Aan de goede kant: Een geschiedenis van de Nederlandse anti-apartheidsbeweging 1960-1990
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Summary

From the protests in Amsterdam in 1960 following the Sharpeville massacre up to the campaign in 1994 to support the transition towards democracy; for over thirty years the Dutch anti-apartheid movement managed to involve the Dutch public with the situation in South Africa. During this period, the sentiments in the Netherlands shifted from strong feelings of kinship with the ‘Boers’ to shame and indignation about the apartheid system. That a large and growing number of the Dutch public felt connected to what was happening in South Africa and became willing to act upon this engagement, could well be considered the biggest accomplishment of the movement. The anti-apartheid movement was probably the most successful social movement in post-war Dutch history. It was responsible for nearly toppling three Dutch governments; changed the business practice of dozens of companies; changed the consumption patterns of the Dutch public; unified the nation behind an African freedom fighter; and changed the political discourse of a whole generation. The anti-apartheid movement was part of the ‘wave of protest’ that flooded the Netherlands (and other countries) between the fifties and the eighties.

The question that this book sets out to answer is: how and to what extent did the Dutch anti-apartheid movement succeed in mobilising the Dutch public and changing the Dutch governmental and non-governmental policies regarding South Africa? It tells the story of the movement over a period of thirty years: three decennia during which several hundreds of organisations and initiatives were started, in which many thousands of people actively participated, and which succeeded to mobilise hundreds of thousands of citizens and unify millions. While describing the movement’s history between 1960 and 1990, I try to explain why certain organisations were successful at certain times to mobilise the Dutch public and government - and why others were not. The movement is portrayed through the seven national organisations that shaped it over the years: het Comité Zuid-Afrika (South Africa Committee, CZA), de Boycot Outspan Actie (Boycott Outspan Action, BOA), de Anti-Apartheidsbeweging Nederland (Anti-Apartheid Movement Netherlands, AABN), the Working Group Kairos, the coalition for an oil boycott and against Shell, het Komitee Zuidelijk Afrika (Holland Committee on Southern Africa, KZA) and the radical ‘autonomous’ movement against apartheid. The analysis of their relative success is summarised in the final chapter using a matrix, which awards scores to each of the seven organisations for the extent to which they succeeded in 1. Mobilising the public and 2. Changing Dutch policies (of both governments and non-governmental entities).

The introductory chapter discusses some of the inevitable limitations of researching social movements. The first difficulty is the fact that the boundaries between the movement itself and its target(s) are often fluid. This was also the case with the Dutch anti-apartheid movement. Governmental institutions and certain non-governmental entities (e.g. churches and trade unions) were targeted by the anti-apartheid movement at some time times, while at other times and on certain issues they acted as part of the movement. Even certain companies – once they had decided to boycott South Africa – can be considered part of the movement that had first targeted them.

Another limitation in researching the success of an internationally focussed movement like the anti-apartheid movement is the matter of goals, sub-goals (or intermediary goals), instrumental goals and means. The ultimate goal of the movement – abolishing apartheid and the establishment of a democratic system – was to a large extent outside the movement’s sphere of influence. That is why most of its actions targeted sub-goals (which could be said to equal means): a boycott of South African products, an oil embargo, disinvestment, etcetera. Informing and mobilising the Dutch public was an explicit goal of most anti-apartheid organisations. This was usually part of a two-step strategy: trying to mobilise the Dutch public in order to pressure governments and big companies to change their policies towards South Africa. The organisations also dedicated time and energy to ‘institutional goals’ such as strengthening the internal organisation, building up a documentation centre, or ensuring funding and financial accountability.

Measuring success is another problem in social movement research. While it may be relatively easy to measure an organisation’s success in reaching intermediary goals (e.g. the banning of certain South African products or the successful organisation of a protest rally), it is notoriously difficult to verify its success in changing government policies. Attribution is at stake: if policies are changed in line with the demands of action groups, how can we establish whether or to what extent this happened as a result of their actions? How success is measured in this study is explained in the introductory chapter.

A complicating factor for the movement as a whole, was that the goal of influencing the Dutch policies towards South Africa meant interfering in the government’s foreign policy. The possibilities of non-state actors to influence a state’s foreign policy are historically limited. International policies are to a large extent shaped by international treaties, trade relations, allies and more in general the position of a
country within the world order. For the anti-apartheid activists it was highly frustrating that the Dutch government, during the bigger part of those thirty years, was so concerned about the international position of the Netherlands that it paid little heed to the internal pressure generated by the movement.

After a sketch of South African history between the arrival in 1652 of the Dutch colonizer Jan van Riebeeck and the year of the Sharpeville massacre (1960), the heart of this book consists of seven chapters that each discuss one of the main organisations of the Dutch anti-apartheid movement. The **South Africa Committee** was established just weeks before the Sharpeville massacre. It existed for a little more than ten years and during that time mainly tried to influence government policies. The board of the CZA consisted of representatives from the entire political spectrum, only excluding the far left (and of course the political currents that agreed with apartheid). In order to gain influence, the CZA tried to incorporate the Dutch political elite. The CZA wrote letters to parliament and to Dutch organisations that had connections with South Africa. It also published a magazine about what was happening in South Africa and the response of Dutch society to this. The broad political consensus the Committee sought, prohibited a radical position towards developments in South Africa, the freedom struggle and the Dutch response to these developments. At one time the CZA organised a boycott action of South African fruit, but this failed to have real impact. A fundraising event for the international Defence and Aid Fund (DAF), which the CZA organised together with some Dutch writers, was successful and led to the establishment of a Dutch ‘chapter’ of DAF, the DAFN. This organisation existed until 1993 and succeeded in raising millions of guilders for South African political prisoners and their families. More radical and inventive action models were rejected by the CZA. The majority of its members did not wish to follow the example of the provocative actions of the Dutch Angola Committee, nor were the ‘gentlemen’ of the CZA inspired by the anti-establishment sentiments overrunning the country in the sixties. The non-radical attitude of the Committee irritated some young people linked to the organisation, but they were unable to change its course. In 1972, the CZA was shut down and its activities were taken over by a new, much more inspired group of people that set up a new organisation: the Dutch Anti-Apartheid Movement. The overall success of the CZA in mobilising Dutch society and influencing Dutch policies was limited. What the committee did do was pave the way for future actions. It helped to put apartheid and the Dutch response to it on the political agenda. The **Boycott Outspan Action** was responsible for one of the biggest single successes of the Dutch anti-apartheid movement: within a couple of years it managed to ban Outspan fruit from nearly all Dutch supermarkets. For a large part of the Dutch population Outspan became synonymous with apartheid and a symbol of oppression in South Africa. The iconic poster depicting the head of a black man and extend a network of local action groups. The people behind BOA, and especially its leader Nelson Mandela in the Netherlands. The introduction of the ANC as a legitimate organisation: the Dutch Anti-Apartheid Movement. The overall success of the CZA in mobilising Dutch society and influencing Dutch policies was limited. What the committee did do was pave the way for future actions. It helped to put apartheid and the Dutch response to it on the political agenda. The **Boycott Outspan Action** was responsible for one of the biggest single successes of the Dutch anti-apartheid movement: within a couple of years it managed to ban Outspan fruit from nearly all Dutch supermarkets. For a large part of the Dutch population Outspan became synonymous with apartheid and a symbol of oppression in South Africa. The iconic poster depicting the head of a black man and a symbol of oppression in South Africa. 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The iconic poster depicting the head of a black man and a symbol of oppression in South Africa. The iconic poster depicting the head of a black boy being squeezed on a juicer certainly contributed to the visibility and success of BOA, as did the fact that the boycott action made it possible for the average Dutch person to do something tangible, and easy in everyday life, about South African apartheid. Outspan was an enemy that could be fought close to home; and the weapon of a boycott struck to the heart of apartheid. After this success, BOA tried to establish and extend a network of local action groups. The people behind BOA, and especially its driving force, South African refugee Esau du Plessis, analysed that anti-apartheid actions had little meaning if the Dutch public was not aware of the existing, veiled racism in Dutch society. Raising awareness about racism at home became the starting point for BOA activities in the eighties. While the success of these locally based actions was rather limited, the local groups did come to serve as a highly useful vehicle for the dissemination of other anti-apartheid initiatives.

The **Anti-Apartheid Movement Netherlands** was the unofficial mouthpiece of the ANC in the Netherlands (certainly until 1976 when the rivalling Holland Committee on Southern Africa was formed). The access that the AABN had to the ANC, and the close relationship between members of the AABN and especially ANC-leaders in London, made the organisation a relevant factor in Dutch anti-apartheid policy making. The AABN also played a leading role in the ‘branding’ of the ANC and its leader Nelson Mandela in the Netherlands. The introduction of the ANC as a legitimate representative of the South African people meant that from then on the Dutch public not only knew what to fight against, but also what to fight for. Taking over from the ‘bourgeois’ South Africa Committee, the AABN was a breath of fresh air. It immediately made a name for itself with provocative actions against a South African water polo team that toured the Netherlands. On another occasion it searched the garbage containers outside an Amsterdam-based tobacco company, finding evidence to prove that this company was breaking the mandatory embargo of Rhodesia. These types of actions were new to the movement. Later on, the AABN was innovative in incorporating well-known Dutch artists, media personalities and famous sportsmen into the anti-apartheid struggle. This helped to build up the trustworthiness of the anti-apartheid movement. Other than the CZA and BOA, the AABN was very much a politically profiled organisation. A majority of the people at the AABN-bureau were
members of the Dutch Communist Party (CPN). They maintained strong relations with the section of the London-based ANC-leadership that belonged to the South African Communist Party. Contrary to popular rumours, however, there were only sporadic direct contacts between the AABN and the CPN: the AABN could not be equaled to a CPN front organisation. The AABN was influenced, but not controlled by the CPN. The communist tendency of the AABN, however, limited the possibilities of the organisation to lobby the Dutch government. Although the AABN made sure to always include representatives of other political backgrounds in its board and committees, the department of Foreign Affairs never failed to perceive the AABN as a communist-dominated organisation. Cold war sentiments and ideological differences also hampered close cooperation between the AABN and other organisations both within and outside the anti-apartheid movement.

In the mid seventies, the AABN faced the biggest crisis in its existence when its founder, South African Berend Schuitema, together with other members of the AABN joined the South African writer Breyten Breytenbach in his Okhela initiative. Okhela aimed to establish a white anti-apartheid resistance movement within South Africa. Okhela exploded when Breytenbach was arrested in South Africa and Schuitema only just escaped arrest. The Okhela-initiative was subsequently disavowed by the ANC/SACP-leadership and Schuitema was forced to leave the AABN. His former girlfriend Conny Braam took over as the organisation’s driving force.

The AABN deviated from the strategy followed by most of the other anti-apartheid organisations insofar as it was against boycotting individual companies and against consumer boycotts. The boycott of South Africa had to be total and all-inclusive. The AABN thus flatly refused to cooperate with the Outspan boycott (initiated in roughly the same period as the start-up of the AABN) and later on also opposed, albeit not openly, the boycott of Shell. The AABN thought it unfair that individual shopkeepers or petrol stations should face the negative consequences of actions. The AABN was at the same time important in mapping the Dutch economic, cultural and military collaboration with South Africa, and in protesting against these relations.

In the second half of the eighties, the AABN organised several big manifestations that focussed on a new, post-apartheid South Africa. The manifestation ‘Culture in Another South Africa’ introduced the Dutch public to South African musicians, poets, writers and painters. It also strengthened the connection between Dutch activists and South Africans other than the exiled ANC community. As a result, the strong ties between the ANC and the AABN were somewhat loosened, which allowed the AABN a more critical stance towards the freedom movement. In the same period, AABN chairperson Conny Braam was requested by SACP-leader Ronny Kasrils to set up safe houses in the countries bordering South Africa. That was the start of the secret Vula network in which dozens of Dutch persons cooperated. After the transition towards democracy in South Africa and the formation of a non-racist government, the AABN festively discontinued its activities.

The Working Group Kairos was formed on request of the South African clergymen and director of the Christian Institute, Christiaan Beyers Naudé. Especially in the sixties and seventies the churches in the Netherlands were struggling to determine their standpoint regarding apartheid. Anti-racist sentiments were gaining ground, but the feelings of kinship and theological connectedness with white South Africa were strong, particularly among the Dutch reformed churches. Working Group Kairos was founded to rally support for the Christian Institute and to convince the church leadership to denounce apartheid. After a call by the World Council of Churches, Kairos also started a campaign for disinvestment and to pressure Dutch companies to sever their relations with South Africa. Others questioned whether instead of withdrawing from South Africa companies should not rather stay and set up shop in South Africa, and in protesting against these relations.

A campaign in the seventies, which included a consumer boycott, led to clear policy changes by two of the biggest banks in the Netherlands. The call for disinvestment was also the starting point of the campaign for an oil embargo and the pressure on the Dutch/British oil company Shell. Representatives of Kairos and the churches engaged in a dialogue with Shell, but did not succeed in changing the Shell policies regarding South Africa. With its roots in the Dutch religious arena, Kairos was a key factor in reaching the political centre, and particularly the Christian Democratic Party, CDA. The political centre was vital in obtaining the majority needed for policy changes. During the seventies and eighties, Kairos tried to get churches, religious groups, the Christian Labour Union and other religiously inspired groups behind the demands of the anti-apartheid movement and behind the demands of South African resistance groups. Kairos seldom engaged in spectacular actions, and therefore was not very well
known among the Dutch public. Its strength was its profile as a serious and trustworthy organisation that presented solid information about developments in South Africa. Besides its participation in the oil boycott, Kairos campaigned intensively for the release of political prisoners in South Africa and was the driving force behind efforts to realise a Dutch boycott of South African coal.

The coalition for an oil boycott and against Shell was the most long lasting and probably the most publicised anti-apartheid campaign in the Netherlands. The roots of the campaign lie with Working Group Kairos. In the early seventies, Kairos started the protest activities at the annual shareholder meetings of Shell, an action model that was continued until 1990. Kairos also engaged in a dialogue with Shell. After the transformation of the former Angola Committee into the Holland Committee on Southern Africa (KZA), this organisation led by Sietse Bosgra joined forces with Kairos in the fight for an oil embargo. Later on, development organisation Novib and the Catholic peace movement Pax Christi joined the partnership. The coalition had some strong trump cards. Firstly, excellent contact was established with leading parliamentarians of both the Social and Christian Democrats. Especially Christian democrat MP Jan Nico Scholten was instrumental in conveying the message of the anti-apartheid movement in parliament. The Second Chamber adopted a motion for a unilateral Dutch oil embargo, but the government refused to execute the motion. A consequential motion of no confidence, however, did not make it, by two votes. A majority of the Christian democratic MP’s did not think the struggle against apartheid was worth a cabinet crisis. A new chance to get a majority of parliament behind an oil embargo did not materialise. Another trump card of the coalition were the solid data on oil shipments gathered by the Shipping Research Bureau. Oil companies could no longer simply deny doing business with South Africa, but had to resort to complicated and often not very trustworthy explanations for their business with South Africa. In the end, however, the ultimate goal of the coalition - a unilateral Dutch oil embargo against South Africa - was not achieved. In the second half of the eighties, its focus shifted from campaigning for a national oil embargo to a campaign against Shell and for a consumer boycott of the Dutch/British oil company. The international contacts were intensified, but a truly international campaign against Shell was never accomplished. Shell never gave in to the demands of the anti-apartheid movement, but in the end shifted its alliance from the white apartheid government to the ANC-leadership. The actions against Shell and the consumer boycott got huge support from the Dutch public. Actions to put pressure on Shell were initiated in numerous towns in the Netherlands. Shell lost a lot of goodwill among the Dutch audience for its stubborn defence of its South African business. It even commissioned a PR-company to design a strategy to neutralise the attacks of the protesters. In the second half of the eighties, the actions of the coalition against Shell became less visible, as the attention of the media and the public shifted towards the violent attacks on Shell filling stations and other installations executed by the radical ‘autonomous’ movement.

The Holland Committee on Southern Africa (KZA) was the successor of the Angola Committee, renamed after Angola and other Portuguese colonies in Africa gained independence in 1976. The arrival of this new, national organisation within the anti-apartheid movement irritated the AABN. KZA was perceived as a rival: targeting the same audience and courting the same ‘bride’, that is the apartheid movement. The actions against Shell and the consumer boycott got huge support from the Dutch public. Actions to put pressure on Shell were initiated in numerous towns in the Netherlands. Shell lost a lot of goodwill among the Dutch audience for its stubborn defence of its South African business. It even commissioned a PR-company to design a strategy to neutralise the attacks of the protesters. In the second half of the eighties, the actions of the coalition against Shell became less visible, as the attention of the media and the public shifted towards the violent attacks on Shell filling stations and other installations executed by the radical ‘autonomous’ movement.
served as a source of unique information: in the eighties it developed into a major and trusted mouthpiece of the ANC towards the Dutch public and the political arena; the clipping service Facts and Reports provided unique information about developments in South Africa and the frontline states; the information the SRB provided also strengthened the image of the KZA as an organisation that knew what it was talking about.

The radical ‘autonomous’ movement against apartheid. At a time when the Dutch anti-apartheid movement was somewhat deadlocked, the radical autonomous movement, originating from the squatter movement of Amsterdam and other major cities, managed to revitalise the struggle with some controversial but spectacular actions. The biggest ‘achievement’ of the radical movement was perhaps the fact that the Dutch multinational SHV decided to withdraw from South Africa after several of its Makro retail shops were set on fire. Several other Dutch companies too decided to sever their relations with South Africa out of fear of the threats of the autonomous movement. This ‘success’ can partly be explained by the earlier mobilisation work done by the conventional anti-apartheid organisations. Companies that were confronted with destruction of their properties couldn’t count on much public sympathy. Even the Dutch government refused to stand by SNV when it was on the verge of giving in to the threats of the autonomous movement.

The radical and destructive nature of many of the actions of the autonomous movement ensured lots of media attention. The downside was that this attention focussed on the violence rather than on the goal of the actions (i.e. the fight against apartheid). An unintended by-product of these violent actions was that the demands of the more moderate anti-apartheid organisations came to be taken much more seriously. Companies worried that refusing to give in to the demands of organisations such as KZA or the AABN would lead to destructive actions by the autonomous movement.

The autonomous movement was anything but a unified organisation, even though the different groups rarely criticised each other openly. The RARA-group (responsible for the most destructive assaults) was driven by an anti-imperialist ideology: the anti-apartheid struggle was no less than a frontline in the war against imperialism and global capitalism. On the other end of the continuum were the ‘realo’s’: people with loosely defined anarchist sympathies, sometimes united into small ad hoc groups, campaigned about a wide range of issues of which apartheid was one. The realo’s made a name for themselves when they organised the blockade of the Shell laboratory in April 1989. The main strategy and goal of this blockade was to inflict damage to the image of Shell. The blockade was unique in the sense that it involved the cooperation between the radical movement and the more moderate anti-apartheid groups in the Netherlands.

The radical ‘autonomous’ movement against apartheid is in a way the odd one out, both in the anti-apartheid movement and in the theoretical assumptions that have guided this research. In fact, its accomplishments defy the assumption that the ability to influence government policies is the result of mobilising the public opinion. The autonomous movement did not contribute to the mobilisation of the public; a considerable part of the Dutch public was repelled by its actions. Nevertheless the autonomous movement was responsible for some distinct successes in the Dutch struggle against apartheid.

In the concluding chapter the ‘pillarised’ character of the anti-apartheid movement is sketched. Pillarisation (verzuiling) refers to the typical “vertical” organising principle of the Dutch socio-political system: Dutch society was traditionally divided into three or four pillars (catholic, protestant, socialist and liberal) each with their own social structure, organisations and leadership. This system of pillarisation lasted until the nineteen seventies, and remnants of this system still exist in the current Dutch society. The different anti-apartheid organisations loosely fitted into this system. A notable difference, however, was that normally the elites representing the different pillars of Dutch society worked together and formed coalitions while ideological differences were more apparent and fought out at the bottom of the pillars. The anti-apartheid movement showed a different, reversed picture: the ‘rank and file’ at the bottom of the pillars had no problem in working together with others in the struggle against apartheid, but ideological (and personal) differences divided the leadership of the anti-apartheid organisations.

The pillarisation of the movement was both an advantage and a disadvantage. An obvious disadvantage was that organisations often collided or failed to synchronise their actions. Negotiations about shared statements sometime dragged on for months. The differences between the organisations were often hard to explain to the public (and to funding entities). An undeniable advantage was that the organisations could each count on their own constituency and approach it in a way that was understood and deemed appropriate. It is also fair to conclude that the rivalry made the anti-apartheid organisations alert and sharp.
The anti-apartheid movement succeeded in mobilising a significant part of the Dutch public in the struggle against apartheid. The issue of apartheid dominated the Dutch political agenda for many years. The main strategy of the movement (i.e. building political strength by mobilising public opinion and so enforcing changes in the Dutch policies regarding South Africa) was to a certain extent successful. The movement scored some major victories (often as a result of consumer boycotts): Outspan fruit, Krugerrands, Cape wines, the stop on Dutch migration towards South Africa, the cultural boycott, the sports boycott, the academic boycott and the retreat of several companies from South Africa. From the eighties onwards it was simply considered not done for a Dutch individual, organisation or company to do business with South Africa. Those who defied the demands of the movement had a hard time explaining themselves and faced substantial reputation damage. In short: the movement was very successful in mobilising public opinion and changing the policies of non-state actors. The Dutch government on the other hand remained reluctant to change its policies regarding South Africa. The Netherlands never boycotted South African coal, never outlawed investing in South Africa, never banned the air traffic between the Netherlands and South Africa, and did not follow the (voluntary) UN-imposed oil embargo. It also implemented only a limited interpretation of the arms embargo that the UN imposed. In some cases the Netherlands even benefited economically from embargos that other countries imposed on South Africa! All in all, the Dutch government succeeded in turning a blind eye to the demands of the anti-apartheid movement. "Bold" unilateral actions of the Dutch government were entirely lacking. The Netherlands generally followed the pace of the slowest of its allies (though it did on some occasions try to persuade the international community to take bigger steps). Commercial interests usually outweighed moral considerations. The most commonly used argument not to engage in boycotting South Africa was that such actions would not have the desired effect, and would actually reinforce the ‘laager mentality’ of the South African Boers. In a way the Dutch advocates and opponents of actions against South Africa were deadlocked between Max Weber’s Gesinnungsethik and Verantwortungsethik: do we take actions because we desire a certain effect or because it is ‘the right thing to do’?

The concluding chapter touches on the impact of Dutch solidarity on the South African political future. Solidarity for South Africa in the Netherlands was (almost) only addressed to the ANC. Other opposition forces were largely ignored; in fact, solidarity for others than the ANC was strongly rejected. Especially through the European Community huge sums of money were channelled to ANC-dominated organisations. Little or no support was offered to other opposition groups like Inkatha, the PAC or even the Democratic Party. One can argue that this has disproportionately affected the political landscape of post-apartheid South Africa.

Involvement of the Dutch public with the liberation struggle in South Africa was instigated by our common history with South Africa. But the strongest driver of solidarity was, no doubt, the Dutch aversion to racism resulting from the experiences of World War II: the deportation and murder of more than 100,000 Dutch Jews, the German occupation of our country, and the racist laws imposed by the Germans. After the war it became more and more clear that not all Dutch citizens had been as active in resisting the Germans as had been claimed. Faced with a choice between black and white, a majority opted for shades of grey. Especially since the seventies the moral question of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ permeated Dutch social discourses, and World War II was usually the litmus test. The strength of the anti-apartheid movement was that it offered the Dutch public concrete ways and options to position themselves on the ‘right’ side in this, new, struggle between good and evil. It was after all a small step from ‘für Juden verboten’ to ‘slegs vir blankes’. The anti-apartheid movement made it clear that this time, in the choice between good and evil, there would be no room for nuance. Different than with World War II, the fight against apartheid did not end with a clear-cut victory over the enemy. Before the movement could really show its teeth, the enemy gave in. The change that had been hoped for came from ‘the other side’, and the president of the detested apartheid state was even rewarded a Nobel Peace Prize. And Shell too miraculously turned up on the ‘right’ side. Politicians who, a little while before, had qualified Mandela and the ANC as terrorists, ended up jostling to have their picture taken with ‘Madiba’ during his visit to the Netherlands. The real anti-apartheid activists were pushed to the fringe of the Amsterdam stage. In this war too, so we were to believe, everybody had been part of the resistance.