideas in his formulation of *satyagraha* (passive resistance) as an affirmative political doctrine.³ And Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.'s expositions and sermons on the impact of faith on politics, as in 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail' and 'I've been to the Mountaintop' drew in turn upon the views set out earlier by Gandhi and Thoreau.⁴

These efforts also draw upon what Harvard's Joseph Nye has called 'soft power' — the ability of culture, ideas, the mass media, and economics to act as important forces in influencing policy — without the coercive nature of military power.⁵ Until the end of the Cold War, international relations analysts often saw soft power as marginal compared with the nuclear or conventional balance of forces between the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Warsaw Pact. The impact of culture, ideas, and the media — even economics — was regarded as having relatively little effect on the essential shape of the international system. However, following the fall of the Soviet empire, and once again after 11 September 2001, analysts are focusing greater attention on the impact soft power and non-state actors can have on the international system. (Examples of powerful soft agencies range from anti-globalisation campaigns, the Internet, the WTO, to al-Qaeda.) Although much attention is still focused on new military technologies, the technologies of communication are also amplifying the impact of non-state actors on the world.⁶

² Thoreau HD, 'Essay on civil disobedience' in Witherall EH (ed.) *Thoreau: Collected Essays and Poems*. New York: Literary Classics of the United States Inc., 2001, pp.203–224.

³ Fischer L (ed.), *The Essential Gandhi: His Life, Work, and Ideas: An Anthology*. New York: Vintage Books, 1983.

⁴ King ML Jr., 'I've been to the mountaintop', in Warner M (ed.), *American Sermons — The Pilgrims to Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Literary Classics of the United States, pp.876–888.

⁵ Nye J Jr., *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

⁶ Taylor C, 'Day of the smart mobs', *Time*, 10 March 2003, p.53.

Parallel to Paul Kagan's 'fog of war,' the profusion of international actors and their often-conflicting goals, strategies and effectiveness can help redirect some attention towards examinations of how (or whether) sports, educational and cultural boycotts and related strategies can achieve significant policy changes. New calls to impose boycotts on behalf of particular causes also encourage examinations of these strategies. Such analysis is both timely and relevant to a fuller understanding of the complete international system.

However, a thorough examination of the full panoply of boycotts used as policy tools is beyond the scope of this paper. The more limited focus of this discussion, therefore, is to look at how major international actors collaborated with South African internal actors (to articulate, design, advocate and use the pressure of sports, educational and cultural boycotts) in bringing pressure to bear on South Africa during the National Party's rule. As the goals of the different actors coalesced, their efforts were aimed, first, at provoking changes in policy implementation; then alterations in the actual policies; and finally, replacing the regime itself.

The origins of the boycotts

Following consolidation of the National Party's rule and the evident failure of armed resistance efforts to bring the apartheid state to its knees, and given the general unwillingness of the world community to take decisive steps to alter the behaviour of the South African government, apartheid's international opponents considered alternative means. The Reverend Trevor Huddleston, after his expulsion from South Africa for his opposition to the Nationalist regime, appears to have been the first to make a specific call for an international sports boycott of South Africa.⁷ He did this first in a 1954 newspaper article, and then more extensively in a book published in 1956.⁸

Huddleston's call led to slowly increasing international pressure to restrict South Africa's international sports participation, including its exclusion from the Olympics Games in 1968. Ironically, it was South Africa's unwillingness to allow Basil D'Oliviera, the formerly South African 'coloured' cricket star, to tour South Africa as part of the

⁷ Denniston R, *Trevor Huddleston*. London: Macmillan Publishing, 1999, p.149.

⁸ Huddleston T, *Naught For Your Comfort*. London: Collins Publishing, 1956.

planned Marylebone Cricket Club's 1968 tour that moved the issue from back burner to front page. The South African prime minister of the time, John Vorster, handed boycott proponents a decisive weapon when in a public speech given in Bloemfontein he argued:⁹

We are not prepared to receive a team thrust upon us by people whose interests are not the game, but to gain political objectives which they do not even attempt to hide. The team, as it stands, is not the team of the MCC selection committee but of the political opponents of South Africa.

Initially, for many, the goal of the sports boycotts was not regime change or a challenge to the legitimacy of the South African state. Rather, it was to punish South Africa's unwillingness to select integrated teams and to manage its international teams through non-racial organising bodies. Most especially its refusal to play integrated teams from other nations provided the impetus for a boycott.

These calls for sports boycotts must be seen from the perspective of their time, rather than from the vantage point of the post-apartheid South Africa. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was still just possible to envision a South Africa where the recent electoral victories of the Nationalist Party could be rolled back at the polls and its policies unwound. Similarly, it was difficult for any but the most optimistic to imagine a South Africa driven to the wall by any of the relatively ineffectual African liberation movements. The popular mobilisation efforts and the underground military wings of the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan-African Congress (PAC) had been crushed internally, and a ring of Portuguese and other European colonies still walled South Africa off from the newly independent states of west, central and east Africa. Rhodesia had not even declared Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), let alone become Zimbabwe.

Support for the pleas made by the ANC president, Albert Luthuli, for sports, cultural or trade boycotts, building on Huddleston's earlier calls, appeared to represent one of the few ways in which pressure could be exerted on South Africa.¹⁰ In fact, until the early 1960s, the only significant international boycott against South Africa had been the World Court's decision about South Africa's administration of

⁹ Oaks D & C Saunders *et al.* (eds), *Illustrated History of South Africa — The Real Story*. Pleasantville, NY: Reader's Digest, 1988, pp.450–451.

¹⁰ Denniston R, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

South West Africa, and the resultant calls for a limited arms embargo against South Africa.

Academic boycotts drew their first impetus from British academic associations. In 1965, nearly 500 academics from 34 British universities signed a declaration to protest the banning orders issued against anti-apartheid academics Jack Simons and Eddie Roux as well as growing racial discrimination in higher education institutions in South Africa. The signatories also pledged that they would not apply for, or accept, academic posts in South African universities that practised racial discrimination.¹¹

Central to this call for a boycott was the close relationship that existed at that time between the British and South African academic worlds, following the colonial and Commonwealth pattern. Most of South Africa's most renowned academics (especially at the English-speaking universities) had personal and professional links to British institutions. Indeed, South African institutions were connected to those in the UK through a broad array of relationships, exchanges and historical ties. American academic connections with South Africa were much weaker and less visible, and so the push for an American academic boycott against South Africa took longer to gain momentum.

It was only in the late 1970s and early 1980s that American universities and academics embarked on a concerted push for an academic boycott targeting South Africa. They did this under pressure from academics whose world view was anchored in the experiences of Vietnam and Watergate and whose organisational skills had been sharpened by the civil rights struggle and anti-Vietnam War protests. Often the academic boycott operated in tandem with the well-publicised disinvestment campaigns. These initiatives put pressure on university endowments and city and state pensions investments in American companies with significant business ties to South Africa and were played out in public and in the media.

The official US government Fulbright exchange programme ceased sending American exchange lecturers to teach in South African universities by the early 1970s. However, the selection of South

¹¹ 'Declaration by British Academics', <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/historyboycotts/academic65.html>.

Africans for Fulbright scholarships to attend American universities continued, as it was regarded as a contribution towards the creation of an educated cohort that could benefit a new non-racial South Africa — whenever that might emerge.¹²

The cultural boycott began slightly differently. Here British organisations again took the lead — reflecting the largely British texture of imported culture in South Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. As noted earlier, Reverend Huddleston was probably the first to call for a cultural boycott when he wrote,¹³

I am asking those who believe racialism to be sinful or wrong ... to refuse to encourage it by accepting any engagement to act, to perform as a musical artist or ballet dancer...

In recognition of the increasing severity of apartheid, several British cultural organisations determined that their members should not perform in South Africa, beginning with the British Musicians Union in 1961. Two years later, 45 British playwrights instructed their literary agents to refuse performing rights, 'where discrimination is made among audiences on grounds of colour.'¹⁴ In subsequent years, a growing number of American, British, Irish and European cultural groups adopted similar policies. This prevented the works of playwrights of the stature of Arnold Wesker, Arthur Miller and August Wilson from being seen in South Africa until the 1990s.¹⁵

¹² The author participated in the administration of the Fulbright Programme during the period 1975–76 and 1989–92. This comment reflects the common assumptions of those involved in the direction and administration of the programme at the Embassy and in Washington and New York exchange offices.

¹³ As quoted in Sher A & G Doran, *Woza Shakespeare*. London: Methuen Random House, 1997, p.218.

¹⁴ United Nations Center Against Apartheid, 'Some important developments in the Movement for a Cultural Boycott Against South Africa.' New York: UN, 1983.

¹⁵ A personal comment: When I first came to South Africa in 1975, I was astonished at how strongly English this country appeared culturally. When I returned in 1987, I was astonished at how much more American in texture the local culture had become — a partial reflection of the impact of TV — and especially American TV — as well as a decline in British cultural content due to the boycott. It also appeared to be a result of an increasingly vigorous embrace of American urban black culture by black (and some white) South Africans via recordings and broadcasts — often through the nominally independent broadcasts of Bop-TV that reached most of Soweto. This produced a curious irony in the impact of the cultural boycott — discussed in the main text.

The boycotts evolve

As they evolved, the boycotts appear to have drawn sustenance from several interacting phenomena.

\$ First, in comparison with South Africa's geopolitical position in the 1960s, its situation in the mid- to late 1980s was more problematic. By then opponents could argue that the Nationalist government and apartheid's days were numbered. The colonial cordon around South Africa had disappeared, giving liberation movements easier access to South Africa. The Soweto uprising of 1976 and its aftermath — the rise of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the 'civics' movements of the mid-1980s — re-energised the internal opposition. Further, the growing impact of economic sanctions, the international banking credit squeeze that followed PW Botha's Rubicon speech, and growing disinvestment movements on university campuses beyond South Africa all led to the realisation that externally generated pressure could be marshalled against South Africa to bring about changes in policy law and even regime.¹⁶

\$ Second, the political activism of prominent figures like Harry Belafonte and Quincy Jones generated interest in, and support for, a list kept by the UN of well-known entertainers who had visited South Africa, despite the growing momentum of the cultural boycott. While being listed by the UN's Centre Against South Africa carried no specific punishment, it did ensure negative publicity — anathema to any entertainer interested in securing bookings and performances in the future. Frank Sinatra's cancellation of a planned performance tour to South Africa is a case in point.¹⁷

\$ Third, leading African American entertainers — Bill Cosby, Stevie Wonder and Quincy Jones, among others — were becoming new cultural icons in South Africa. That these personalities were prepared to protest against South African policies, to refuse to visit South Africa, and to prevent their works from being made available to TV, cinema or video and record/CD stores may have given the average white South African yet another reason to reconsider support for apartheid.¹⁸ A similar trend occurred in sport, as

¹⁶ Kasrils R & V Brittain, 'No room for justice', *The Guardian*, 21 December 2002, among many other commentators.

¹⁷ Sher A & G Doran, *op. cit.*, p.219.

¹⁸ During the late 1980s, SABC-TV management repeatedly asked American Embassy officials to use their good offices to encourage American television producers to help them obtain the rights to broadcast such shows as 'Sesame Street' on SABC's main channels.

international protests over attempts to give South African teams international competition opportunities helped to encourage a growing sense of international isolation in South Africa.¹⁹ Simultaneously, it appears to have given black South Africans a sense that a much larger community outside the country understood their travails, and was doing something to end them.²⁰

§ Fourth, increasing numbers of entertainers began to participate in public political efforts directed against South Africa — and they began to have greater impact. A descendant of America's civil rights struggle and the anti-Vietnam protests, the anti-apartheid movement seemed to many to be a moral and political continuation of these earlier efforts. On the other side, South Africa's attempts to evade these pressures through the use of entertainment venues in the so-called independent bantustans may well have had the opposite effect to that intended: they gave foreign entertainers a specific, identifiable target that could be abbreviated into a struggle sound byte.²¹ Sun City, an entertainment/recreation resort in the theoretically independent state of Bophutatswana, gave rise to Steve van Zandt's chart-topping pop tune, 'Ain't Gonna Play Sun City,' among other songs and music videos that were open attacks on the National Party regime.

§ Fifth and finally, the formal establishment of an official ANC cultural office toward the end of the 1980s seems to have heralded a more focused, effective direction for the cultural boycott. This office worked in increasing synergy with the UN, as well as a broader range of American, British, Western European and other anti-apartheid coalitions and organisations.²²

However, even as late as 1987, international relations scholars such as John Barratt could still write:²³

¹⁹ Kahiya V, 'Debate over boycott looks to past', *The Zimbabwe Independent*, 10 January 2003 and via <http://allafrica.com/stories/200301100475.html>. Also, Oaks D & C Saunders et al, *op. cit.*, pp.450-1.

²⁰ 'Roundtable: Ray Phiri, Siphon Mabuse, Ole Rietov', from 1st World Conference on Music and Censorship, Copenhagen, 20-22 November 1998, *African Quarterly on the Arts*. Glendora International Limited, 2002, <http://www.glendora-eculture.com>.

²¹ Sher A & G Doran, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

²² 'Barbara Masekela: Profile', <http://www.africanpubs.com/Apps/bios/0053MasekelaBarbara.asp>.

²³ Barratt CJA, 'Can external leverage pressure South Africa?' in Sethi P (ed.), *The South African Quagmire*. Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1987.

There is no doubt that international pressures — from mere criticism to sanctions threats — have had an effect, much of it positive in the sense of contributing to reform, some of it negative in that it has caused hardening of official white attitudes ... But it is not possible to measure the extent of the roles of external pressures in each of these areas against the internal pressures for change. One problem is, of course, that the [South African] government has never been able to admit explicitly that external pressures have to any great degree been responsible for changes in policy.

Nonetheless, just three years later, as Nelson Mandela and other ex-prisoners were beginning to adjust to ordinary life, as exiles were returning home and as once-banned organisations were re-engaging in vigorous political activity, the author and political activist Achmad Dangor could argue:²⁴

The cultural boycott was conceived in a time when all peaceful opposition had been driven underground ... The necessity to fight and isolate apartheid and white supremacy on all fronts, included a cultural dimension. In the eighties the blanket boycott was adjusted to accommodate the emergence of resistance culture and to implement it in a democratic fashion. While there have been difficulties, this strategy in relation to the other fields of struggle has been effective and it will remain in place until apartheid is abolished ... Neither the cultural boycott nor sanctions are ends in themselves, but means to an end.

The boycott strategy had multiple purposes. Proponents argued for a two-fold approach. Through the public controversy surrounding the sports, arts and education boycotts, they wanted to generate public demand to impel the governments of other countries to exert pressure on South Africa for change. In addition, they would also encourage, bring pressure to bear on, or embarrass into compliance, leading cultural, academic and sports figures in other countries to make public statements committing themselves to eschew any relationship with South Africa. In so doing, they would bring home the costs of apartheid to white South Africans, so encouraging white disaffection from racist policy and building support for a fundamental restructuring of South Africa's political order.²⁵

²⁴ Oliphant, 'Achmad Dangor: Writing and Change [interview]', *Staffrider*, 9, 2, p.34.

²⁵ 'Position paper on the cultural and academic boycott', adopted by the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress, Lusaka, May 1989.

The US government did not sign on to the boycotts officially. However, in addition to a growing array of limited economic sanctions, it effectively altered its international educational and cultural activities. This was in recognition of the boycotts and in response to the growing futility of engaging in international cultural exchanges between the US and South Africa.

The ANC eventually became the prime mover of the push for a strengthened cultural boycott. Especially once its cultural desk in Lusaka was up and running, the ANC articulated a cultural policy that took increasing notice of what South Africans were later to describe as the vanguard role of culture and cultural workers in South Africa in the liberation struggle. As musician Hugh Masekela said recently, 'I don't think we could have had a revolution in this country without songs.'²⁶

The ANC while still in exile was the primary mover of advocating and asserting the boycott. Even within and around the ANC there appear to have been several competing views. From the late 1980s onward, two schools of thought appear to have emerged regarding the purposes of the boycotts. On the one hand, there was the position, described by journalist Mandla Langa in his report on the 'Culture in Another South Africa' conference in Amsterdam in 1987: 'There was no mincing of words: the arts are a weapon in the struggle for national liberation and democracy in our country. There is no way to separate culture from politics.'²⁷ On the other hand, an alternative view began to emerge in succeeding years. It was articulated first by ANC exile intellectual Albie Sachs, and then by such local figures as Mike van Graan. For these individuals, the anti-apartheid struggle and the cultural boycott were more means to liberate the arts and artists than unconditional tools in service to a revolutionary idea. Sachs' paper, 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom', first produced in exile, then widely circulated in photocopied versions, was finally reprinted in the *Weekly Mail* in early 1990. It triggered particularly intense debate in South Africa about the role of the artist in a new political dispensation — and the continuing relevance and utility of the boycotts.²⁸

²⁶ O'Connor AM, 'US audiences hear of SA's revolution armed with music', *The Sunday Independent*, 9 March 2003, p.11 (reprinted from the *Los Angeles Times*).

²⁷ Langa M, 'The quiet thunder: Report on the Amsterdam Cultural Conference', *Sechaba*, March 1988.

²⁸ Sachs A, 'Preparing ourselves for freedom', in de Kok I & K Press (eds), *Spring is Rebellious*. Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1990.

Van Graan's argument, also first distributed in photocopied versions, and then reprinted in various alternative newspapers around the country, argued that the boycotts had actually outrun their usefulness:²⁹

Now, with apartheid being removed from the statute books and formal repression such as states of emergency, bannings and detention on the decline, the moral base and legitimacy of many of the strategies adopted in the past has been or is being eroded.

Moreover, he claimed that because of the decline in apartheid, support for the boycott was actually weakening. Continued unwavering adherence to it to satisfy the 'young lions' of the liberation movements ran the risk of alienating the very people the liberation movements wished to attract as new supporters at a time when they were within reach of victory.

Much of this debate was presaged by the ANC's own 1989 position paper on the cultural boycott, which advocated a new, more limited form of boycott. This paper argued that:³⁰

In order to grow and develop, this emergent culture of liberation needs to interact with, and be exposed to, the progressive intellectual and cultural currents in the rest of the world ... The cultural and academic boycott of apartheid South Africa ... must consistently and continuously be strengthened as part of our overall strategy for the isolation of the apartheid regime.

No cultural workers, artists, sportspersons or academics should be permitted to travel to South Africa to perform or to impart their services and expertise, save and except in those instances where such travel is clearly in furtherance of the national democratic struggle or any of its objectives. Democratic and anti-racist South African artists, cultural workers, sportspersons and academics — individually or collectively — who seek to perform, work or participate in activities outside South Africa should be permitted to do so without fear of ostracism or boycott. It would greatly facilitate matters if the Mass Democratic Movement [this prior to the unbanning of the ANC — author] created credible structures for consultation inside South Africa to vet such travel.

...[T]he current effort to create broad non-racial governing bodies in every major sports discipline has become an important new arena of

²⁹ Van Graan N, 'The Cultural Boycott: A case for its immediate and unconditional lifting', *South*, 22–28 November 1990.

³⁰ 'Position paper on the cultural and academic boycott', *op. cit.*

struggle of the forces of national liberation and democracy. It deserves the support and assistance of the international community.

In mid-1990, Barbara Masekela, newly returned from exile and the ANC's head of cultural policy, spoke at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival. She advocated the continuation of the cultural boycott, arguing that it would serve as 'a pathway, to allow the representative, democratic culture of the people out to the world, as much as it is a filter to exclude the poison of apartheid, and prevent it gaining credibility.'³¹

In sport, pressure from various African countries had kept South Africa out of the 1968 Olympics and had led to its complete expulsion from the Olympic movement in 1970. The ANC, in its 1971 paper entitled, 'International Boycott of Apartheid Sport — with special reference to the campaigns in Britain by the Anti Apartheid Movement', argued that because official South African sports organisations had failed to integrate their respective sports racially, they were in violation of the terms of the Olympic Charter, which stated that, 'No discrimination is allowed against any country or person on grounds of race, religion or political affiliation.'³² Even at that early date, the ANC had begun to set out the case that integrating sports might not be enough to produce an end of the boycott. As a paper presented by the ANC before the UN concluded:³³

The Anti-Apartheid Movement has always urged that the outside world should boycott all apartheid sport. All links with racist bodies should be abolished until sport *inside* South Africa is conducted on the basis of merit alone and not of colour. This may not be possible until white domination itself is ended in South Africa. *Until there is a non-racial society which will permit open sport, we may have to exclude South Africa from all international competitions.* For it is wrong to support racialism in any form and apartheid is not a game. [author's italics]

The cancellation of the Marylebone Cricket Club tour to South Africa, exclusion from the Olympics, and then the collapse of a South African tour to England in 1970 amidst furious street demonstrations set a

³¹ Masekela B, 'Culture in the New South Africa', *Scenaria*, September 1990.

³² 'International Boycott of Apartheid Sport — With special reference to the campaign in Britain by the Anti-Apartheid Movement', *United Nations Unit on Apartheid, Notes and Documents*, 1, 16/71, April 1971 <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdoc/history/aam/abdul-2.html>.

³³ *Ibid.*

pattern that was to prevail until South African cricket became multiracial. As University of the Witwatersrand historian, Bruce Murray, wrote in his monograph on the collapse of South African international cricket during the apartheid era:³⁴

As it happened, when in the late 1970s the apartheid state and white sports administrators finally responded to the country's sporting isolation by moving towards deracialising team sports in South Africa, the radical opponents of apartheid added another dimension to the sports boycott by demanding the dismantling of apartheid itself as a precondition for South Africa's return to official international competition.

While some international sports competitions continued to take place, most notably between South African and other national rugby teams, South Africa 'remained almost totally isolated from serious international competition in sport'.³⁵ However, once FW de Klerk unbanned the liberation movements, released the political prisoners, and began negotiations towards a political transition, South Africa's readmission to international sports became possible — even in advance of a full political transformation. As described by the Australian scholar Douglas Booth, following complex negotiations and consultations between internal and external actors, the International Olympic Committee 'granted the Interim National Olympic Committee of South Africa conditional recognition and said that South Africa would be invited to Barcelona upon the repeal of apartheid'.³⁶

³⁴ Murray B, 'The Sports Boycott and Cricket: The Cancellation of the 1970 South African Tour of England', The Wits Interdisciplinary Research Seminar, 12 August 2002, pp.26-7. This unpublished paper provides a wealth of detail and sources about the decision to end official cricket competitions between South Africa and the rest of the world following protests organised by Peter Hain, as well as the internal debate between ANC-aligned and other sports federations outside of the officially sanctioned white sports organisations in South Africa. This was the same Peter Hain who would advocate boycotting Zimbabwe in the 2003 Cricket World Cup because of its human rights record under President Mugabe.

³⁵ Oaks & Saunders, *op. cit.*

³⁶ Booth D, 'Accommodating race to play the game: South Africa's readmission to international sport', *Sporting Traditions*, 8, 2, May 1992, p. 195. Like Murray's monograph, Booth's article in this Australian journal of sports sociology, history and economics leads the reader to a wide range of original sources. Booth argues that the readmission of South Africa to international sports as part of the process of the negotiated transfer of power was essentially a betrayal of anti-apartheid sports bodies inside South Africa in the interests of making the Barcelona games truly universal.

Meanwhile, a somewhat different evolution was taking place among academics regarding the academic boycott. This was occasioned initially by the Irish academic Connor Cruise O'Brien. In a controversial speech at the University of Cape Town in 1987, he called for the end of the academic boycott. Although this debate became intertwined with a larger, more complex debate about democratising apartheid-era university structures, admissions and instructional content (which were similar to the debates occurring simultaneously over the democratisation and integration of official sports bodies), there were differences as well. The posture of even politically radical academics became what Neville Alexander summarised as:³⁷

Debate over the boycott also raised deep questions concerning the morality and political point of only excluding scholars coming from outside the country when the majority of scholars who supported apartheid were South Africans employed by the very institutions that were to carry out the boycott. Eventually consensus was attained, at least in the more left-leaning academic community. All anti-apartheid academics and intellectual activists should band together in academic staff associations explicitly opposed to the regime and committed to the eradication of apartheid. These associations would be mandated, as appropriate, to invite foreign scholars to South African universities or to prevent them from coming. The boycott should not be a suicidal weapon cutting off all communication between the progressive academic community in the rest of the world and ourselves living in South Africa.

In acknowledgement of these changes in interpretation of the academic boycott, the US gradually began encouraging the restoration of informal and official educational and cultural activities. It did so in the belief that these links contributed to reasserting the importance of democratic and artistic values in the shaping of a new South African political and cultural life. In late 1990, embassy officials negotiated with the National Education Crisis Committee, one of those anti-apartheid educational structures envisioned by the ANC boycott policy paper, to re-establish the American Fulbright Professor programme in some of South Africa's universities.

In the following year, embassy officials, in close consultation with the ANC, the PAC and other anti-apartheid parties, and in association with cultural institutions generally regarded as having been part of the broad anti-apartheid movement, began negotiations to assist the

³⁷ Alexander N, 'Academic boycotts: Some reflections on the South African case,' <http://www.iit.edu/departments/csep/perspective/pindex.html>.

first officially-authorized American cultural exchanges to South Africa in a generation. These included obtaining the rights to a play written by the leading African-American playwright, August Wilson, and directed by a leading American theatre director, to be performed at the Market Theatre and the Grahamstown National Arts Festival; a two-week visit to Grahamstown and Johannesburg by the National Theatre of the Deaf; and a month-long visit to Johannesburg by the internationally renowned Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH). The DTH visit brought three South Africans back to their own country, where none of them had previously had the chance to perform professionally before. This last venture was officially a co-production by the Market and the Johannesburg Civic Theatres, the latter newly reopened after years of renovation. It was now racially integrated and had a new management structure that took cognisance of the need for greater representivity in its governing body. When the DTH's visit was officially announced, *The Sowetan* published the news under the banner headline 'Dancers to Open Civic Theatre — Big Break: Famous Harlem Group to Herald End of Cultural Isolation'. It reported:³⁸

It is now official that the famous Dance Theatre of Harlem is to open Johannesburg's newly renovated Civic Theatre on September 15. This was confirmed by the Market Theatre Foundation, the City of Johannesburg and Nedbank. This will be the first time an American dance company of international repute tours South Africa. The tour starts on September 7 and will feature DTH's community outreach programme. This will include arts exposure, lectures and demonstrations aimed at educating and developing audience participation. Master classes for aspiring South African dancers, lectures and workshops on production, wardrobe and repertoire will also be held.

In accordance with the new, more open, complex and democratic process, the organisers worked hard to elicit broad support from the anti-apartheid community and liberation movements. President Nelson Mandela, in endorsement of the DTH visit, and echoing the logic of the ANC's cultural policy document, wrote to DTH artistic director Arthur Mitchell that the company would:³⁹

... serve as an inspiration to our artists, who have struggled to maintain their vision and creativity despite brutal apartheid oppression ... Our great challenge here is to democratise our cultural and social institutions, over which the apartheid ideology has sought to dominate. The

³⁸ 'Dancers to open Civic Theatre', *The Sowetan*, 29 July 1992.

³⁹ Letter, from ANC President Nelson Mandela to Dance Theatre of Harlem Artistic Director Arthur Mitchell, 3 April 1992.

transitional process we are struggling to engender is a difficult one, to which your visit will make positive contributions.

The PAC, meanwhile, clothed their agreement to the visit in more avowedly liberationist language, noting that⁴⁰

The PAC feels that the Harlem Dancer's visit will not have the intent and effect of advancing apartheid and will give appropriate assistance to the Market Theatre and other dance formations and to the disadvantaged dancers in occupied Azania ...

Evaluating the results of the boycotts

Proponents of the boycotts have frequently argued that these boycotts focused increasing attention and pressure on the apartheid state both internationally and internally, and helped lead to its demise.⁴¹ Despite the obvious appeal of this argument, this position remains difficult to measure, and still requires more thorough evaluation. Testimony from government decision-makers noting how much weight they had given to the intangible costs of the boycotts when deciding how much to resist a negotiated settlement would provide an obvious measure of the effect of the boycotts. However, it is unlikely that such evidence could be obtained. Nonetheless, another, more indirect measure is the extent to which South African officials sought to circumvent the boycotts. They did this by means of support for cultural events arranged with other willing regimes, through concerts in the notionally independent homelands and — most importantly — through efforts to set up international sporting events even when they required *sub rosa* government funding. These supply at least a rough gauge of how much the boycotts had begun to hurt.⁴²

Further, it appears that there were also important, unintended consequences of the boycotts — and the apartheid regime's concurrent restrictions on many South African artists and entertainers. As Zegeye and Kriger have argued, 'Cultural practitioners were actively engaged in a new discourse, pre-empting, as it were, the contours, policies and practices of culture in a post-apartheid

⁴⁰ Letter, from PAC Secretary for Culture and Sport to the Market Theatre Foundation, 13 February 1992.

⁴¹ 'Roundtable: Ray Phiri, Sipho Mabuse, Ole Rietov', *op. cit.*

⁴² Oaks & Saunders, *op. cit.*

society.’⁴³ Moreover, despite the difficulties the boycotts created for many South African artists who attempted to arrange for performance and exhibition opportunities overseas, some of these artists have commented that this relative isolation gave them essential space to grow and develop their craft. It prevented them from being thrust too early into the glare and the quickly-changing currents of world art movements before they had consolidated their own styles, content or perspectives.⁴⁴

From the US government’s viewpoint, as early as 1991 American embassy officers had begun to envision a South Africa where an end to apartheid would lead to new opportunities for self-expression for cultural groups. It would also, paradoxically, leave such groups with little financial support once ‘under-the-radar’ funding by foundations and governments (mostly in Western Europe) began to evaporate in the new, more democratic dispensation. This would leave cultural groups formally free but organisationally and financially unable to participate meaningfully in the new state and new culture.

The embassy described this dichotomy specifically in terms of nurturing democratic values through the free expression of culture and ideas. The proposed solution was the creation of a special fund. Embassy comments to Washington on the proposed fund argued, ‘We ... believe that this opportunity represents a once in a generation opportunity to encourage democratic principles as an entire society undergoes a sea change.’⁴⁵ While this proposal was ultimately not successful in its original form, it represented the clearest possible signal from the embassy that culture, education and sports represented avenues through which to advance a democratic agenda, while supporting a remaking and transformation of the South African polity.

Final comments

⁴³ Zegeye A & R Kriger, ‘Cultural change and development in South Africa’, *Culturelink Review*, Special Issue, 1998–99. <http://www.culturelink.org/review/s98/s98intro.html>.

⁴⁴ Private conversation between William Kentridge and the author, February 2003.

⁴⁵ ‘Cultural self help for South Africa: a unique fund for unique time and place’. Unclassified telegram 8605 from American Embassy Pretoria to USIA Washington, 27 June 1991.

Only a few years ago, treatments like this one would probably have been relegated to historical studies of the cultural life of South Africa's apartheid era. However, renewed appreciation by scholars and foreign policy professionals of 'soft power' and the role of non-state actors in the international system has made analyses of boycotts and their ability to induce policy change both timely and relevant to achieving a fuller understanding of the international system.

Moreover, the recent past offers a new series of state and non-state efforts to effect changes in the behaviour of other states through the use of boycotts. These have included calls for academic boycotts against Austria when a neo-Nazi party joined the government, initiatives to institute academic and cultural boycotts against Israel in response to its policies in the West Bank, and in 2003 a putative sports boycott during the Cricket World Cup to bring about changes in Zimbabwe's domestic policies. Accordingly, even without precise analytical measurements, international actors must believe boycotts have potential utility.

Accordingly, further study of the educational, sports and cultural boycotts directed against South Africa, together with comparative boycott studies, should be able to contribute to a more thorough ability in commentators to analyse the impact, effectiveness and approaches of non-state actors involved in asymmetrical international struggles. This in turn should help inform policy makers about the fullest array of options available to deal with conflicts.

It is important, too, to remember that the cultural, sports and academic boycotts directed against South Africa took place before the advent of the Internet as a major international tool for gathering or disseminating ideas, information and advocacy. Over the past several years, anti-globalisation protestors have demonstrated the power of the Internet by mobilising demonstrators and activists around the world, without the need for major office staffs, headquarters operations or even a central command centre. The mobilisation of protestors over the Iraq crisis in 2003 led to Internet-generated efforts that ranged from physical demonstrations to flooding the computers of government offices with unsolicited junk e-mail. Just before the start of the Iraq war, anti-war protestors nearly caused total breakdown in the switchboards of the White House and US

Congress.⁴⁶ The potential for non-state, citizen-based efforts — both nationally and internationally — is obviously growing. As *The Economist* noted:⁴⁷

As the Internet becomes mobile and ubiquitous, it will bring about changes of its own. Precisely what these will be is not yet clear, but the earliest claims of cyber-dreamers — that the Internet will produce a shift of power away from political elites to ordinary citizens — may well become reality.

[Already] much more political activity is now being channelled through single-issue, grassroots organisations and expressed by means of 'protest politics', such as petitions, demonstrations and consumer boycotts. This trend was well established before the Internet, but the web's arrival has accelerated it. The ability to organise, proselytise and communicate at low cost has been a huge boost to such groups, be it a locally based effort to block an airport expansion or a global environmental campaigner such as Greenpeace.

⁴⁶ Taylor C, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷ 'Power to the people', 'Digital dilemmas', *The Economist*, 25 January 2003, p.13.