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REINVIGORATING SOUTH AFRICA-SWEDEN RELATIONS:

CULTURE, BUSINESS, DOMESTIC ISSUES, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

GUEST EDITED BY SVEN BOTHA

In This Issue

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Prof Ronit Frenkel

The University of Johannesburg acquired *The Thinker* in April 2019 from Dr Essop Pahad. Over the last decade, *The Thinker* has gained a reputation as a journal that explores Pan-African issues across fields and times. Ronit Frenkel, as the incoming editor, plans on maintaining the pan-African scope of the journal while increasing its coverage into fields such as books, art, literature and popular cultures. *The Thinker* is a 'hybrid' journal, publishing both journalistic pieces with more academic articles and contributors can now opt to have their submissions peer reviewed. We welcome Africa-centred articles from diverse perspectives, in order to enrich both knowledge of the continent and of issues impacting the continent.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS EDITION - All contributing analysts write in their personal capacity

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Silences and Vulnerabilities: **Sex Work and Gender-Based Violence in South Africa and Sweden**

By Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, Marion Stevens, Åsa Eriksson, and Johanna Gondouin

Background

In 1999, Sweden introduced legislation that prohibits and criminalises the purchase of sex – while continuing to decriminalise the selling of sex. Referred to as the 'Swedish model', or the 'Nordic model' after neighbouring countries followed suit, this legal framework is built on an understanding of 'prostitution' as exploitation and a form of violence against women. Examined through this lens, the selling of sex can never be regarded as work. Through its feminist foreign policy platform (in place between 2014 and 2022), Sweden declared that it would engage in 'persistent and robust commitment and agency' to encourage other countries to adopt similar legal frameworks. Yet, evidence of the presumed success of the Swedish model is scant at best, with recent research raising concerns over how the Sex Purchase Act in conjunction with immigration law and third-party regulation has contributed to increased vulnerability of migrant sex workers – who make up the majority of people selling sex in the Nordic region (Vuolajärvi, 2019).

In South Africa, both the selling and buying of sex is criminalised, in spite of the country being party to several international treaties that recognise the right to free choice of work. As decriminalisation of sex work in South Africa is currently high on the public agenda, and the 'Swedish model' is one of the alternatives discussed, critically examining the possible consequences of adopting this model is crucial. In this paper, we draw on research and activist interventions in Sweden and South Africa to examine the possible implications of the adoption of the 'Swedish model' in South Africa – a country with markedly different historical and demographic trajectories, migratory patterns, and a much less extensive and supported social welfare system. We caution that such a move may not achieve the aim of reducing sex workers' vulnerability and exposure to violence. Furthermore, framing the selling of sex as violence rather than work may risk silencing causes for social justice by stripping sex workers of their agency and autonomy, while simultaneously casting them as victims.

Introduction

The Swedish Sex Purchase Act, which prohibits the purchase of a 'temporary sexual relationship', became effective on 1st January 1999, making Sweden the first country in the world to criminalise purchasing but not selling sex. Prior to this, neither the selling nor the buying of sexual services was criminalised[1]. The idea of shifting the criminal focus and moral guilt from the seller to the buyer has a historical genealogy which can be traced to before 1919, when women's movements, in various petitions to the Swedish government, foregrounded 'curbing of male demand' (Svanström, 2017: 31). The contemporary case for client criminalisation was also made using feminist arguments: indeed, the legislative changes were introduced by the ruling Social Democratic Party to parliament as part of the Women's Peace (Kvinnofrid) Bill in 1997. The proponents of the legislation perceive prostitution[2] as violence against women who sell sex; as something which contributes to violence against women in society more broadly and as something that emanates from but also entrenches gender inequality even further. Constructing all prostitution/sex work as a form of violence, Swedish policy diverges from recommendations by UN agencies that understand sex work as consensual sex between adults, and cautions states not to conflate sex work with trafficking, as it risks leading to inadequate responses, and to denied access to rights and increased exposure to violence and oppression for sex workers and victims of trafficking (UNAIDS, 2021). When the legislation was introduced, client criminalisation was presented as a measure that would be combined with social support to persons selling sex, with the ultimate aim of assisting them to exit the industry. This combined approach of criminalising the buyer while decriminalising the selling of sex, and providing social support to persons selling sex, is referred to as the 'Swedish' or, more recently, the 'Nordic model'. Since its adoption, the political support for the legislation has continued to grow. In May 2011, when the Parliament approved a government bill which extended the maximum penalty for the purchase of sexual services from imprisonment for six months to imprisonment for one year, few critical voices were raised in the preceding debate – a sharp contrast to the late 1990s, when several political parties opposed the legislation (Svanström, 2017). Yvonne Svanström (2017) suggests that the reason for this consensus is a shift in the framing of the model, where the question of selling and buying of sexual services has become embedded in broader human rights discourse, linked to measures aimed at preventing trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes. The adoption of an anti-trafficking frame, which was absent when the legislation was first introduced, was prompted by trafficking emerging as a key policy concern within the EU, as well as by the UN Palermo Protocol on trafficking in 2000 (Svanström, 2017). Within this frame, trafficking of human beings for sexual purposes cannot be eliminated unless measures to combat prostitution and sexual exploitation are in place (Ekberg, 2004). Thus, prostitution is subsumed under the rubric of trafficking.

Linking sex purchasing and trafficking, and arguing that client criminalization helps prevent sex trafficking, has also been central in Sweden's recent efforts of exporting the model to other countries within the EU and beyond. Promoted as part of Sweden's feminist foreign policy (launched in 2014 and in place until October 2022, when it was revoked by the newly formed coalition government[3]), the model seeks to advance an understanding that 'prostitution' can never be regarded as work, and that it is always exploitative (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2019: 71). Furthermore, supporters of the Swedish model have in recent years increasingly started referring to it as 'The equality model'. This has to be located within the understanding of the Swedish welfare state as a state feminist/women-friendly entity (Svanström, 2017). Through the feminist foreign policy, Sweden, as the first country in the world, committed to 'systematically [integrating] a gender perspective throughout [its] foreign policy agenda' (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2019: 9). Activist and academic Petra Östergren (2006), a vocal critic of the Swedish model, has suggested that one of its key functions is to embed in the larger discourse of Swedish exceptionalism; the national identity that constructs Sweden as gender-equal, anti-racist, and detached from a colonial past. This moral high ground has been reinforced through Sweden's strong welfare state identity (Habel, 2012). Furthermore, anthropologist Don Kulick (2003) has suggested that through this legislation, as a relatively new EU member state, Sweden wanted to depict itself as the conscience of the EU, and a beacon of morality with regards to the protection of women's rights. One of the leading proponents of the legislation, former Minister for Gender Equality, Margareta Winberg, indeed spoke of Sweden as a 'shining star' when it comes to gender equality (Winberg, 2006, cited in Östergren 2006: 208). Nonetheless, the attribution of gender equality and empowerment of women to Western liberal values and practices is in itself deeply problematic (see Towns, 2009). As noted by Langford and Skilbrei (2022: 166), Sweden 'both drew on and sought to strengthen its nation brand in promoting the criminalization of the purchase of sex'. In recent years, France has emerged as a close ally to Sweden in attempts to export the model to countries within and outside of the EU. Besides France, the model has become exemplary for countries such as Canada, Norway, Iceland, Northern Ireland and Israel who all have adopted a similar legislation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). While the notion of a Swedish or Nordic model has emerged as a well-known, strong brand, Langford and Skilbrei (2022) note that policy differences between the four Nordic countries having implemented some aspect of client criminalisation is too great for it to reflect an actual model. The 'Nordic model', they suggest, functions rather as an important construct and resource in attempts to reform prostitution policy in various countries, often with different aims, focus, and outcomes (Langford and Skilbrei, 2022; McMenzie, Cook and Lang, 2019; Kingston and Thomas, 2019).

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With the 'Swedish model' being one of the exemplary alternatives looked at in South Africa, where a bill regarding decriminalisation of sex work was recently published, a close reading of critical scholarship from the Nordic region, and predictions by South African activists and practitioners on the possible implications of adopting this model, are crucial. This article contributes to such a reading using three different entry points. First, we bring critical research on the Swedish model and its consequences in Sweden into dialogue with contemporary activist and researcher debates in South Africa. Second, we discuss the possible implication for South Africa in adopting a model aimed at strengthening gender equality, which does not address other hierarchies of power that shape women's everyday lives, such as race, class, and migration status. Third, we scrutinise the importance accorded to the Swedish/ Nordic model in South Africa against the backdrop of the historically close ties between the countries, emanating from Sweden's solidarity with the struggle against apartheid, and the present-day relationships which are marked by power inequalities and north-south dependence. Following these three threads, we argue that a possible adoption of the 'Swedish model' in South Africa – a country with markedly different historical and demographic trajectories, migratory patterns, and a much less extensive and supported social welfare system – would risk enhancing the vulnerabilities of sex workers while silencing causes for social justice.

Conundrums and contestations: Sweden

In spite of the Swedish government's endeavours to widely market the Swedish model abroad, state-led initiatives to evaluate the impact of the sex purchase act are curiously few. The only large-scale evaluation to date was published in 2010 (SOU, 2010: 49) and it suggests that sex purchases and trafficking have decreased substantially since the introduction of the legislation. This was corroborated by the Minister of Justice and Home Affairs, Beatrice Ask, who stated that 'the police, as well as social workers, state that criminal groups that sell women for sexual purposes view Sweden as a poor market. They choose not to establish themselves in Sweden because of our legislation' (Ask, 2011). These conclusions have received criticism from researchers in the field, who argue that the knowledge base for such claims is insufficient. A scoping study by Holmström and Skilbrei (2017) on the consequences of the sex purchase act notes that while there may be grounds for claims that fewer sellers operate on the streets since the legislation was adopted, there is no reliable data regarding sex purchase in less visible sites such as indoor and/or online sex (see also Levy and Jakobsson, 2014). This was corroborated in the 2007 enquiry on prostitution by the *National Board of Health and Welfare* (2008), which stated that 'hidden prostitution' was even harder to account for after the implementation of the law (Socialstyrelsen, 2008).[4]

Furthermore, Holmström and Skilbrei (2017) note that the 2010 SOU evaluation ignores other social processes that are likely to have impacted the market, including the rapid increase in the use of online sites for client contact in the same period. The research evidence reviewed by the authors, which they describe as patchy and often biased, also does not give a clear indication of whether trafficking for sexual purposes, an activity that is even more difficult to research, has increased or decreased. Parallel to this, a global media content analysis of the spread of the 'Nordic model' notes several discrepancies between the actual implication of prostitution policy reform packages in the Nordics and how the model is communicated by its promoters on the international scene (Langford and Skilbrei, 2022: 175–178). For instance, while criminalisation of clients and third-party agents was the key policy shift introduced in the Nordics, the communication puts a lot of focus on the decriminalisation of the selling of sex and strengthened welfare services for people selling sex as cornerstones of the model. Nonetheless, the selling of sexual services had been decriminalised in Sweden long before the introduction of the model. Furthermore, the provision of welfare support for persons selling sex in the country is described as weak (Langford and Skilbrei, 2022: 177).

The lack of comprehensive evidence backing the exportation of the 'Nordic model' discussed above, and the dissonance between its marketing and implementation on the ground, represents two of the contradictions and conundrums surrounding the legislation. Below, we delineate what we see as several additional discrepancies built into the model, drawing on experiences in the Swedish context, emanating in the question of whether this seemingly progressive policy approach ultimately may aggravate the very problems it seeks to address.

Whither gender equality?

As discussed above, gender equality has been used to frame the prostitution debate in Sweden, with prostitution seen as incompatible with 'freedom of the individual' and 'gender equality' (SOU, 2010: 49). Assessing people's attitudes towards prostitution in Norway and Sweden through an internet-based survey, Jakobsson and Kotsadam (2011) argue that gender egalitarian attitudes have more purchase in Sweden (while in Norway the debate was triggered by reactions to the increased presence of Nigerian sex workers on the streets) and can be traced to feminists within ruling political parties in Sweden (preceding the criminalisation of buying sex) viewing prostitution as patriarchal oppression of – and violence against – women. This 'neo-abolitionist' policy approach (Kingston and Thomas, 2019: 423) makes the static link between prostitution as a result of 'male oppression of women' and the consequent enforcement against men as the assumed clients. Furthermore, this legislation, as well as other gender equality policies in Sweden, largely builds on an understanding of 'women' as a unitary and homogenous political subject with shared interests, for whom marginalisation is primarily experienced on the basis of gender. As highlighted by critical scholars, this gender equality framing has in effect led to a privileging of the interests of white, middle-class, heterosexual women, while ignoring the (growing) inequalities between women (see Tollin, 2011; de los Reyes, 2005; de los Reyes, 2016). In other words, what is lacking is an intersectional understanding of gender, without which the experiences of working-class women, women of colour and trans women, and the ways in which overlapping structures of social inequality interact, tend to be marginalised in Swedish gender equality policy as well as in Swedish feminism more broadly (Crenshaw, 1991; de los Reyes et al, 2002; de los Reyes and Mulinari; de los Reyes, 2005). Another component to the 'gender equality paradox' is the assumption that women sell sex and men buy those services. It thus fails to acknowledge instances in which women and couples pay for sex and men and trans people sell sexual services (Kingston and Thomas, 2019).

Niina Vuolajärvi's (2019) ethnographic study draws on over two years of fieldwork and 195 interviews with people who sell sex and other informants working within the field of commercial sex in Sweden, Norway, and Finland. She draws attention to how the 'Nordic model' fails to offer support to, and in fact contributes to the increased vulnerability of, migrants who sell sex in the region. Vuolajärvi observes that the majority of persons selling sex in the region are migrants (70–80%), often entering the Nordic countries on a tourist visa or a residence permit from another EU country. This resembles the South African context, where a large share of persons selling sex are foreign nationals, who are furthermore highly vulnerable to violence as is evident in the recent spate of murders of sex workers in Johannesburg (Njilo, 2022). In Sweden, Norway, and Finland, the third-country nationals – many of whom are citizens of Russia, Nigeria, or Latin America – are subjected to punitive measures through immigration policies and made particularly vulnerable (Vuolajärvi, 2019). For instance, third-country nationals operating in Sweden risk being deported, or denied entry, on suspicion that 'he or she will not support himself or herself by honest means' (Swedish Aliens Act, 2005, Chapter 8, Section 2). This points to an additional ambiguity in the Swedish policy, where the selling of sexual services is neither criminalised, nor regarded as a legitimate (or 'honest') form of work.[5] Furthermore, all forms of facilitation of the selling of sex are criminalised through third-party ('pimping') laws in the Nordic countries, also when facilitation is not for profit, and not exploitative. This includes providing a space where sexual services are sold, such as letting out an apartment or a hotel room to a person selling sex, and it further prohibits sex sellers from working together as a form of protection (Vuolajärvi, 2019). Combined with racialised profiling and policing (Vuolajärvi (2019) notes that Nigerian women are particularly vulnerable to arbitrary controls and deportation) many women have no choice but to pay exorbitant prices for housing where they can meet their clients.

The Nordic model may be found appealing through its humanitarian claim of protecting women. It is important to highlight a paradox here about the gendered and raced nature of victimhood. It is well established that a moral paternalistic attitude frames the discourse on sex work with sex workers being cast as 'victims' in need of 'saving' and justifies interventionist impulses (also reminiscent of the discursive framing of imperialist ideology which cast the 'third world woman' as ignorant victims of their culture (see Mohanty, 2003)). Levy and Jakobsson (2014: 602) also point out that some of their respondents were expected to 'adopt a victim status' in order to be eligible for assistance. Furthermore, research participants in Anna Hall's (2021) qualitative study describe being questioned or even seen as guilty when reporting physical and sexual abuse from a violent client, if they resist identifying themselves as victims of prostitution who wish to quit selling sex. On the one hand, this discourse is as problematic as one that overemphasises the agency of the sex workers – at the other end of the spectrum. On the other hand, if we were to accept the frame of victimhood as uncontentious, then the lack of its extension to third country nationals is baffling in itself. The ambiguities embedded in how persons selling sex are expected to relate to the notion of 'victim' is again visible in how the sex purchase act frames the buying of sexual services from an adult as a public-order crime, to which the person selling sex is assumed to have consented. Women (and other persons) selling sex may thus be called as witnesses in the court of law, but are not granted a 'crime victim status', which would make them eligible for legal representation and damages (see Johansson and Östergren, 2021; Hall, 2021).

Furthermore, the model's decoupling of gender from other relations of power – including class, race, and migration status – thus negates the experiences of third country migrants who are engaged in selling sex. Research points out that when it comes to matters of immigration and immigrants, the 'exceptionalism' of the Nordic model falls short in addressing the material realities for women from ethnic minority backgrounds. Corroborating this and drawing on an ethnographic study with Swedish sex workers, Levy and Jakobsson (2014: 603) state: 'Where the sex purchase law appears to be used to displace sex workers from public space, immigration legislation and trafficking rhetoric is used to displace migrant sex workers.' Moreover, also in cases when non-EU citizens have been trafficked to Sweden for sexual purposes, they risk facing deportation, as the government, regardless of which party has been in power, has refrained from granting the right to permanent residency to victims of trafficking (Svanström, 2017).

But what alternative livelihood strategies are offered for exiting the industry, especially for migrant women who lack permanent residency? This is pertinent since immigrant women and minority ethnic women in Sweden are less integrated in labour markets, in politics, and in society in general (Lister, 2009). Among Vuolajärvi's respondents, foreign third-country nationals looking for jobs outside of the sex industry received no support to do so and were unlikely to succeed, as only long-term employment is grounds for obtaining a working visa. This speaks to the limitations of analysing violence solely through the lens of gender relations, and individual men's behaviour. Drawing on an interview study with women selling sex in Sweden, Anna Hall (2021: 140) observes that a single-axis focus on gender-based violence that women face from individual male clients risks making invisible the structural violence that conditions sex work for many women in the first place, namely: unequal access to rights and resources, cuts in or exclusion from the social welfare system, lack of access to trauma support, racism, and restrictive migration regimes. The linking of the sex purchase act with harshly policed immigration laws and third-party laws, in Vuolajärvi's analysis (2019: 164), produces a Nordic model that is 'ultimately a form of punitivist humanitarianism, or governing in the name of caring'.

Increasing stigmatisation and ambiguous readings of 'violence'

Research mapping attitudes towards the sex purchase act in Sweden shows that there is strong support for the legislation (Holmström and Skilbrei, 2017). However, in addition to this, quantitative surveys also indicate that the majority of Swedes favour a complete criminalisation, a view that is particularly strong among women (Kuosmanen, 2011). In other words: rather than imagining women (and other persons) selling sex as victims, the general public appears to view sex sellers as (potential) culprits. Persons selling sex have in opinion pieces and in interviews with researchers reported facing increased stigma and being more vulnerable since the introduction of the Sex Purchase Act – while those who had stopped selling sex were generally positive to the legislation (see SOU, 2010; Östergren, 2006). The 2010 government evaluation of the Sex Purchase Act curiously suggests that increased stigmatisation could be regarded

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as a positive rather than a negative outcome, given that the legislation ultimately aims at eliminating prostitution (SOU, 2010: 130). As noted by Holmström and Skilbrei (2017), this reflects a dissonance with the legislators' framing of prostitution as a form of violence against women. At the same time, a high share of persons selling sex in Sweden, like elsewhere, have been physically and sexually assaulted by clients – with trans-persons and people with disabilities being particularly exposed to violence (Holmström et al, 2020). Such violence often goes unreported, as many sex workers have had negative experiences in their contact with the police, and may also refrain from seeking healthcare services out of fear of not being taken seriously; of being reported to the social services (which in turn may lead to losing social welfare support or even custody of one's children); or out of fear of losing clients (Holmström et al, 2020; Östergren, 2006; Levy and Jakobsson, 2014). Hall observes that while asserting one's agency (as a sex worker) in meetings with clients is perceived by her informants as a key strategy for avoiding violence, asserting one's agency (as a sex worker) in encounters with the police and other authorities may be perceived as a threat, leading to a questioning of one's status as a 'true' victim of violence from clients. This ultimately raises questions as to which women the 'Swedish model' is designed to protect. As noted by critical scholars, the aim of abolishing prostitution appears to override concerns of protecting individuals involved in selling sexual services here and now – unless they are Swedish permanent residents and willing to exit (see Holmström and Skilbrei, 2017; Vuolajärvi, 2019; Rydström, 2021; Hall, 2021). Put differently, one may ask if it is primarily hegemonic (white) female respectability and (white) heteronormative Swedish ideals of gender equality that the Swedish policy makers aim to protect and market abroad?

Conundrums and contestations: South Africa

In relation to Sweden, South Africa is a country with markedly different trajectories: historical, demographic, migratory patterns and a much less extensive and supported social welfare system. As a former settler colony where wealth was accumulated through slavery and indentured labour, South Africa remains one of the most unequal countries in the world, where inequalities have increased since the end of racially privileged, white minority rule in 1994. The majority of the country's black population continues to live in poverty, lacking access to basic services (SERI, 2018). Furthermore, while both the South African and the Swedish economy have depended on the availability of (cheapened) migrant labour over the past decades, South Africa's historical migrant labour system has a particular trajectory, linked to the demand for ultra-cheap labour on the mines, in commercial agriculture and private households under colonialism and apartheid, combined with repressive laws prohibiting black labourers from permanently residing in the areas where they worked, together with their families. As unemployment rates have continued to rise in present-day South Africa, and the country continues to be a destination for migrants seeking refuge from conflicts or better economic opportunities (mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and Zimbabwe), xenophobic violence is rife, with fearful consequences, particularly in poor communities (Greenburg, 2010).[6]

Reflecting on the persisting inequalities in post-apartheid South Africa, political theorist Neville Alexander (2002, 2012, 2013) believes that the ideals of solidarity embodied within the post-1994 notion of South Africa as a 'rainbow nation' masks the unequal socio-economic and political structures (high income inequality, poverty and unemployment), where 'a few thousand black middle class people have boarded the gravy train and are being wooed into the ranks of the established (white) elite, but the nature of the state remained fundamentally unchanged' (Alexander, 2002: 64). Paradoxically, this not only heightens racial competitiveness and ethno-racial consciousness (Moodley and Adam, 2000), but also undermines the 'non-racialism' that post-apartheid transition was supposed to embody. Furthermore, the current democratic government's failure to provide basic services to a large portion of society must both be understood against the backdrop of post-apartheid and post-colonial legacies, and the political factionalism and cronyism within the African National Congress, which exposes the vulnerability of the institution of democracy.

With regard to gender equality, the Bill of Rights[7] in South Africa's constitution provides for the right to equal protection and outlaws discrimination on the grounds of, among other things, gender, sex, pregnancy, race, and sexual orientation. Despite the strong legal protection, structural discrimination is rife in the deeply patriarchal South African context, with very high rates of sexual and gender-based violence, disproportionally affecting poor and working-class women of colour.

Feminist scholars have traced the legacy of sexual violence in South Africa back to the period of slavery (practiced between 1658 and 1838 in the Cape Colony, with slaves being brought in from South East Asia, East Africa, and the Southern African region) (see, for instance, Gqola, 2015). Sexual violence and forced prostitution were key features of slavery, with the Slave Lodge in Cape Town operating as a brothel, while marriages as well as concubinage between white male settlers and enslaved and free non-white women were common (Keegan, 1996). Furthermore, throughout white minority rule, from colonial times (including the Dutch Cape Colony, the British Cape (and other) colonies, the Union of South Africa (a self-governing dominion of the British Empire), the sovereign, white-ruled Republic of South Africa from 1931, the apartheid era from 1948) until the first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa has had a legacy of both informal and formal policing of sexualities. In particular, relationships across race were increasingly perceived as a threat, and were barred through the Immorality Act of 1927 (amended in 1957). During the apartheid era (from 1948 until the early 1990s), police actively patrolled the intimate lives of citizens (Klausen, 2004, 2015). With regards to sex work, the formal policing by colonial powers of women selling sex was for the most part lenient during the

19th century, when legal measures primarily sought to control the (primarily black or mixed race) sex workers as potential vectors of disease, or as a public nuisance (Thusi, 2015). However, this changed with the arrival of white female sex workers from Europe in great numbers at the turn of the century, who were entertaining both white and black male clients in the rapidly increasing number of brothels. The relationships between white female sex workers and black clients sparked moral panic among the racist white regime and in 'respectable' white communities, prompting a decision to criminalise such interactions through the adoption of the 1902 Morality Act in the Cape Colony, later extended to other parts of present-day South Africa (Thusi, 2015). In other words, the white colonial regime took action based on the fear of the so-called 'black peril' putting at risk the purity of 'respectable' white women, not out of concern for the bodily integrity and sexual and reproductive health of black women (and) sex workers. Another example of this disinterest is reflected in the instrumentalization of black women's bodies during apartheid, through the extension of well-funded family planning services to black townships from the 1970s onwards, aimed at reducing fertility rates among black communities and addressing the political concern around 'overpopulation' (Norling, 2019).

The Sexual Offences Act 23 of 1957 formally criminalised the selling of sexual services, while the purchase of sex was made an offence through the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act 32 of 2007, to more explicitly criminalise clients. Thus, both the sex worker and the client are presently criminally liable (Spies, 2021). South African laws also prohibit a range of activities viewed as sex work, including running or owning a brothel, living off the earnings of 'prostitution,' and enticing a woman into 'prostitution'.

The global influence of the Swedish or Nordic model discussed above is visible also in the South African context. The South African Law Reform Commission's (SALRC) Report Sexual Offences: Adult Prostitution (Project 107) approved by the Cabinet and released in 2017, discusses the 'Swedish model' at length. While recommending that both the selling and buying of sexual services remains criminalised, the report suggests, among other things, that research on the Swedish model 'reflects a decline in trafficking and illegal immigrants' (South African Law Reform Commission, 2015: 225). The trajectory of the SALRC report has spanned nearly 20 years, with a starting point in the 1997 'Investigation into Adult Prostitution' (originally entitled 'Sexual Offences by and Against Children'). Unlike Sweden, where sex workers and their organisations have been marginalised in the public debate by both the state and the women's movement (Goodyear and Weitzer, 2011), sex worker-led organisations in South Africa have invested large amounts of time and resources to remain active participants over this 20-year process. However, influential organisations like the *Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Task Force* (SWEAT) argue that the lack of commitment by government towards reforming laws governing sex work makes it evident that the government lacks the political will to take the lives of sex workers seriously (Richter and Chakuvinga, 2012).

Yet, in a surprising turn of events, swift policy initiatives aimed at decriminalising sex work were taken at the tail end of 2022. On November 30, the Cabinet approved the publishing of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Bill of 2022 regarding the decriminalisation of sex work, for public comments. The Bill repeals the Sexual Offences Act (previously Immorality Act), 1957 (Act No. 23 of 1957) and Section 11 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 2007 (Act No. 32 of 2007) to decriminalise the sale and purchase of adult sexual services. In a briefing on December 9th, the Minister of Justice, John Jeffery, said: 'The Bill follows a two-step approach to sex work. It does not decriminalise and regulate the industry all at once. It deals with decriminalisation only, with regulation to follow at a later stage. It was thought to be important to deal with the decriminalisation first, so as to ensure that sex workers are no longer criminally charged. This will mean greater protection for sex workers. Decriminalisation will de-stigmatise sex work and enable access to basic services and protection by law enforcement agencies. Existing laws prohibiting children from selling sex and trafficking for sexual purposes, remain in force.' This briefing took place days before the fraught political conference of the African National Congress where the Minister was a key figure in the leadership contest. While the outcome is yet uncertain, this risky political behaviour of introducing a bill on a topic that has attracted fierce conservative opposition, may indicate that this move has strong support in the Parliament as well as from global actors such as UNAIDS and Human Rights Watch. Some of those who oppose decriminalisation call the bill the 'Jeffery' bill, referring to the Deputy Minister, ostensibly linking him to the disgraced sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Sex work as violence – or violence against sex workers?

As noted above, proponents of the Swedish legislation spoke of prostitution as violence against women who sell sex, and also as something which contributes to violence against women in society more broadly. In an attempt to infuse a position to address gender-based violence, the SALRC (2015: 4) report's reasoning includes the contention that 'exploitation, particularly of women in prostitution, is inherent in prostitution' and that decriminalising sex work would make women who already face high levels of interpersonal violence in South Africa 'even more expendable.' This perspective was countered by SWEAT, which, on the contrary, views criminalisation of sex work as enabling gender-based violence. The organisation argues that it drives sex work underground and prevents sex workers from accessing public services, whether health or education. Today, most persons selling sex in South Africa are poor, black, and female, and they sell sex primarily in order to support their children, as well as other dependents,[8] some referring to themselves as engaging in 'survival sex' while others identify as (commercial) sex workers (Wojcicki, 2002). They endure extraordinarily high levels of violence – including rape, beatings, extortion, and theft – often at the hands of clients and police officers (Hands off! 2016: 5). Furthermore, as noted by Leigh Manoek and Abrahams Fayker (2014: 118), sex workers experience 'layered levels of stigmatization' and abuse, intersecting with power hierarchies of gender, race and class. The criminalisation of sex work may thus be understood as a systemic legacy emanating from the racialised violence and policing of sexualities under apartheid, where the bodies of poor black women were made particularly vulnerable and expendable. In other words, activists and researchers in South Africa suggest that by criminalising sex work, policy makers are contributing to, rather than addressing, violence against female (and other) sex workers.[9]

Health programming for sex work – and the influence of foreign funding

Since the transition to democracy, South Africa has progressively introduced laws protecting a range of sexual and reproductive rights that were earlier seen as controversial. This includes the extension of the right to safe abortion (The Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1996) and to same-sex marriage (the Civil Union Act of 2006, amended in 2020). Furthermore, the legal challenges concerning HIV treatment resulted, after successful campaigning by civil society, in the provision of access to Anti-Retroviral Therapy. Curiously, sex work reform – albeit currently high on the political agenda – remains one of the few contested sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) issues that has not been resolved, despite 28 years of democracy and commitment to transforming injustices.

Stevens et al (2022) consider SRHR as a continuum of intersecting services, from information about sexuality and reproduction, care for cancers, STIs and HIV, contraception and abortion and note how these are poorly provided to sex workers. They conclude that reproductive justice – which envisions full access to reproductive rights in a safe and healthy environment – is undermined by both the criminalisation of sex work and the denial of quality and humanising sexual and reproductive healthcare to sex workers. Reproductive health care to sex workers is primarily provided as part of HIV prevention for 'most at risk populations', motivated by the need to address the 'threat' that sex workers present to public health in general (Stevens et al, 2021: 21). Stabile (2020) cautions that this risk and rescue focus, a dominant discourse in western feminist scholarship, undermines sex workers' human dignity and reproduces racism and colonial hierarchies of power as well as sex and gender binaries. The public health arguments addressing STIs, including HIV, and the health and safety of sex workers were presented to the SA Law Reform Commission in favour of full decriminalisation. It cannot be denied that sex workers are at a greater risk of contracting HIV because of their exposure to multiple sexual partners, the ever-present threat of violence in sexual encounters, and riskier sex (Manoek and Fayker, 2014: 104–5). However, criminalisation of selling of sexual services in itself fosters an unsafe environment for sex workers by undermining their access to justice for crimes committed against them and exposing them to unchecked abuse and exploitation by law enforcement officials (Rangasami et al, 2016). Notwithstanding the Department of Health's National Strategic Plan on HIV for Sex Workers being informed by a respect for the human rights of sex workers, outreach, and non-discrimination,[10] public health researchers have cautioned that criminalisation hinders sex workers' access to health care (see Louskieter et al, 2021), including HIV prevention, treatment, care and support (Strathdee et al, 2015).

As noted above, while there has been legal and policy reform aimed at increasing access to SRHR in South Africa, these laws are poorly implemented and women experience the burden of poor social determinants of health (Stevens, 2021). Furthermore, given that many key stakeholders in South Africa – sex worker organisations, the Commission for Gender Equality, and the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) – favour a decriminalisation of sex work, the question which arises is what causes this inaction? The substantial deficits in government capacity and provision of resources to provide a basic package of sexual and reproductive health services has resulted in a gap which is presently filled by predominantly foreign donors (Klugman, Stevens and Van den Heever, 2000). The Gates Foundation and Buffet Foundation are large funders of reproductive health care in SA currently. This development, where essential services are delivered by donors, is a cause of concern, due to the possibility of agendas being aligned with the interests of foreign donors rather than South African policies and local priorities – something which is perhaps even more challenging where there exists a political legacy of solidarity (Stevens, 2021). Foreign donors also fund a large share of the research on sexual and reproductive health and rights in South Africa, including large-scale research projects with sex workers. Here, sex workers fall between the cracks, as they are invited to take part in research regarding public health concerns often related to HIV or cervical cancer projects, yet they do not have their general health, including sexual and reproductive health needs met. This is due to sex workers experiencing being stigmatised and judged when they access public health care facilities, linked to sex work being criminalised (Stevens et al, 2022).

The concern of the strong influence from US-based private funders, who engage in SRHR work in South Africa without investing in a sustainable local movement for reproductive justice (Stevens, 2021) have been corroborated by Gerber Fried and Hendrixson (2014: 22) who describe the Gates Foundation as having an 'outsized leadership role in initiatives to promote contraception in the Global South'. The Gates Foundation's policy to not fund abortion work (in place since 2014), Gerber Fried and Hendrixson note, results in 'a wall dividing abortion from family planning', which in turn contradicts South African policy decisions to provide integrated sexual and reproductive healthcare packages. Favier et al (2008) further note the 'creep' of US international NGOs taking over the purview of the state public sector and undermining the work of public health systems' sustainability. In displacing government action and public decision making, international NGOs may thus exercise quasi-governmental power – imposing paternalistic restrictions and incentives while simultaneously overriding people's decisions on how to live their own lives (Saunders-Hastings, 2022).

While the US is the largest donor, including both public and private foundations (Stevens, 2021), Sweden is also an important player in the region, both when it comes to development assistance to sexual and reproductive health and rights and to policy dialogue initiatives by the Ministry of Foreign affairs. As noted above, Sweden actively worked to promote the adoption of the 'Nordic model' in other countries and regions, as part of its feminist foreign policy (in place 2014–2022). Through this work, Sweden has among other things provided a platform to South African NGOs, such as *Embrace Dignity*, that advocate for the adoption of the model.[11] Given the history of self-gagging on matters of SRHR in South Africa, as evidenced by the experience during the US Global Gag rule and the simultaneous decision by the Gates Foundation not to fund abortion work (Du Plessis et al, 2019), it may well be that the South African government would in similar ways refrain from undertaking legal reforms with regard to sex work, if this is not favoured by foreign allies. While this is the purview of the Department of Justice within South Africa, one may ask if the lack of traction and engagement in reforming sex work legislation in South Africa, despite evidence from human rights and public health actors, may be linked to, or reinforced by, not wanting to jeopardise good relations with Sweden and other like-minded foreign allies and development partners.

Conclusion

The central aim of our paper is to bring critical research on the Swedish Sex Purchase Act known as the Nordic or Swedish model, in dialogue with contemporary research and activist debates in South Africa, where it has been exemplary in the lengthy process of reforming sex work legislation, an issue presently high on the political agenda. In Sweden, the initiative to criminalise buying sex was driven by feminist policy makers who argued that prostitution is an expression of gender inequality, and a form of male violence against women. Consequently, the objective of this legislation is to eradicate all forms of sex work. However, to this date, the only existing evaluation of the model is inconclusive as to its efficiency to curtail the selling of sex. The Swedish Model, as well as the framing of debates on prostitution in Sweden, have been criticised for building on a universal female subject for whom marginalisation is primarily based on gender, whereas the majority of women selling sex are migrants, subjected to punitive measures through immigration policies which creates an environment conducive to high levels of abuse and violence. A growing body of research indicates that the Swedish model's failure to address other vectors of inequality such as class, race, sexuality, and migration status has in fact increased their vulnerability.

In South Africa, as opposed to Sweden, organisations supporting sex workers are vocal in debates on sex work. South Africa has a larger sex worker population (mainly women but also men and transgender persons) where disparities, compounded by racial inequalities, disable poor women from accessing 'decent work' – with sex work being seen as the only viable means of survival. Furthermore, the criminalisation of sex work may be understood as a legacy of the racialized violence of colonialism and apartheid, where the bodies of poor black women were made particularly vulnerable and expendable. Thus, in spite of different entry points and different historical trajectories, a common denominator between the two countries is that sex work is mainly performed by marginalised populations.

Another area of concern raised in the article is the extensive reliance on foreign funding for the provision of, and research on, sexual and reproductive healthcare services in South Africa. The risk of agendas being aligned with the interests of foreign actors rather than South African policies and local priorities was raised in this regard. While the US is the largest donor, including both public and private foundations, Sweden is an important player when it comes to support for sexual and reproductive health and rights in the region. Furthermore, Sweden has actively promoted the adoption of the Swedish Model as part of its feminist foreign policy, including by giving visibility to South African actors in favour of the model.

However, we argue that in South Africa, as well as in Sweden, full or partial criminalisation contributes to stigma and unfair discrimination against sex workers and facilitates the non-observance of sex worker's human rights, rights that all persons living in Sweden and South Africa are constitutionally entitled to. Criminalisation also jeopardises long-fought feminist battles over bodily autonomy and integrity. This increases the sex workers' vulnerability to violence and abuse. In fact, policy standpoints of UN international bodies including UNAIDS suggest that full decriminalisation would enable better access to health and social services for sex workers and their children, since sex workers fear functionaries of the state and experience violations. Thus, introducing the Swedish model in South Africa would be inconsistent with an ambition to strengthen the position of women engaging in sex work, who experience multiple and interlocking forms of discrimination and violence. More broadly, it would work against the efforts being made at various levels to improve gender equity and to bring an intersectional feminist perspective to foreign policy.

Notes

1. While the regulation of prostitution was abolished in 1919, vagrancy legislation (in place until the 1960s) continued to be used to monitor (working class) women selling sexual services, who, if found guilty, could be sentenced to forced labour (Svanström, 2022).

2. We are aware that the framing and terminology is contested and reflected in the theoretical stances of feminist approaches. Radical feminists align themselves with the vocabulary of prostitute/prostitution as it emphasises the exploitation inherent in selling sex. Liberal feminists, on the other hand, choose the terminology of sex work as it is no different from other kinds of work/labour that women may choose to do (Spies, 2021). Nonetheless, self-identification by sex workers associates the derogatory nature of the word 'prostitute' while recognising that this terminology frames many legal documents (see www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/StellaInfoSheetLanguageMatters.pdf). State organisations such as Folkhälsomyndigheten in Sweden choose the term 'sex mot ersättning' (sex for a fee) instead of prostitution or sex work. In public health work that engages with sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), the term 'give or receive compensation for sex' is used even when the compensation consists of other exchanges besides money, such as clothes, gifts, alcohol, drugs, or sleeping accommodation.

3. The newly formed government comprises a coalition between the Moderates, the Christian Democrats and the Liberals with heavy reliance on the Far-Right party the Sweden Democrats. The latter in particular is well known for its resistance to progressive gender policies. Furthermore, the new government, unlike its predecessor, refrains from associating itself with feminism.

4. For a gendered breakdown of those who have received financial or other compensation for sex, see www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/pubreader/pdfview/display/60999?browserprint=1

5. Sweden's new conservative government is furthermore investigating the possibility of making 'bristande vandel' (an old expression referring to immoral/unrighteous ways of living) grounds for expulsion of foreigners, listing prostitution as one such condition, as one of its policy manoeuvres aimed at driving a deeper wedge between the mutually exclusive categories of citizens versus foreigners.

6. The unemployment rate among women was 37,3% in the third quarter of 2021, compared to 32,9% among men according to the official definition of unemployment. The official unemployment rate among black African women was 41,5% during this period, compared to 9,9% among white women, 25,2% among Indian/Asian women, and 29,1 among coloured women. For further details, see www.statssa.gov.za/?p=14957 and www.statssa.gov.za/?p=15407

7. For further details, see: www.statssa.gov.za/?p=14957 and www.statssa.gov.za/?p=15407

8. For further details, see: www.sweat.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Why-Sex-Work-Should-be-Decriminalsed.pdf

9. For further details, see: www.sweat.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Why-Sex-Work-Should-be-Decriminalsed.pdf

10. For further details, see: www.sweat.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/National-Sex-Worker-Strategy-plan-for-HIV-Prevention.pdf

11. For further details, see www.cap-international.org/fr/activity/cap-intl-participates-south-africa-advocacy-visit/ and www.embracedignity.org.za/about-us/#who

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South Africa
Sweden
University Forum

The South Africa-Sweden University Forum (SASUF):

An Exploration of Knowledge Diplomacy Within South Africa-Sweden Relations

By Sven Botha and Helin Bäckman Kartal

Abstract

Science diplomacy has been an endeavoured area of cooperation between Sweden and South Africa despite Sweden's reluctance to practice science diplomacy. However, the introduction of the South Africa-Sweden University Forum (SASUF) in 2017 remains an under-explored phenomenon of knowledge diplomacy. Using Knight's five characteristics of knowledge diplomacy (focus on higher education, research, and innovation; diversity of actors and partners; recognition of different needs and the collective use of resources; reciprocity; and the building and strengthening of relations between states), this paper argues that SASUF is an essential frontier for knowledge diplomacy in the context of South Africa-Sweden relations. The employment of Knight's framework finds that SASUF can indeed be classified as an example of knowledge diplomacy. In conclusion, a new research agenda on knowledge diplomacy within the context of South Africa-Sweden relations is proposed.

Introduction

The Kingdom of Sweden and the Republic of South Africa have shown signs of leaning towards the practice of science diplomacy, with the former being slightly more reluctant than the latter to embrace science diplomacy. Regardless, both states have displayed an appetite for knowledge diplomacy. Over the last decade, the phenomenon of knowledge diplomacy has become an ever-present diplomatic practice within the context of South Africa-Sweden relations via the South Africa-Sweden University Forum (SASUF). A joint statement released by SASUF partner universities in May 2019 following the conclusion of the second SASUF Research and Innovation Week noted: 'As two countries at the opposite end of the globe, we reali[s]e that cooperation is key to our future prosperity as countries' (SASUF, 2019: 1). Such an acknowledgement suggests that SASUF should be considered as a means of knowledge diplomacy. Using SASUF as its case study, this paper argues that Sweden and South Africa engage in knowledge diplomacy via SASUF. This argument is made by employing Knight's five characteristics of knowledge diplomacy as an analytical framework to a random sample of SASUF projects. In making this argument, it is important to note that the authors simply wish to illustrate the practice of knowledge diplomacy within the context of South Africa-Sweden Relations; it is beyond the scope of this paper to comment on or assess any power dynamics that may exist between South Africa and Sweden when both states practice knowledge diplomacy. This delineation is desired as SASUF is an ongoing project. Hence, a more accurate and in-depth assessment of power relations will be at hand once SASUF concludes its work. Following this introduction, the authors provide a brief historical overview of SASUF, after which the conceptual considerations are discussed, namely the intersection between education diplomacy, science diplomacy, academic diplomacy, and knowledge diplomacy. Knight's five characteristics of knowledge diplomacy are unpacked and clearly defined to firm up the analytical framework to be used in this paper. Thereafter, the framework is applied to the case study with some practical examples. These examples are drawn primarily from project reports submitted to SASUF, thus offering the authors some frontline insights into the work of SASUF. Finally, the conclusion will summarise the main arguments and findings of this paper while also highlighting some areas of further academic interest.

The South Africa-Sweden University Forum: A brief overview

The South Africa-Sweden University Forum, or SASUF, was founded in 2017 by means of a joint application being made to the Swedish Foundation for Cooperation in Research and Higher Education (STINT) by an array of vice-chancellors from a number of South African and Swedish universities. STINT viewed the application favourably and SASUF was born with an initial three-year lifespan spanning from 2018–2020 (South Africa-Sweden University Forum [SASUF], 2023a). At the conclusion of the second SASUF Research and Innovation Week in May 2019, the then-36 partner universities issued a Joint Declaration, calling on their respective governments to support their collaboration (Uppsala University, 2019):

The universities participating in SASUF call on their respective governments to promote collaborations and networking linked to the United Nations Agenda 2023 through research and educational cooperation between South Africa and Sweden by facilitating the following:

- *To support flexible mobility of academic staff, students encompassing undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctorial students as well as post[-doctorial] fellows and provide exchange opportunities for administrative officials by strengthening existing funding structures and creating new ones where gaps exist.*
- *To facilitate the development of early career academics through the initiation of grant programmes to enhance collaboration and networking between South Africa and Sweden.*
- *To ensure appropriate flexible funding schemes to facilitate partnerships in research and education between South Africa and Sweden.*

This call has resulted in the emergence of a number of programmes, including virtual exchange grants, the SASUF Papers Grants, and the completion of three Research and Innovation Weeks (see Table 1), with both countries taking turns to host this event. At the conclusion of its first collaboration cycle in 2020, SASUF has connected 3,000 students and educators from both South Africa and Sweden via 70 projects to date (SASUF, 2023a). Following its initial successes, SASUF was given a three-year extension in 2021 and will continue to function until 2024. SASUF concentrates on six themes (SASUF, 2023a), including:

1. Climate change, natural resources, and sustainability
2. Education for a sustainable society
3. Social transformation through change (knowledge and social development strategies)
4. Health (Understanding the burden of disease in Sweden and South Africa)
5. Sustainable urbanisation, travel, and tourism in the 21st Century
6. Digital technologies, big data, and cybersecurity

Table 1: *All of the Research and Innovation Weeks hosted to date*

Year	Host institution	Location
2018	University of Pretoria	Pretoria, South Africa
2019	Stellenbosch University	Stellenbosch, South Africa
2020	Uppsala University	Uppsala, Sweden (unforeseen circumstances related to the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the exchange taking place remotely under the theme of 'SASUF Goes Digital.')
2022	Uppsala University[1]	The exchange was again facilitated remotely under the theme of 'SASUF Goes Digital.'
2023	University of the Western Cape	Cape Town, South Africa

*(**Source:** The authors with the data provided by the co-author)*

At the time of writing, SASUF consists of 40 partner universities and one associate partner. Table 2 organises SASUF's partners by category and country.

Table 2: *Partner universities and associated partners of SASUF as of January 2023*

Partner universities	
South African universities	**Swedish universities**
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	Uppsala University (coordinator)
Central University of Technology	Jönköping University
Durban University of Technology	Linköping University
Mangosuthu University of Technology	Luleå University of Technology
Nelson Mandela University	Lund University
North-West University	Karlstad University
Rhodes University	Karolinska Institutet
Sefako Makghato Health Sciences University	Malmö University
Sol Plaatje University	Stockholm University

Stellenbosch University	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Tshwane University of Technology	Umeå University
University of Cape Town	University of Gothenburg
University of Fort Hare	University West
University of the Free State	Örebro University
University of Johannesburg	
University of KwaZulu-Natal	
University of Limpopo	
University of Mpumalanga	
University of Pretoria	
University of South Africa	
University of the Western Cape	
University of Venda	
University of Witwatersrand University of Zululand	
Vaal University of Technology	
Walter Sisulu University	
Associated partners[2]	
Entrust Foundation	

(***Source:*** *The authors with data from SASUF, 2023b)*

Conceptual considerations

Since the end of the Cold War, the practice of diplomacy has expanded beyond the state-to-state nexus. Against this backdrop, both the number of actors as well as the number of categories encompassing diplomacy have become plentiful (Abdurahmanli, 2021). Academia, research, and institutions of tertiary education have become pivotal instruments of diplomatic practice; the use of this tool is twofold, as diplomats can deliver lectures or participate in panel discussions while higher education institutions can also be used to establish collaboration in research (Rozental and Buenrostro, 2013: 235 and 236; Ogunnubi and Shawa, 2017: 87 and 88; Knight, 2022: 103). The realms of knowledge generation, knowledge sharing, and cooperation to deliver education have spurned various diplomatic typologies, namely: education diplomacy, science diplomacy, academic diplomacy,

“Since the end of the Cold War, the practice of diplomacy has expanded beyond the state-to-state nexus. Against this backdrop, both the number of actors as well as the number of categories encompassing diplomacy have become plentiful (Abdurahmanli, 2021). Academia, research, and institutions of tertiary education have become pivotal instruments of diplomatic practice”

and knowledge diplomacy. While it is clear that this paper opts to employ its analytical framework within the confines of knowledge diplomacy, the authors deem it necessary to clarify these concepts as a firm understanding of them will help readers to understand the interconnectivity between these various typologies and the reason why knowledge diplomacy was chosen over other typologies. Education diplomacy is defined as a means of using the diplomatic skillset to advance effective cooperation among various actors and sectors to achieve transformational agendas in education (Childhood Education International, n.d.). Over time, education diplomacy has been studied by scholars as a means of advancing international peace, security, development, and human rights (Scorza, 2019: 65). Within this setting, education diplomacy has predominantly been used in the Global South to propel the attainment of the fourth sustainable development goal (quality education for all) (Murphy, 2018). Occurrences of this within the literature include Cardarelli's application of education diplomacy to the refugee education for children displaced by the Syrian conflict (Cardarelli, 2018) and Nasser's proposal for a new framework to use education diplomacy as means to improve childhood education in Pakistan (Nasser, 2018).

Academic diplomacy is perhaps the most loosely defined diplomatic typology discussed in this paper. Academic diplomacy is the exchange of knowledge and ideas in higher education across borders (Chandramohan and Rycroft, 2018). One such example is the academic network established by the MIKTA[3] bloc to aid exchanges between academics and students in Mexico, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Turkey, and Australia (Farrelly, 2015). Abdurahmanli (2021: 587) argues that the exchanges between academics across borders are a form of civil diplomacy, a means of diplomacy whereby civilians informally represent their states. The Academic Diplomacy Project (n.d.) instead argues that academic diplomacy should instead be a means of ensuring that academic knowledge benefits those outside of the academic space, particularly in the case of communities and societies in need.

Aukes (2020: 1) defines science diplomacy as 'collaborations between stakeholders from science, policy and diplomacy, which involve various governmental or diplomatic organisations as well as non-governmental scientific organisations.' Within this backdrop, science diplomacy has three characteristics (The Royal Society, 2012: 15), namely:

Centring foreign policy objectives around science and scientific work.

Coordinating international cooperation in the area of science

Employing cooperation in the area of science to enhance bilateral relations between two states.

Figure 1: *The interconnection between various diplomatic typologies*

(***Source:*** *The authors*)

South Africa has been an ardent practitioner of science diplomacy. The Republic's appetite for scientific advancement is rooted in its isolation brought on by sanctions from the international community in response to apartheid. International isolation solidified the need to safeguard South Africa's security by means of employing technologies pertaining to steel production and iron processing, nuclear technology, bio-warfare, and energy security (Masters, 2015: 174). The Republic's scientific path resulted in advances in nuclear technology, cola-to-liquid processing in aid of oil production, and surgical intervention in the form of the world's first human-to-human transplant (Masters, 2015: 174). In the post-apartheid era, the Republic adopted its White Paper Science and Technology (the White Paper). The White Paper emphasises that South Africa needs to foster a culture and setting of innovation in order to make meaningful progress. The White Paper notes that (South African Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 1996: 8 and 9):

> *The stimulation of a national system of innovation will be central to the empowerment of all South Africans as they seek to achieve social, political, economic, and environmental goals. The development of innovative ideas, products, institutional arrangements and processes will enable the country to address more effectively the needs and aspirations of its citizens. This is particularly important within the context of the demands of global economic competitiveness, sustainable development and equity considerations related to the legacies of our past. A well-managed and properly functioning national system of innovation will make it possible for all South Africans to enjoy the economic, socio-political, and intellectual benefits of science and technology.*

South Africa's quest for scientific innovation persists into its White Paper on Foreign Policy which identifies Europe, Asia, and South America as regions that could help the Republic advance its admission in science, technology, and innovation (South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2011: 29, 31, and 34). By 2012, South Africa's Department of Science and Technology[4] had three overseas offices attached to the Republic's diplomatic missions to Russia, Tokyo, and the European Union to promote cooperation in the areas of science and technology; officials have also been seconded to the secretariat of the Southern African Development Community as well as the African Union Commission (Pandor, 2012: 3). Additionally, South Africa has played a leading role in the establishment of the Group of Earth Observations (GEO).[5] The GEO was founded in 2005 following a call to action for the establishment of an internationally integrated earth observation system following the Republic's hosting of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 (South African Department of Science and Innovation, 2018). The Republic would go on to become the Lead Co-Chair of the GEO in 2018 and is to host the 2023 GEO Ministerial Summit in its capacity as present-day Co-Chair (South African Department of Science and Innovation, 2018; South African Department of Science and Innovation, 2022). South Africa has also used its membership of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) club to practice science diplomacy. One such example of this occurred in 2019 when the BRICS Youth Energy Agency and the National Youth Development Agency of South Africa signed an agreement to facilitate formal collaboration between young scientists from the BRICS states (Botha, 2022: 117 and 118).

While Sweden, like South Africa, is a member of the GEO, and both states had initially opted to enter a bilateral agreement aimed at nurturing cooperation in the areas of science, technology, and innovation in 2013, Sweden appears less ardent in pursuing science diplomacy. The bilateral agreement remains unenforced (South Africa's Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2022). Sweden's lack of enthusiasm is also highlighted by Aukes and Kuhlmann in their report detailing the extent to which the Kingdom has used and could use science diplomacy going forward. In particular, Aukes and Kuhlmann (2022: 26) note:

> *Science diplomacy is a trending term in foreign policy as well as international science policy. This trend has not yet caught hold in the Swedish STI ecosystem. Partly, this is because of the careful consideration of new, fashionable notions that is common among Swedish policy stakeholders. At the same time, the Swedish diplomatic tradition, among others in international environmental policy, represents a logical starting point for a stronger role of science diplomacy in the country.*

Stalled cooperation in the areas of science, technology, and innovation coupled with a stagnant attitude towards science diplomacy within Swedish policymaking and diplomatic circles necessitates a shift towards a more inclusive diplomatic typology.

Finally, Knight (2020: 38) defines knowledge diplomacy as 'a two-way process. It refers to the role that international higher education, research, and innovation (IHERI) play in building and strengthening international relations and, vice versa, the role that international relations play in facilitating and improving IHERI.' These processes are underpinned by five characteristics, all of which are listed and unpacked in the next section of this paper.

Overall, the above discussion illustrates how the blossoming of diplomatic typologies has complicated the diplomatic discourse. Regardless, it is important to note that there is overlap between the various typologies discussed above. This overlap is necessitated by two realities. Firstly, there is a form of 'actor-overlap' between education, science, academia, and knowledge diplomacy. Within the realms of science, academic, and knowledge diplomacy, higher education actors play a role in these kinds of exchanges. Furthermore, education and science diplomacy are very specific in their applications. The former predominantly refers to undertakings to improve access to education in the basic education sector, while the latter mostly speaks to cooperation in finding solutions to global challenges via means offered by the natural sciences. This also raises questions about the difference between science diplomacy and knowledge diplomacy and if they should be considered to be symmetrical. Knight (2022: 122) weighs in on this ponderance by noting:

> *This is a question worthy of serious consideration. It depends on how broadly the concept of science is being defined and used. If science is broadly interpreted to mean knowledge, as in the Latin word "sciencia", then there is a close relationship. But traditionally, science diplomacy has been seen and used in the Western sense of natural sciences as illustrated in all the examples provided in the conceptual framework developed by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.*

Knight (2022: 122) also highlights the one-sided nature of science diplomacy:

> *However, the focus on science and technology excludes, to a large extent, other sectors, issues and disciplines related to the social sciences and humanities. For instance, it is unlikely that science diplomacy initiatives or negotiations would include humanitarian or societal issues such as migration, ageing, refugees, gender, poverty, or human rights. Thus, while full acknowledgement is given to the importance and role of science diplomacy, it does not exclude the necessity of knowledge diplomacy, which is a more inclusive concept in terms of the range of issue sectors and disciplines involved, the diversity in the production of research and application of knowledge.*

"with knowledge having the broadest scope, thus providing an opportunity for education, academic, and science diplomacy to be embarrassed in the practice of knowledge diplomacy (as shown by Figure 1) depending on the context in which each typology is applied. This is apresent within the realm of South Africa-Sweden Relations."

The discussion above shows that each typology discussed in this paper, while akin in some way, is different in their scope and objective. Each typology discussed herein has its own scope, with knowledge having the broadest scope, thus providing an opportunity for education, academic, and science diplomacy to be embarrassed in the practice of knowledge diplomacy (as shown by Figure 1) depending on the context in which each typology is applied. This is present within the realm of South Africa-Sweden Relations. While South Africa's priorities are channelled towards the pursuit of science diplomacy, Sweden's motivations are anchored in the Swedish government's desire to expand the internationalisation of Swedish higher education. A government report published in 2018 summarising the outcomes of a state-sponsored inquiry tasked with proposing a new strategy for the internationalisation of Swedish higher education found that internationalisation, by means of cross-border collaborations in research, enhances the quality of research and education (Government of Sweden, 2018: 8). The report further notes that internationalisation in higher education yields significant political, economic, and social benefits for the participating states. Politically, the internationalisation in higher education allows for the strengthening of bilateral relations as many states desire to create 'knowledge-intensive societies' (Government of Sweden, 2018: 9). Economically, the internationalisation of higher education can stimulate economic growth. As the report notes (Government of Sweden, 2018: 9):

> *By attracting researchers, experts and foreign students who stay on after completing their studies, a country can gain access to international expertise, compensate for inadequate domestic education capacity, support innovation and the economy by renewing the knowledge and innovation system through an inflow of new methods, perspectives and technologies and mitigate the effects of an ageing population.*

From a social perspective, the report concludes that the internationalisation of higher education can result in the personal growth of the individual participant as exposure to external cultures has the potential to increase their self-understanding as well as the understanding of others (Government of Sweden, 2018: 9).

"From a social perspective, the report concludes that the internationalisation of higher education can result in the personal growth of the individual participant as exposure to external cultures has the potential to increase their self-understanding as well as the understanding of others (Government of Sweden, 2018: 9)."

When considered side-by-side, it is clear that South Africa favoured science diplomacy while Sweden was more inclined towards academic diplomacy[6] with the increasing frequency of science diplomacy being mentioned in the report (Government of Sweden, 2018: 9). SASUF therefore paves the way for knowledge diplomacy to occur as the potential occurs whereby both states are able to have their objective fulfilled.

Secondly, the context of the mechanism or platform, in this case SASUF, cannot be overlooked as it provides a circumstantial setting which brings higher education and education-focused non-governmental organisations from both South Africa and Sweden together as collaboration to advance a joint agenda for the delivery of higher education in a wide array of fields spanning the natural and social sciences, which align with Knight's observations above.

Combined, these realities require a more generic typology that accommodates both a diversity of actors and different interests among participating actors.

Knight's five characteristics of knowledge diplomacy

Jane Knight remains one of the few scholars, if not the only scholar, who has been able to enrich and solidify the collective conceptual discourse pertaining to knowledge diplomacy. In this regard, five characteristics have been developed (Knight, 2020: 38–39):

I. **Focus on higher education, research, and innovation:** The practice of knowledge diplomacy involves various forms of internationalisation efforts in higher education. These include student exchanges, scholar exchanges, joint conferences, and research projects. It is imperative to note that all of these activities must be linked or interconnected to one another, as well as a myriad of actors which help to drive strategies for international engagement in order to be considered knowledge diplomacy.

II. **Diversity of actors and partners:** Within the context of higher education, higher education institutions play a potent role in international exchanges; they are, however, not the only actors involved in this process. As Knight (2020: 38) notes 'national, regional, or international centres of excellence, research institutions, foundations, think tanks, professional associations, nongovernmental education organizations and governmental departments/agencies [all have a role to pay in adding the facilitation of international exchanges in the higher education sector].' Of equal importance are the engagements with actors from different sectors who will be involved in the facilitation of the exchanges.

III. **Recognition of different needs and collective use of resources:** It is understood that while different actors come together to address common issues, their ability to engage and seek international partners may differ on each partner's needs and the resources they have access to. Regardless, it is important to acknowledge that each state will bring their own resources to the table by engaging the partnership. Within this context, the cooperating states recognise the collective needs their partners have and work together to ensure that these needs are realised through the constructive employment of each partner's resources.

IV. **Reciprocity (mutual, but with different benefits):** When states engage in knowledge diplomacy, they often exist in different social, economic, and/or political contexts resulting in each partner having access to different and sometimes unequal resources, thereby yielding asymmetrical benefits for all parties involved Regardless, both states are likely to remain engaged in the practice since their participation is mutually beneficial and will likely meet contextual needs or outcomes.

V. **Build and strengthen relations between countries:** Overall, knowledge diplomacy, if employed correctly, can help to strengthen the bilateral relations between the two participating states. Interactions undertaken in the name of knowledge diplomacy are seen to go beyond any pre-existing bilateral or multilateral agreements that the participating states may be party to.

SASUF as a means of knowledge diplomacy within the context of South Africa-Sweden relations

Focus on higher education, research, and innovation

A focus on higher education is central to SASUF. The project's website notes that SASUF was founded with 'the overall aim of strengthening ties between Sweden and South Africa in research, education and innovation' (SASUF, 2023a). As noted earlier on in this article, SASUF has to-date connected an estimated 3,000 students and researchers. This number will most likely increase, given that SASUF's second cycle of operation is still ongoing.

Diversity of actors and partners

As illustrated by Table 2, SASUF currently has 40 university partners and one associate partner. Additionally, there are many partners that may emerge when SASUF collaborations take place via the Seed Grants for Collaborative Research Programme. The Wilder Rangelands Workshop Series project, co-hosted by the University of Fort Hare, Nelson Mandela University, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, the University of Cape Town, Umeå University, and Rhodes University is one such example. The Final Report submitted for this project noted that Conservation South Africa played a key role in cross-learning and knowledge exchange between academic and non-academic experts in the rangeland conservation (SASUF, 2023d: 7). Outside of the Seed Grants for Collaborative Research Programme, other ad-hoc pilot collaborations have also highlighted how different SASUF actors can converge to achieve a common goal. An example of this is the Student Essay Contest on South Africa-Sweden Relations (the Essay Contest). The Essay Contest was open to all final-year undergraduate students at SASUF partner universities, with the hosting and coordination being jointly attended to by the University of Johannesburg (UJ), SASUF, and the Swedish Embassy in Pretoria. The Essay Contest welcomed submissions from five categories, namely: gender issues, environmental issues, academic exchanges, science and technology issues, and cultural issues. Participating students were asked to write an essay in which they explained how both states can strengthen their bilateral relationship within the student's chosen category. The essay submissions were assessed by a panel of 14 judges (seven from South Africa and Sweden respectively) emanating from various SASUF partner universities.

Recognition of different needs and collective use of resources

While both South Africa and Sweden acknowledge that their collaboration is rooted in addressing border-blind issues of mutual concern, each state has their own set of needs that they wish to meet via their collaboration within SASUF. The needs of both states, within the context of SASUF-orientated collaboration, are not publicly stated. Clarity can, however be sought when assessing the foreign policy documents of both states. As has been demonstrated above, South Africa maintains an ardent admission to participate in and lead processes pertaining to research, technology, and innovation. For its part, Sweden has singled out the need to deepen its development cooperation with the African continent, as noted by the Swedish Foreign Ministry (2022):

> *Africa's countries and regions face widely differing conditions and opportunities when it comes to sustainable development. At the same time, several of the continent's challenges are cross-border in nature. One important starting point for the strategy is, therefore, to strengthen regional cooperation and integration. Development cooperation includes support in areas such as environment and climate, democracy and human rights, migration and development, economic integration, and peaceful and inclusive societies.*

While the above does not specifically mention cooperation in education, science diplomacy, nor knowledge diplomacy, it is plausible to argue that cooperation in education and knowledge exchange is part of this process given that the Kingdom is known for fostering a cooperation culture which allows locally based partners to take an active part in owning the projects they collaborate on (Söderbaum, 2017). Moreover, the Swedish government's desire to further the internationalisation of Swedish higher education also suggests that the Kingdom places an emphasis on the important role that collaboration in higher education can occupy in the pursuit of its own interests.

Collaboration within SASUF places an emphasis on each party employing their own resources. This emphasis is reflected in the Seed Grants for Collaborative Research Programme, where Sweden provides funding via STINT, and South Africa provides funding via its National Research Foundation (NRF). STINT contributes 100,000 SEK while the NRF contributes R130,000 (73,891 SEK)[7] (SASUF, 2023e). Additionally, during the Essay Contest, each of the three partners put their respective resources into action to make the contest a success. UJ used its academic knowledge to map out the initial framework for the contest while also providing the artwork advertising the Essay Contest to prospective students. SASUF was able to help market the Essay Contest to partner universities and help identify suitable candidates for the panel of judges. SASUF also awarded the Essay Contest a mobility grant which allowed the winners of each category to attend a winners' luncheon at the Swedish Ambassador's Residence in Pretoria. The Embassy's willingness to host the luncheon provided prospective submitters with an incentive to participate in the Essay Contest.

Reciprocity (mutual, but with different benefits)

Despite having different needs, the various partners are incentivised to cooperate because their collective efforts will make progress towards fulfilling their needs. In the context of SASUF, there are benefits for both states, as well as for individual researchers participating in SASUF's activities. For South Africa, SASUF offers the Republic the opportunity to meet its domestic and foreign policy objectives by affording South African researchers and students the opportunity to be part of the creation of innovative solutions to common problems, such as by scientific and exploratory means. The articles co-authored by Richards and Lipnizki, as well as Dermineur and Kolanisi, respectively, for this special issue are evidence of this. As for Sweden, the Kingdom can fulfil its desire for increased internationalisation of higher education via SASUF. South African-based researchers are able to gain access to a wider pool of research funding while also enhancing their international professional networks. Sweden-based researchers are able to gain access to the African loci for research purposes with greater ease. Combined or mutual benefits have also emerged as researchers from Sweden are able to obtain fellowships in Swedish academic institutions and vice versa. Moreover, postgraduate students from South Africa and Sweden benefited from co-supervision expertise from both states.

Build and strengthen relations between countries

The activities conducted by SASUF have strengthened bilateral relations between South Africa and Sweden. SASUF was due to be showcased as a successful bilateral undertaking in 2020 at a high-level meeting between President Cyril Ramaphosa and then-Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven. The South Africa-Sweden Bi-National Commission's Working Group on Science and Technology had agreed that SASUF would be the subject of the plenary session.[8] Unfortunately, this meeting was postponed due to Covid-19.

SASUF's work has also helped to foster strong social bonds between researchers from both states. Some of the Final Reports submitted by beneficiaries of the Seed Grants for Collaborative Research Programme brought these conclusions to the surface. Facilitators of the Remote Sensing and Multispectral Imaging for Plants and Food Stuff to Meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) project made a similar observation and noted the following when asked to highlight the most significant outcomes of their collaboration: '[t]he different ties we have been able to make and that there are several projects both within academia and between academia and the private sector that will survive after the project is over' (SASUF, 2023e: 1). Likewise, the Final Report submitted for the 'Violence on the Global Map: 'Street Science' for Challenging Norms and Practices' project made the following observation: 'We have been able to develop the partnership into a strong and meaningful collaboration that is looking forward to continued shared activities and engagement' (SASUF, 2023f: 2). They elaborate further to say: 'Through this project we have learnt from one another in ways that have enriched us all and our future plans will enable the learning to strengthen teaching and learning activities at [our respective] institutions' (SASUF, 2023f: 2). Finally, collaborators working on the Open Education and Social Justice (OESJ) Project concluded (SASUF, 2020: 5):

> *The SASUF OESJ has been highly successful as a mechanism to facilitate ongoing collaboration between participating researchers. The team has benefitted from the numerous contact meeting opportunities and has established the trust and rapport necessary to facilitate longer-term collaboration. The project team members have all benefited personally from the interaction in terms of being exposed to different perspectives in two countries and remain committed to ongoing interaction.*

The positive outcomes outlined above confirm strong social ties between South African and Swedish academics, which could help to maintain traditional bilateral relations going forward should the strong bilateral cooperation in research and innovation continue.

" The positive outcomes outlined above confirm strong social ties between South African and Swedish academics, which could help to maintain traditional bilateral relations going forward should the strong bilateral cooperation in research and innovation continue. "

Conclusion

This paper sought to highlight the presence and nature of knowledge diplomacy within the context of South Africa-Sweden Relations by attempting to illustrate that Knight's five characteristics of knowledge diplomacy were present within SASUF. These characteristics were found to align with SASUF's work which indicates that SASUF is an example of knowledge diplomacy within the context of South Africa-Sweden Relations. Given the alignment of SASUF with the typology of knowledge diplomacy, the authors posit and propose a new research agenda vis-á-vis SASUF and knowledge diplomacy. The proposed research agenda is threefold. First, continued usage of SASUF as a case study in scholarly work could help further understanding of contemporary South

Africa-Sweden Relations. Some of the Final Reports submitted have indicated that the seed funding has helped to foster strong working relationships between South African and Swedish researchers. With this submitted observation as a backdrop, future research should focus on how SASUF-orientated collaborations impact how researchers view South Africa-Sweden Relations and whether their work contributes to the fostering of this relationship. The motivation for electing to participate in SASUF activities could also be incorporated into this research.

Second, researchers may wish to focus on the soft power potential of SASUF. Jane Knight has already illustrated the difference between knowledge diplomacy and soft power, so future research should apply this differentiation to SASUF. Third, the long-term impact of the SASUF-funded projects is yet to be determined. This is largely due to the fact that SASUF is still in its second cycle of operation. SASUF coordinators, researchers, and students should continue to submit Final Reports while also keeping additional statistical and numerical information on hand so that a thorough evaluation can be undertaken upon the second funding cycle's conclusion. The success of knowledge diplomacy between South Africa and Sweden by means of SASUF is laudable. However, South Africa's positions in relation to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict as well as the possible expansion of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) bloc could possibly undermine this positive collaboration.[9] Only time will tell how these phenomena will unfold and potentially impact the bilateral relations between South Africa and Sweden.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the South Africa-Sweden University Forum for allowing them access to the Final Reports of the Seed Grants for Collaborative Research Programme, which provided some primary insights for this article. Both SASUF and the authors of these reports are assured that their information was used solely for research purposes and was not disclosed to a third party.

Notes

1. SASUF encourages the joint coordination of projects across its partner institutions. To this end, plans are currently being formulated for the Research and Innovation Week for 2024 to be co-hosted by three Swedish universities.

2. Plans with SASUF's Associate Partners are still under development. Further information regarding SASUF's Associate Partners was not available at the time of writing. Their work, contributions, and impact will need to be noted and discussed in future research.

3. MIKTA is a bloc of states consisting of Mexico, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Turkey, and Australia.

4. At the time of writing, this department is known as the Department of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation.

5. The GEO was founded in 2005 with the intention of establishing a Global Earth Observations System that will enable political leaders and policymakers to make better decisions that will impact humankind. At the time of writing, the GEO has 113 member states, which include both South Africa and Sweden.

6. This conclusion is confirmed when one considers the definition of internationalisation of higher education used in the report.

7. This is an estimated value based on present-day exchange rates.

8. This information was provided to the authors by SASUF.

9. For more information on these global developments, please refer to Beakkvold and Hattar's paper in this special issue.

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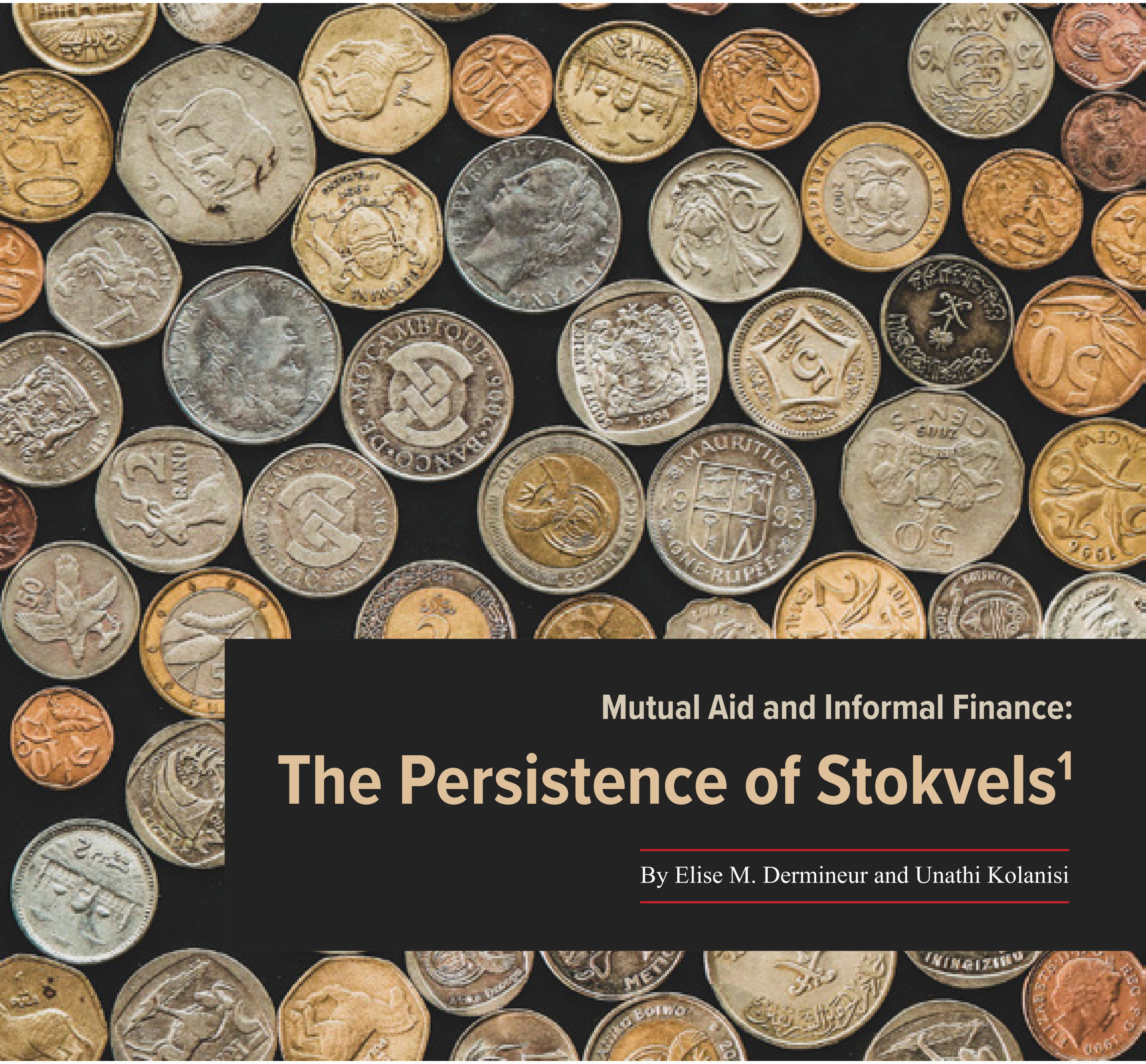

Mutual Aid and Informal Finance:

The Persistence of Stokvels[1]

By Elise M. Dermineur and Unathi Kolanisi

Abstract

This paper focuses on stokvels in contemporary South Africa. It examines the resilience and persistence of mutual aid in a modern setting. It seeks to build a qualitative model to understand the persistence and adaptation of the stokvels in a modern society where banking institutions coexist with informal credit practices. The concept of cooperation is key to the analysis. We argue that stokvels continue to persist in modern society, despite the rise of banking institutions, because of their cooperative nature.

Introduction

The National Stokvel Association of South Africa (NASASA) estimates that about 11 million South Africans, or about 40% of the adult population, are members of a stokvel, the South African variant of a rotating savings and credit association (ROSCAs).[2] About 810,000 stokvels are currently active. Together, they collect about R50 billion annually. Yet, these figures might only be the tip of the iceberg. More people than NASASA estimates may in fact participate in this informal financial system.

A stokvel is a club where voluntary members help each other by taking turns in receiving the contributions of all members of the group (see, for instance: Ardener, 1964; Kok and Lebusa, 2018; Lukhele, 1990). Each stokvel has its own rules, practices, and purpose. The common denominators are mutual trust and a strong sense of mutual responsibility. These informal financial schemes have developed outside the scope of the authorities and have not been subsidised, regulated, or supervised in any way. There is no intermediation, just peer-to-peer exchange. Only social norms regulate stokvels. The behaviour of each member is monitored via collective self-regulation; enforcement is thus made easy. Because of this set of norms and rules, a stokvel is usually considered as a social institution. Women are the most active members and the most numerous (Grietjie Verhoef, 2001; Ardener, 1995). These credit circles appear like an alternative way to save money for funerals, daily supplies, and even investments (see the recent Hossein and P.J, 2022).

But when apartheid ended in the 1990s, one might have predicted the end of the stokvels. As the country opened up both internationally and domestically, its credit industry developed and grew. Banking was made easier thanks to a new set of regulations. And the demand for credit exploded under the impulse of unrestrained consumerism. An increasing number of people became 'banked', i.e. hold a bank account. In 2010, 63% of the adult population above the age of 16 had a bank account. This number jumped to 81% by 2021 (Financial Sector Conduct Activity, 2022). In this context, what about the old stokvels? Samuel Popkin claimed that the survival of mutualist schemes is theoretically unlikely because they are non-inclusive and insufficient for survival (Popkin, 1980). Today in South Africa, stokvels represent an economy of R50 billion, contradicting Popkin's prediction (Koenane, 2019; Lukhele, 1990b). Why did stokvels continue to thrive? How can we explain such a success?

This paper attempts to answer these questions by building a theoretical model. It examines the resilience and persistence of mutual aid in a modern setting. We are especially interested in the persistence and adaptation of the stokvels in a modern society where banking institutions coexist with informal credit practices. We focus especially on the concept of cooperation. We theorise this concept further while using the theorical framework used by Joseph Heath (Heath, 2006). Our aim is to offer a model to explain the resilience and persistence of stokvels in South Africa. This paper examines first the economic needs for stokvels in post-apartheid South Africa. Then, it focuses on the cooperative nature of stokvels to explain their persistence in modern society.

An economic need: The persistence of mutual aid schemes

A long history

The origin of stokvels is uncertain. Reciprocity and mutual aid are understood to be features of traditional communities and belonged to a timeless tradition, part of the indigenous knowledge system, dating well before the time of colonisation, something anthropologists have long hinted at (Graeber, 2002). South African scholars think the term 'stokvel' originated from the nineteenth-century 'stock fairs'. At such fairs, farmers and agricultural workers engaged not only in economic negotiations and the bargaining of livestock, but also in socialisation. Popular with rural Black communities, these meetings quickly spread and thrived in urban areas as well (Grietjie Verhoef, 2001).

Stokvels remained popular with the Black communities under apartheid. Formal banking services then were not accessible to a large chunk of the population. Black people had 'very restricted access' to loans from commercial banks (James, 2014: 7). Pay slips were mandatory to apply for a loan and many lacked such documentation. Additionally, from the 1950s onwards, Black ownership of property was forbidden and mortgages were therefore not granted. Many turned thus to informal solutions. Along with stokvels, mashonisas – loan sharks – also granted people funds, often for emergency needs. Informality was therefore common.

Post-apartheid credit and indebtedness

In 1994, the first multiracial elections were held in South Africa and saw the victory of Nelson Mandela's party, the African National Congress. The end of apartheid signalled a new era for the country and its inhabitants. New economic opportunities became available, especially for the Black community, long discriminated against. Jobs were created and growth took up again. The Black middle-class thrived and many engaged in unrestrained consumerism. In the meantime, regulation was relaxed, and a liberated market witnessed the rise of a newly burgeoning credit industry, today the most important sector in terms of GDP. Banks and microlending institutions thrived. The number of 'banked' people increased tremendously.

As a result, South Africans borrowed as they never did before. Many credit actors, however, attracted by easy profits, engaged in reckless and predatory lending (James, 2014: 67). Some microcredit institutes charged outrageous interest rates to new customers, who did not necessarily have the financial acumen to deal with unscrupulous lending practices.[3] The microlending sector grew from almost nothing in 1994 to R35 billion in 2007 (James, 2014: 66). Commercial banks also witnessed increasing profits. Household debt to GDP reached an all-time record of 51.9% in the first quarter of 2008, only to be beaten in 2020 with the Covid-19 crisis (52.7%).[4]

Indebtedness crept everywhere. In January 2018, *The Economist* published an article with the provocative title: 'In South Africa, more people have loans than jobs.'[5] 'A neoliberal-style economy' was being created, engendering an indebtedness epidemic (James, 2014: 1 and 5). The borrowing craze evidently did nothing to alleviate poverty in a country where economic recovery after apartheid was difficult (Thompson, 2001). In 2020, about 55% of the South African population lived in poverty and 19% in absolute poverty, having less than $1.90 per person to live on. The country's GINI index measuring the dispersion in wealth among the population reached 63, the highest score in the world.[6] Even worse, both poverty and inequality have now continued to progress under the Covid-19 pandemic (Parry and Gordon, 2021).

In this context, despite the rise of banks, stokvels continued to thrive. For those who could not borrow via formal banking actors, stokvels remained a way to save and borrow money to make ends meet and to consume. Stokvels are even now considered to be 'among the key poverty-alleviation strategies' and social advancement tools (Verhoef, 2001; Matuku and Kaseke, 2014; van Wyk, 2017). In an earlier study, Verhoef found that 57% of her respondents belong to a stokvel to survive economically. And 60% of her respondents stated that they cannot survive economically without participation in a stokvel (out of 115 respondents) (Verhoef, 2001: 530).

In fact, if stokvels continue to be an important cornerstone of the household economy it is partly because the banking sector does not compete well with the purposes and aims of the stokvels. In South Africa, banking institutions of different types offer bank loans, insurance products, investment opportunities and grant access to the payment

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system. They mostly do this for people with regular incomes and pay slips.

Stokvels offer capital that would not be accessible otherwise to many households because they lack regular incomes and/or collateral to secure loans. Accessing loans via a banking institution appeared exceedingly difficult for many (see also Aliber, 2001). Many rural dwellers had never had access to a loan offered by a bank (FinAccess, 2019). Microlending institutes offer smaller loans than traditional commercial banks. But because of the lack of rules and regulations before the NCA, many of these actors had to seek profit above all, resulting in a growing distrust among their clients (James, 2014: 69). After 1994, many of the microcredit companies were opened by the Afrikaans-speaking minority, complicating further the relationship with a largely Black clientele. Many believe that banks and microcredit institutes discriminate against their Black clients (James, 2014). Paradoxically, while traditional banking institutions do offer high interest rates, they are often lower compared to the ones proposed by stokvels. But it is understood that the stokvel interest rates go to members of the community and not to a bank, therefore members perceive the process differently. Members' strategy may not be viewed as optimal from a self-interested point of view, but nonetheless it is seen as worth pursuing from a social point of view (Simon, 1983; Bowles, 2016).

The situation has changed recently. An increasing number of people own a bank account. Many more use a bank account for savings but are also members of a stokvel (Aliber, 2001: 54–55). While stokvels help people to accumulate cash, banking deposit accounts offer a safe place to store the accumulated capital. People therefore use both systems (see also Hutchison, 2020). Overall, stokvels did persist after 1994. Poverty, unemployment, and the absence of regular incomes pushed many to continue turning to the informal sector out of habit, but more especially out of necessity. New banking actors often ignore a large segment of the population who could not present sufficient guarantees to secure a loan. But many people also came to distrust the formal banking sector; they perceive it as discriminating. Many believe the stokvel system, by contrast, is more reliable because it is based on interpersonal exchanges.

The cooperative nature of stokvels

Stokvels and cooperation

Stokvels did persist despite the rise of modern banking. One of the reasons, as we have seen above, was economic. Many could not pretend to a bank loan. The lack of formal banking opportunities and banking access encourages individuals to turn to informal options such as stokvels (Platteau, 2006: 822). But another reason for this persistence resides in the social character of stokvels, and, in particular, its cooperative nature. In this part, we aim to highlight the features that enable stokvels to persist in modern South Africa, with special reference to social and moral norms. A stokvel is a cooperative arrangement. Instead of choosing an individual strategy, stokvel members choose a single *joint* strategy, leading to what they consider an optimal outcome. Individuals join a stokvel because of the prospect of new benefits achieved mutually, through cooperation (Gauthier, 1987). It is either the possibility to save money and/or to borrow money. But it is also the possibility to be part of a network which can provide social assistance, solidarity in many different forms, as well as information access. The benefits of stokvel cooperation are thus manifold. We aim to show here how cooperation – that is, pooling resources together in stokvels – works in practice. We use partly Joseph Heath's model of cooperation to highlight the social and economic advantages of stokvels while also reflecting on their flaws (Heath, 2006).

Economies of scale: The community or the strong incentive to cooperate

The first obvious mechanism of cooperation is what Joseph Heath called 'economies of scale'; 'nature sometimes organizes things in such a way that people can do better working together than they can working individually' (Heath, 2006: 319). In traditional and rural communities, cooperation between villagers is often indispensable. Harvesting the fields, curing livestock, mending fences or houses, or taking care of each other's children, for example, require mutual assistance and imply reciprocity. Rural dwellers often rely on each other for communal labour in times of need (Verhoef, 2001). Women, in particular, perform efforts collectively with special reference to informal labour and child rearing.

Because of the need for mutual assistance, traditional communities are usually regarded as societies 'where predispositions toward altruistic or norm-following behavior are pervasively present', although these societies are not deprived of conflicts and social tensions (Platteau, 2006: 821). In fact, cooperation is made possible because of people's self-interest. By helping others, they hope to receive the same assistance when the time comes. Reciprocity is one of the constitutive characteristics of a small community (Taylor, 1982). This reliance on one's neighbours is naturally extended to economic needs and, by extension, to stokvels. In such a setting, cooperation is thus made easier. Individuals are used to relying on each other for their needs. This environment not only creates the conditions for the setting of mutual arrangements such as stokvel but also favours cooperation. Cooperation is sustained further via social norms.

Stokvels and shared norms

The second mechanism of cooperation is tightly related to the first one. Shared norms and values make cooperation easier. Holding beliefs and values in common is a common feature of small African communities. One of these major values is the concept of Ubuntu. This pan-African norm and value literally means that a man can only be a man through others. 'In its most fundamental sense,' writes Verhoef, 'it stands for intense caring and sharing' (Verhoef, 2001: 522). Several studies mentioned Ubuntu as an important factor in the functioning of stokvels (Van Wyk, 2017; Rodima-Taylor, 2022).

Beyond this concept, communal social norms are of importance. Because of a shared common background, people often do share the same social norms. Upon the formation of a stokvel, most of the members are usually of prior acquaintance. Enrolment in a stokvel happens either upon recommendation or via co-optation. Members often share the same background. They belong to the same community, live in the same street or village, frequent the same church, or are involved in the same trade. Some of them are even related to each other. Most of the existing stokvels are all female. This can be explained because women are often in charge of their households' finances and budget. Homophily in terms of gender, socio-professional background, ethnicity, and religion constitute a critical criterion of recruitment.

Social norms are a set of informal rules collectively understood and subject to change, which circumscribe economic exchange in ways that defy purely economic rationality so that it is fair and mutually beneficial in a community of advantage (Sugden, 2018). What kind of role do social norms play in stokvels? Social norms sustain cooperation in at least three different ways.

1. Social norms incite stokvel members to follow the rules they agreed upon. There is a shared understanding that rules and practices need to be followed to reach the common goal. And there is mutual trust that each member will stick to the rules; members expect reliability from one another. Meanwhile, there is also room for flexibility and negotiation.

2. Members comply with social norms because of the fear of condemnation and ostracism from their social group. Stokvels are self-enforcing institutions. Strong social norms not only prevent default, but also prevent or sanction non-compliance. In the case of non-compliance with the rules, members avoid resorting to the formal justice system (in which the Black population historically would not have been treated fairly).[7] A system of fines punishes both late contributions and non-attendance at the mandatory stokvel meeting, emphasising the importance of participation. Negotiations between the stokvel members are conducted in cases of likely default. If these talks fail, violence and ostracism may occur. If a member does not repay the interest and the capital as agreed, sanctions must ensue. First, some of the stokvel members are sent to negotiate with the defaulter. If the group fails to obtain either the repayment or insurance of future payments, a community disciplinary forum may decide to physically seize a defaulter.[8] Physical

violence may occur as a means of coercion (Bähre, 2007). Such a shaming mechanism is used to underline the untrustworthiness of a stokvel community member in the public eye. The shaming acts both as an information channel to warn about a particular individual, but also to warn other potential defaulters. As a result, the default rate in such lending and savings groups is apparently very low. Because of the close-tight character of small communities (many stokvels are rural stokvels or/and stokvels based on prior acquaintance), sanctions to address 'bad' behaviour work better in such a setting; norms of exclusion are more effective in smaller groups (Cook, 2005: 34). Social norms make the incentive not to default very strong, not only because of the direct economic effects but also because of the social consequences.

3. And, finally, members follow certain ('moral') norms for intrinsic reasons consistent with their own preferences, even when such conduct is against their own interests and is not subject to social monitoring and condemnation; (Re)-negotiation and flexibility towards other members for instance (Hedström, Bearman, and Bearman, 2009; Sugden, 2018; Bowles, 2016).

We underline that the combination of shared social norms and high homophily encourage and sustain trust between stokvel members. In the literature, respondents often emphasise the importance of trust in the formation of a stokvel (Cook, 2005). In fact, trustworthiness works as a collateral in a system where tangible guarantees are non-existent. Shared social norms, therefore, encourage and sustain cooperation because of the common understanding of rules but also because of the fear of sanctions.

Tight-knit communities and information transmission

The third mechanism of cooperation is directly tied to the previous two. In tight-knit communities, informational problems are almost inexistent (Platteau, 2006: 855). Agents can come by the information they need because of the intimate, close-knit character of the community. Tied social networks encompass more or less everyone in the community. Information access is made easy. For example, people know about their neighbours' income – or have a rough estimate of it – as well as about their harvests, livestock, personal difficulties, etc. This direct access to information means that no third party is needed and that trust – or distrust – can happen first-hand. In other words, stokvels can remain informal because information flows well. There is no need for monitoring and screening, such as a credit score, because members do have access to the information they need. Stokvel members do not need to outsource the access to information to external parties against a fee. Local information access creates the conditions for cooperation and sustains it. Evidently, in a context where parties know each other and where there are no external screening or monitoring mechanisms, overconfidence can mislead people. They can rely on false information. They can also ignore missing or negative information because of the embeddedness of economic exchanges in the social fabric. We will come back to this point in the last part.

Risk pooling: Stokvels as insurance

The fourth mechanism of cooperation in stokvels is risk pooling. Uncertainty about the future is something all of us are exposed to. For poor households, unfortunate events can tip them over and engulf them into deeper poverty and destitution. In order to get uncertainty under control, insurance is the usual answer. Formal institutions, and in particular those of the welfare state, usually provide a safety net for their citizens (Douglas, 1987). But many poor South African households are left without employment and proper insurance. The social grants distributed by the government often proved to be insufficient to palliate all the needs and uncertainties that households face.

Stokvels can act as a risk-pooling arrangement, a safety net in case of unexpected events. Burial stokvels are perhaps the best example; they work as a life insurance scheme and not only allow their members to bear the cost of burial but also offer social assistance in a delicate time. In an estimate from 2014, 65% of the stokvel population belonged to a burial society for which the average contribution is R134 per month per member.[9] In small communities, the pooling of resources via a stokvel is made easier thanks to social proximity and shared social norms. People have an incentive to come together to save money to shield their families against uncertainties.

This incentive is magnified by the lack of other alternatives. Formal insurance schemes usually require formal documentation, additional transaction costs (transportation, communication, etc.) and fees that might be a deterrent for many.

Cooperation and conflicts

Despite these mechanisms of cooperation, the reality and practices of stokvels are made up of conflicts and tensions. In the literature, respondents often emphasise the social aspect in stokvel membership. In fact, the social and entertainment functions of a stokvel are tremendously important not only to cement the group and smooth the exchanges, but also as an incentive to join a stokvel. Membership in a stokvel is often perceived as being part of a social group, like being among friends. Precisely because of this deep embeddedness of economic transactions in the social fabric (Granovetter, 1985), tensions and conflicts are common (see, for instance: Bähre, 2007). The high degree of personalisation is a fertile ground for disputes of all kinds. As such, stokvel arrangements might not be the most efficient mechanisms. The lack of intercession and monitoring by an external party does not deter conflicts.

Directly related to this problem of embeddedness is the question of power in financial relationships. There has not been much research on this because ROSCAs are usually considered equitable (Bähre, 2007a; 2007b). But financial transactions bind people together in a social relationship (Mauss, 2011). Pierre Bourdieu refers to 'the exercise of gentle violence' when referring to credit (Bourdieu, 1977: 193). For him, credit is 'an attack on the freedom of one who receives it (...) it creates obligations, it is a way to possess, by creating people obliged to reciprocate' (Bourdieu, 1998: 94). The first stokvel members to retrieve money from the common pot became a debtor while the other members became creditors. Another dimension of this imbalance of power problem resides in forced cooperation. By forced cooperation, we mean the participation in stokvels because of social pressure to do so but also the pressure to extend the capital obtained to non-members who might be relatives and friends (Wherry, Seefeldt, and Alvarez, 2019; Baland, Guirkinger, and Mali, 2011). Again, there is not very much research on this aspect. Future research will certainly shed much-needed light on this issue.

Concluding remarks

Stokvels continue to persist in modern society, despite the rise of banking institutions, because of their cooperative nature. These mutual arrangements are based on reciprocity, social norms and cooperation. This pattern of cooperation is certainly not new. Small communities have relied on each other for communal tasks and labour and continue to do so. This is naturally extended to the economic sphere and thus to the stokvels. Stokvel members trust each other, they share and respond to the same social norms. And they don't need external actors to come by information as the close-knit and intimate character of a small community enables them to access information. Social norms act as a deterrent against default and uncooperative behaviour. Stokvel members pool risk together to face uncertainties in a world without adequate security nets. Yet, conflicts and tensions are common. Considering the current success of stokvels, the benefits of cooperation seem to overcome their downsides.

The rise of information technology has given birth to new FinTech apps proposing to mimic stokvel mechanisms (Rodima-Taylor, 2022). Yet, as we perceive it, there is a risk that those new intermediaries harm the cooperative mechanisms of stokvels. As we have seen in this paper, stokvels are perceived as successful because they are cooperative; because of the embeddedness of economic exchanges in the social fabric of communities. Altering this process could engender dis-embeddedness and change the nature of cooperation in stokvels.

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Notes

1. The data for this research has been gathered, processed, and stored in South Africa. It does not involve sensitive data categories as defined by the GDPR.

2. There are other terms used to refer to stokvels such as gooi-goois, makgotlas, kuholisana, etc. The variation depends largely on local practice. The literature on ROSCAs is vast.

3. The National Credit Act of 2005 put a halt to abusive practices by regulating interest rates and introducing comprehensive affordability testing (Calvin, 2010).

4. International Monetary Fund, Household Debt to GDP for South Africa [HDTGPDZAQ163N], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; fred.stlouisfed.org/series/HDTGPDZAQ163N, September 6, 2022.

5. See: www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/01/18/in-south-africa-more-people-have-loans-than-jobs

6. World bank data available here: databankfiles.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/Global_POVEQ_ZAF.pdf

7. The latest statistics indicate that the number of civil summonses issued for debt is about half a million per year for a population of 55.7 million inhabitants. See: www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0041/P0041October2020.pdf

8. Seizing a defaulter physically was a common practice in medieval and early modern Europe. (See, for example: Wakelam, 2020)

9. See: pressoffice.mg.co.za/ipsos/PressRelease.php?StoryID=248956

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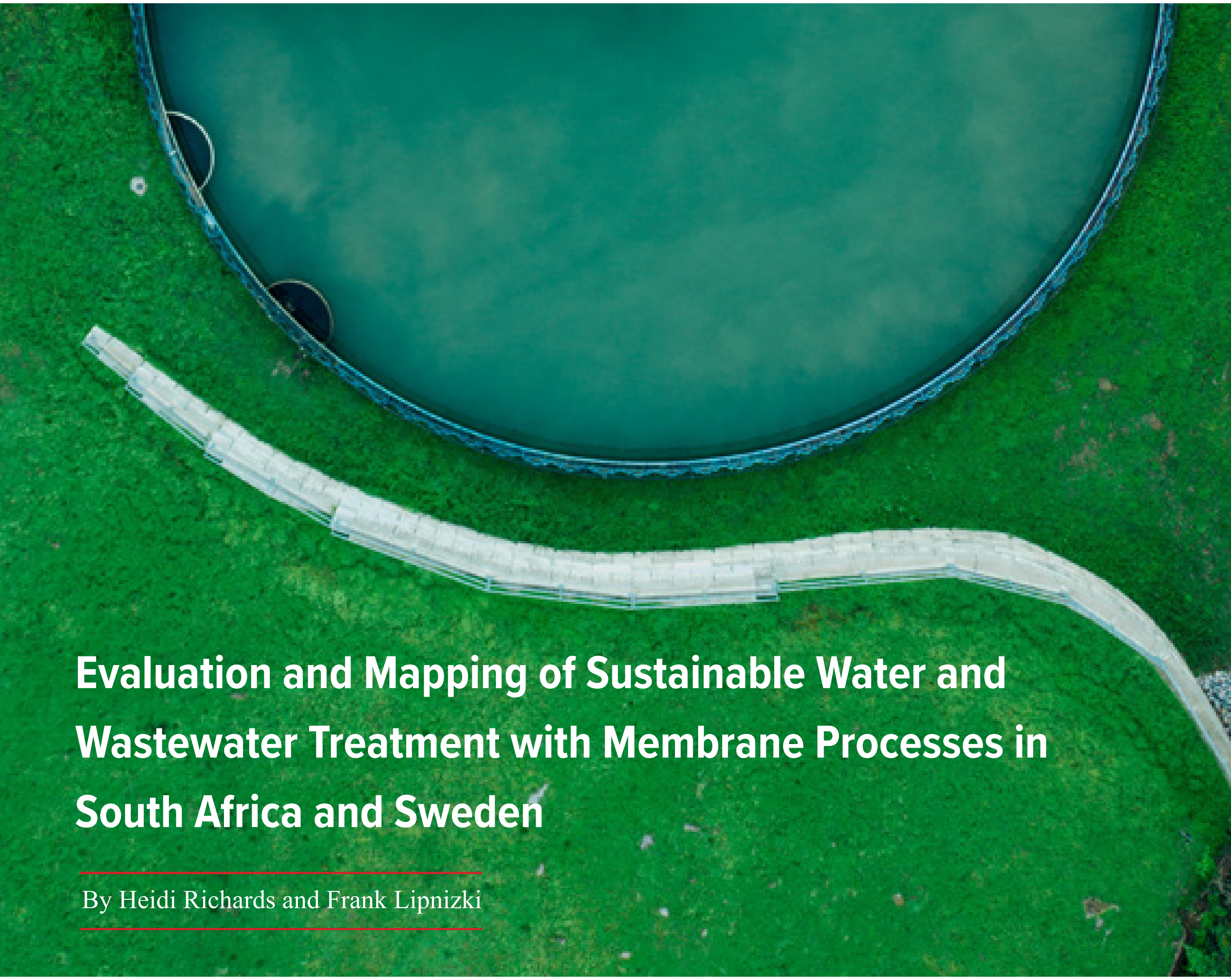


Evaluation and Mapping of Sustainable Water and Wastewater Treatment with Membrane Processes in South Africa and Sweden

By Heidi Richards and Frank Lipnizki

Abstract

Membrane technology is crucial to achieving Sustainable Development Goal No. 6 of clean water and sanitation for all. Despite its numerous benefits, high capital and operating costs pose major challenges. Recent research has focused on sustainable materials as membranes and more effective cleaning regimes to reduce costs and improve membrane lifespan. While South Africa and Sweden have both begun using membrane technology for water and wastewater treatment, it remains relatively rare. Collaborations through SASUF aim to evaluate and share best practices. Although MBRs have produced high-quality effluent in South Africa, cost, maintenance, and membrane replacement, as well as river pollution, remain major considerations. In contrast, Sweden has seen large-scale membrane installations in drinking water and wastewater treatment plants. Establishing working membrane references is crucial to the success of membrane technology, which is well-established globally but often requires local adaptations. Collaborations between the two countries are essential to support this approach by sharing knowledge and learning from each other.

Introduction

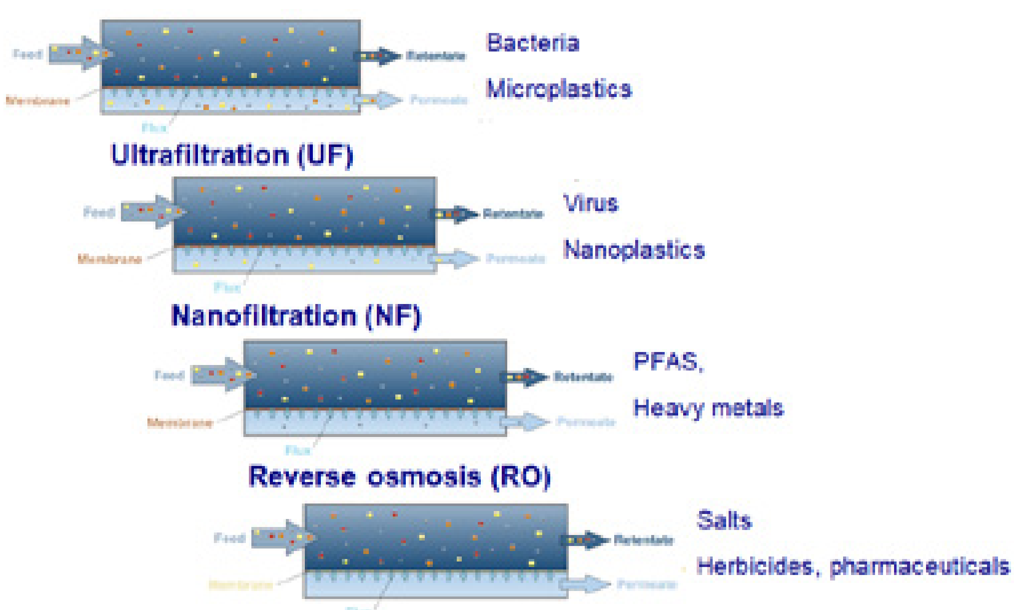
Water is a global future challenge as highlighted in Sustainable Development Goal 6: 'clean water and sanitation for all'. One of the key technologies which can significantly contribute to reach this important goal is membrane technology. Although there are numerous merits of this technology, some major challenges like high capital and operating costs still exist.

The heart of membrane technology is a semi-permeable (often polymeric) membrane which acts as a barrier retaining targeted components and allowing others to pass. In order to address the operating cost challenges, recent research has focused on the use of more novel, sustainable materials as membranes, as well as more effective cleaning regimes that can improve the membrane life span and reduce costs in the longer term.

Membrane technology is still often considered as an emerging technology but in fact it is already a widely established technology for both drinking water preparation and wastewater treatment. The success of membrane technology started in the 1960s with the invention of the phase inversion membranes. Since then, the membrane market grew rapidly and the total membrane market for industrial/municipal and medical applications is today approx. 20–25 billion Euro worldwide and the market is still growing with a stable average annual growth rate (AAGR) of 8–9%. The water and wastewater market including desalination is the largest membrane market after haemodialysis for treating patients with kidney failure. Other, key membrane markets are agro-food, biorefineries and biotech including pharmaceutical applications. The key membrane technologies are the pressure-driven processes microfiltration (MF), ultrafiltration (UF), nanofiltration (NF) and reverse osmosis (RO). Figure 1, below, shows an overview of how these processes can retain different micro- and nano-pollutants from water and thus purify the water.

Despite the global success of membrane technology, membrane processes for water and wastewater treatment are still relatively rare in South Africa and Sweden. Thus, this collaboration between South Africa and Sweden tries to accelerate this development by mapping and evaluating the status on membrane technology for drinking water and wastewater treatment in the two countries and share experiences and best practices.

Figure 1: *Membrane processes for water and wastewater treatment and their retentions.*



(Source: The Authors)

South Africa

Globally, membrane technology is very common for the treatment of water and wastewater; in South Africa, however, this is not the case. The few drinking water treatment plants using membrane technology are based on RO as part of the treatment regime; however, the technology has been slow in uptake in the wastewater treatment area. This is due to several complex reasons that are not all easy to overcome. Currently there are only 4 membrane bioreactors (MBRs) operating on wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs) in South Africa, a shockingly low number considering that there is a total of 824 treatment plants. This fact led us to look critically at the existing plants and their successes and/or challenges.

South Africa has nine provinces, of which Gauteng is the smallest in land size, but the most densely populated. The province that is furthest south, and the most well-known by tourists, is the Western Cape. It is here where one currently finds the only MBRs in the country. Table 1 indicates the location of the MBRs that are currently in operation, as well as the type of effluent that they treat.

It must be noted that scientific publications focused on the applications of MBRs in the South African context are very limited; in fact, they are near non-existent. Therefore, information obtained for this article was sourced directly from municipal managers with the necessary expertise and background in the technical aspects of the MBRs currently in operation. We acknowledge and thank the City of Cape Town for their contribution in this regard.

Witsand Desalination Plant was the first desalination plant in South Africa that uses solar energy to power its processes. Its new technology applications allow for the elimination of storage batteries in the design. The plant's new Osmosun® technology involves the use of a specialised 'intelligent' membrane that is able to continue delivering reverse osmosis, even when the sun goes behind a cloud, thus reducing the amount of solar energy delivered (The Gremlin, 2019). The energy delivered would increase again when the clouds moved away. This ability to 'soften' the variability in the energy delivered preserves the reverse osmosis membranes. At night, when there is no sun, the design allows the plant to switch to conventional grid-electricity and continue working all through the darkness, until the sun rises the next morning.

The first municipal MBR module in South Africa was installed at Zandvliet WWTP. The MBR plant was sized for 18 Ml/d average dry weather flow and was commissioned in 2009. The membranes used were Zenon hollow fiber (now Suez). The plant is currently significantly overloaded, and a second capacity upgrade will have to occur immediately after the one currently under construction (Capacity will increase from 72 Ml/d – 90 Ml/d when complete (Mandela, 2019). The plant has a combined inlet works and consists of two treatment modules:

Table 1: *Summary of membrane treatment plants in South Africa in 2022.*

Plant type	Location	Application	Pilot vs. full scale
Drinking water			
RO	V&A Waterfront – Cape Town	Seawater desalination	Pilot
UF + RO	Beaufort West – Western Cape	Reclamation plant WW to drinking water	Full
RO	Witsand – Western Cape	Solar-driven seawater desalination	Full
Wastewater			
MBR	Malmesbury WWTP – Western Cape	Domestic effluent	Full
MBR	Bellvile WWTP – Western Cape	Domestic/industrial effluent	Full
MBR	Zandvliet WWTP – Western Cape	Domestic effluent	Full
MBR	Stellenbosch WWTP – Western Cape	Domestic effluent	Full

(Source: The Authors)

> Membrane processes for water and wastewater treatment only became established in the Swedish market at the beginning of the 21st century. The main reasons for the late entry of these technologies into the Swedish market were the generally good availability of high-quality water and the initially high costs of membrane processes compared to conventional treatment technologies.

- 54 Ml/d Conventional Activated Sludge (CAS) Module treating raw wastewater and using chlorine gas for disinfection (2 bioreactors, MLE process configuration);
- 18 Ml/d MBR treating raw wastewater with dedicated 2mm fine screen, 1 MBR (UCT process configuration) and site chlorination for disinfection (chlorine gas).

The entire WWTP is currently being upgraded with a new combined inlet works, new combined primary sedimentation, second 18 Ml/d MBR section, together with refurbishment of all existing modules and a new mechanical dewatering installation. The commissioning of the new plant is anticipated to be by December 2023.

It is clear that MBRs are producing high quality effluents at the 4 WWTPs where there are currently in use, which brings us to the question: why is it not being considered by the rest of the treatment works in South Africa?

There are a number of reasons for this, but some of the considerations are:

I. First and foremost is the cost of the technology. Not only is the budget for construction of a MBR plant huge, but maintenance of the plant and cleaning of the membranes is very expensive. The membranes have a limited life cycle and have to be replaced every number of years. South Africa is still a developing country, with many challenges such as poverty and poor infrastructure. Not all municipalities are therefore equipped to justify such a huge capital expenditure.

II. Secondly, our rivers in South Africa, especially in the North of the country in provinces like Gauteng, are extremely polluted. Discharging a final effluent obtained from a multi-million-rand treatment facility into a river that is polluted on a daily basis, is simply not economically feasible.

III. Thirdly, due to the two reasons just mentioned, it is very difficult to convince the decision makers in local government to invest in more MBR based WWTPs.

IV. As researchers in membrane technology, we remain hopeful that this will change in the not-too-distant future.

Sweden

Industrial applications for membrane processes in Sweden started in the 1970s. However, in contrast to many other countries, the focus was not on drinking water production but on process applications in the dairy and pulp and paper industry with the demineralisation of whey from the cheese production by ultrafiltration as one of success stories. Membrane processes for water and wastewater treatment only became established in the Swedish market at the beginning of the 21st century. The main reasons for the late entry of these technologies into the Swedish market were the generally good availability of high-quality water and the initially high costs of membrane processes compared to conventional treatment technologies. However, in recent years, a major change with regard to the amount of large-scale membrane installations has been noted in Sweden. Generally, three major trends have been observed:

1. Drinking water plants based on UF/NF using ground and surface-water, e.g. river or lake water.
2. Drinking water plants based on RO using brackish water aka water from the Baltic Sea.
3. Wastewater treatment plants using MBRs.

An overview of key membrane plants installed in Sweden is given in Table 2.

Table 2: *Selected membrane plants in Sweden status 2022.*

Plant type	Location	Application	Pilot vs. full scale	Ref
Drinking water				
UF	Gothenburg	River water	Full	[3]
UF	Kungälv	River water	Full	[4]
UF	Varberg	Lake water and ground water	Full	[5]
UF + RO	Ôland	Industrial waste and brackish water	Full	[6]
UF + RO	Gotland	Brackish water	2 x Full	[7, 8]
Wastewater				
MBR	Stockholm	Domestic effluent	Full	[9]

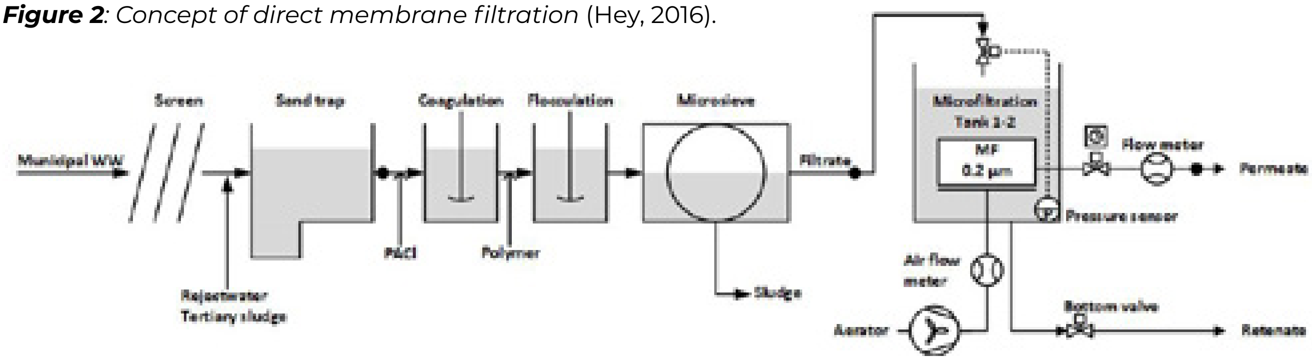
(Source: The Authors)

A milestone in the use of membrane technology in Sweden for drinking water preparation was the Lackarebäck plant in Gothenburg. The UF plant was not only the first major plant in Sweden, with a capacity of 186 Ml ~~m^3~~/day, but also one of the largest UF plants in Europe (Pentair X-Flow(a), n.d.). The treatment plant converts river water from the Göta älv to drinking water for the second largest city in Sweden. The success of this plant led to the installation of similar plants using river, lake, and ground water in locations such as Kungälv (Pentair X-Flow(b), n.d.) and Varberg (Keucken, 2017).

Another important step was the installation of membrane plants on the Swedish Baltic Sea islands Gotland and Öland. The first installation was RO plant at Herrvik on Gotland with a capacity of 20 m^3/h in 2016 (Region Gotland, n.d.). The treatment plant directly takes water from the Baltic Sea, passes it through a strainer plus UF and then desalts it to produce drinking water. The second installation on Gotland is the Kvarnåkersham plant, which uses the same concept and was started in 2019. With a capacity of 7.5 Ml/day it is the largest brackish water desalination plant in Scandinavia (NCC, n.d.). An interesting concept for drinking water production was realised at Mörbylånga on Öland (Mörbylånga Kommun, n.d.). The plant uses brackish water from a well close to the Baltic Sea and industrial wastewater from a food processing plant. The industrial wastewater passes initially through an industrial WWTP and is then further polished by flocculation, UF and UV-light before being mixed with the brackish water. The combined stream is then further treated in a second line of UF, RO and UV-light as major steps before being used as drinking water.

Most recently the Henriksdal wastewater treatment plant in Stockholm opened the first of four MBR stages (Andersson, 2018). The total capacity of the plant once completed is two million persons equivalent and it will be ranked among the largest MBR plants in the world. An interesting feature is that the plant is completely installed inside a mountain close to the centre of Stockholm. The use of MBRs for municipal wastewater treatment is only a very recent trend. It is foreseen that other Swedish municipalities will follow that trend and update their wastewater treatment plant to MBRs.

Figure 2*: Concept of direct membrane filtration* (Hey, 2016).



(Source: The Authors)

Furthermore, at Lund University the use of another concept described as direct membrane filtration (DMF) for municipal wastewater treatment is investigated (Hey, 2016). The DMF concept treats municipal wastewater by flocculation/coagulation followed by microsieving and thereafter by MF/UF, Figure 2. Key to the process is that negligible biological degradation is involved in the treatment process and thus the solid biodegradable organic load of the wastewater is available for biogas production. The supernatant containing soluble nutrients such as phosphorous, ammonia and nitrogen is available for surrounding agricultural activities.

Conclusions

The use of membrane technology in drinking water and wastewater treatment in South Africa and Sweden is growing despite the relative late start of both countries. Key for the success is the establishment of working membrane references for both drinking water preparation and wastewater treatment to serve as best practice examples. Membrane technology as such is very well established on the global market but often needs some local adaptions to work effectively. Reclamation of wastewater effluent would either be done indirectly as present scenarios and/or directly with the use of membranes. Thus, the collaborations between South Africa and Sweden as done in the South Africa Sweden University Forum (SASUF) are essential to support this approach by learning from one another.

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Exploring the Impact of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa:

A Partnership Between the University of Johannesburg and Mid Sweden University

By Corné Davis

In 2021, Prof. Corné Davis, from the Department of Strategic Communication at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), approached KPMG South Africa regarding the publication of an updated research report on the cost of gender-based violence (GBV) to the South African economy, following a frequently quoted report titled 'Too Costly to Ignore – The Economic Impact of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa'. A memorandum of agreement (MOA) was signed between UJ, Shared Value Africa Initiative, and KPMG South Africa to conduct research and to publish a new GBV report for South Africa. In the 2014 KPMG report, Prof. Koustuv Dalal of Mid Sweden University was cited with reference to the cost estimations he had done during a study in KwaZulu-Natal in 2011. Prof. Davis contacted Prof. Dalal by email to invite him to participate in the study.

On 11 March 2020, President Ramaphosa published the National Strategic Plan to address GBV in South Africa in which he called on the private sector multiple times to address GBV. At that time, no study had been conducted to determine the views of the private sector on GBV. Hence, this new research was conceptualised. The study used three methodologies, which were interviews with leaders in private sector organisations in South Africa (mostly chief executive officers), an employee perception survey, and a secondary data analysis for the estimation of the cost of GBV to the South African economy. At that time, there was little evidence to suggest that GBV was being addressed as an issue that affects employees in the private sector in South Africa (Davis, 2020).

First, interviews were held with leaders in private sector organisations in South Africa to determine: a) their awareness of the prevalence and impact of GBV in South Africa; b) where they would position the issue of GBV within their organisational framework; c) what they thought their employees expected them to do regarding GBV support and intervention; and d) whether they intended to address GBV in some way.

Second, a survey instrument was developed in collaboration with Dr Kuhudzai, an expert statistician at UJ. The survey was distributed among all networks, including the stakeholders of the South African research partners, and was also shared on LinkedIn. The aim of the survey was to determine what employees' knowledge, perceptions, beliefs, and recommendations were pertaining to GBV and how it should be addressed by private sector organisations in South Africa. The survey ran for 10 months and a total of 2,270 responses were used for analysis. Although this was not a representative study, responses were received from all provinces in South Africa and included all language groups. The number was significant enough to provide some insight into employees' perceptions. Prof. Dalal had previously done research in 52 countries, with many of the studies focused on GBV. He had also been ranked as the top health economist in the world and is familiar with South Africa from his previous research. He used local and global figures to estimate the current cost of GBV to the South African economy with the secondary data obtained from the World Bank and the World Health Organisation. He made a strong recommendation for a study to be conducted among GBV victims to arrive at a more accurate figure, given that most cases of GBV in South Africa are never reported to the police.

Release of the research

Prof. Dalal visited South Africa from 8 to 18 August 2022 to attend the release of the research report at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). Prof. Dalal was welcomed at UJ Auckland Park Campus on 10 August 2022 by the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Prof. Kammila Naidoo. Prof. Dalal presented a public lecture that was well attended by enthusiastic students who were keen to learn about some of the successful GBV interventions he had been involved in previously.

Image 1: Prof. Koustuv Dalal, Prof. Corné Davis and Dr Anesu Kuhudzai (the research team)

The event at the JSE was attended by various stakeholders, including some of the participating private sector organisations, non-governmental organisations, and other stakeholders. Several interviews were held on television and radio channels and most of the major newspapers in South Africa covered the event. The research report was endorsed by Prof. Mervyn King, who is well known for the King Reports on corporate governance and who authored the foreword, as well as UJ Chancellor Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, who has also been the executive director of UN Women, with a rank of under-secretary-general of the UN.

The report showed that leaders in the private sector were aware that GBV was a problem in South Africa, but their awareness of how it affected their employees was less apparent. It was also apparent from leaders' responses that they were aware that gender inequality persisted in South Africa, and they acknowledged that inequality was a key driver of GBV. Many agreed that addressing GBV should be included in their organisation's strategy as well as organisational policies. Many leaders acknowledged that GBV was an issue that affected employee wellbeing and that it required a more holistic approach as it also affected employees' inner circles. Leaders who did not know much detail about GBV were provided with some statistics, including the fact that intimate partner violence statistics in South Africa are six times higher than the global average, and that most cases of GBV are never reported to the police. They were also informed that a very high number of GBV distress calls received by the TEARS Foundation's Help-at-your-fingertips line were made from affluent areas in South Africa (Davis and Meerkotter, 2017).

Findings of the research

The findings from the employee perception study were most insightful. The sample population was skewed towards higher education levels, ranging from diplomas to doctorate qualifications. There were several key findings. First, most of the sample was aware of the prevalence of the different kinds of GBV being perpetrated in South Africa. Most respondents strongly agreed that GBV had to be addressed in the workplace, because of its high prevalence in South Africa. Surprisingly, a significant number of employees felt that perpetrators of GBV also needed

“The health economy stream of the research revealed concerning findings, showing that among the 789,000 employees in the organisations included in the study, the crude estimate was that approximately 208,000 female employees would have experienced some kind of GBV in their lifetime. It was pointed out that GBV necessarily impacts victims' performance at work and hence the profitability of the company.”

support, given that children who were exposed to or experienced GBV in their lives were far more likely to become either victims or perpetrators or both. Employees also felt that patriarchy was a key driver of GBV and that it was closely linked to inequality and the subordination of women across cultures, with 77% holding the view that GBV was a main contributor to the lack of career progress for women in South Africa. Several employees expressed their dismay at the South African government's systemic failures, ranging from inadequate police services to the lack of support structures and appalling conviction rates for GBV crimes. They also thought that private sector organisations should include how they were addressing GBV in their annual Economic Social and Governance (ESG) reports to demonstrate their commitment to addressing GBV in South Africa.

The health economy stream of the research revealed concerning findings, showing that among the 789,000 employees in the organisations included in the study, the crude estimate was that approximately 208,000 female employees would have experienced some kind of GBV in their lifetime. It was pointed out that GBV necessarily impacts victims' performance at work and hence the profitability of the company. A figure in the study also shows how the disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) have increased over the past 10 years, based on the secondary data obtained from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Bank. DALYs refer to years of life lost because of exposure to and experience of GBV. The human capital approach was used for the cost estimation of

GBV in South Africa, referring to health, knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic wellbeing (Davis, Kuhudzai and Dalal, 2022). The cost estimation included the out-of-pocket (OOP) expenditure of individuals, as well as loss of productivity, and the DALYs for South Africa in 2019 was estimated at 289,800, while the OOP expenditure for GBV victims was estimated at approximately R10 billion per annum. Also considering other costs, such as medical practitioners and judicial expenditure, a loss of more than R36 billion to GDP in 2019 alone was estimated for South Africa. The report acknowledged that these estimations may not be accurate, and that primary research had to be conducted to arrive at more accurate cost estimations.

The report made a number of recommendations, starting with an appeal to business leaders to speak out against gender inequality in the workplace and to address issues such as gender discrimination, while providing more support to enable women's empowerment. The report reiterated the importance of subscribing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with specific reference to SDG 5, which aims to achieve gender equality. It was also recommended that organisations should enable complaint and response mechanisms that could also help to address the silence that perpetuated GBV. Private sector organisations should act to prevent GBV within the company through strategy, HR-led policies, systems, awareness training, communication and dialogue.

Further research

Further research was done during Prof. Dalal's visit. The first engagement was in East London in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. A focus group discussion was held with a group of public services representatives and other GBV support service providers to gather their views on why the GBV statistics for South Africa are so high. Interviews were also conducted and conversations held with GBV support service providers in the city of Cape Town in the Western Cape province. Most interviews were held in Umhlanga in KwaZulu-Natal, where participants included GBV activists, a team of medical practitioners, public health officials, and the National Prosecuting Authority. The last set of data was collected from public service providers in Welkom in the Free State province. These findings will be submitted for publication shortly.

Since Prof. Dalal's visit to South Africa, he has been appointed Distinguished Visiting Professor at UJ, and an MOU between UJ and Mid Sweden University has been signed. Prof. Dalal will visit UJ again in 2023 to continue with our GBV research and, hopefully, to attend the release of our next national GBV research report on victim profiling in collaboration with the TEARS Foundation. The current research will show the number of GBV distress calls that were made to the TEARS helpline, and where these calls were made from. It will also provide very specific information about call patterns, including population parameters for the various cities and suburbs in South Africa. Another data stream in this study will profile GBV victims in terms of their conversations with TEARS support staff. These data sets will also be linked to police records and statistics published by the South African government.

The collaboration so far has been successful, and hopefully the publication of the forthcoming reports will gather support for the funding of GBV intervention programmes that are so critical for South Africa. The impact of the GBV research has been recognised as Prof. Davis won the Faculty of Humanities Dean's award for 2022 and won the Woman of Stature award for women in education, as well as the overall Woman of Stature award for South Africa. Considering the global impact of GBV, further collaboration between South African and Swedish universities to address GBV is recommended.

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"Re-Tale"

Proposing A Fifth Principle in The Sustainable Fashion Retail Story

By Beate Stiehler-Mulder and Thea Tselepis

Abstract

The fashion industry has long been in a battle to improve its sustainability, as well as its environmental protection efforts. In this conceptual paper, we unpack the different stories of sustainability and environmental challenges in this specific industry – which is very much driven by fast fashion. We contrast developing (South Africa) and developed (Sweden) markets' approaches to fashion sustainability, to uncover and understand broad overlapping dimensions of sustainability, and differences. The aim of this paper is to stimulate thinking and conversations about sustainable practices in developing nations as well as in developed nations. The review of the stories and the contexts presented suggests the need to shift the focus to the developing market's consumer, and concludes with the proposal of including a fifth principle of sustainability: Reframing fashion.

Introduction

At the start of 2023, the global fashion industry is still under the magnifying glass about impacting the environment negatively, and it is argued that numerous stakeholders and customers will increasingly question and investigate how fashion brands convey their sustainability credentials (McKinsey, 2022). The general facts are that the size of the fashion industry was valued at around 1.5 trillion U.S. dollars in 2021 and is predicted to reach 2 trillion dollars by 2026 (Statista, 2022). Early 2021 till mid 2022 saw robust growth in the industry. However, hyperinflation and depressed customer sentiments impacted the growth rate from the second half of 2022 and is likely to continue in 2023 (McKinsey, 2022). Nevertheless, the luxury fashion category has continued to do well, as wealthy consumers are less affected by the economic challenges and conspicuous consumption[1] is therefore expected to grow.

The South African fashion industry offers one of the largest fashion markets in Africa, accounting for more than 45% of the continent's total spending on clothing and footwear (Fitch Report, 2022). The good news is that South African consumers are increasingly focused on local fashion brands with the country's apparel industry growing at an average of 5.2% over the past five years (Fitch Report, 2022). South Africa's market for luxury fashion is growing mainly due to the growing middle-income consumer segment (Saruchera and Mthombeni, 2023). However, South African consumers are becoming conscious of sustainable and ethical fashion options (Taljaard and Sonnenberg, 2019).

In another context that is advanced in terms of sustainable fashion consumption, Sweden is the leader in sustainable fashion consumption (Gupta, Gwozdz and Gentry, 2019). Sweden has tackled sustainable fashion from the manufacturing side with a fashion pact to request companies to reduce environmental impact and on the other hand has implemented various campaigns and initiatives that encourage consumers to think about the environmental impact of their purchases (Brydges, 2021). These include choosing items from sustainable material, buying second-hand clothing, and avoiding excessive packaging. The Swedish consumer is therefore well-informed about various principles and the consequences of their fashion consumption.

From the above, we argue that the story of South African fashion consumption is still very much a story of consumerism and that some best practices of Sweden may be applicable. Moreover, a strong South African consumer narrative is that of conspicuous consumption and the display of abundance – in a time where the abundance of natural resources is not a truth for most countries (Ahmed, Asghar, Malik and Nawaz, 2020). In many instances, the guidelines to industry and consumers for sustainability are the four principles of sustainability: Reducing consumption, reusing items or material, recycling materials, and recovering energy from waste (David, Thangavel and Sankriti, 2019).

In this paper, we offer a critical dialectical engagement with existing literature on sustainable fashion in the South African and Swedish contexts with the aim to present the story/tale of the application of principles of sustainability to support thinking and conversation about these important aspects. This conceptual paper commences with an overview of the general tale of sustainable fashion with the issues of fast fashion consumption as a main theme. The paper then continues to offer two contexts for sustainable fashion practice (South Africa and Sweden) and concludes with a recommendation of a fifth R in the four principles of sustainable fashion particularly applicable to South Africa.

A general review of sustainable fashion

In this review of scholarship, we offer the facts on sustainable fashion to illustrate the story it tells. We apply our own critical voice to comment on the story and present relevant themes around sustainable fashion relating to some of the commonly referred to principles of sustainability.

The three Ps and the four Rs of sustainability

Sustainability as an overall concept is proposed to consist of three dimensions or pillars, i.e. economic (profit), environment (planet), and social (people) (Silvius, Schipper, Planko, Van den Brink and Köhler, 2012), and were first documented around 1987 by Barbier (Purvis, Mao and Robinson, 2019). The three pillars are, however, argued to be vague in terms of how to effectively operationalise the concepts. This model is also critiqued for being more applicable to a developed market context, and the pillars' complex historical origins suggests that the concept remains context-specific, as well as ontologically open. For this reason, it should be clearly described in terms of how it is understood (Purvis et al., 2019). To position this within the purpose of this article, the authors lean towards the Brundtland definition about sustainable development, which states that sustainable development is '*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*' (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). In terms of this definition, the authors extend sustainable development to the context of specifically fashion, by supporting the idea of focusing on the needs of the current fashion industry, in a manner that will not compromise the needs of the future. The authors therefore focus on the specific factors of reducing, reusing, recycling, and recovering – as the principles applicable to the fashion industry. The four principles focus on reduction of consumption of fashion, reusing garments or leftover materials, recycling, and then reusing existing garments and/or materials and thereby also recovering energy from materials previously considered waste (David et al., 2019). The adoption of a circular business model, in the context of the three sustainability principles, may potentially support all three of these pillars in different ways. Renewed business models (e.g. a circular approach) rooted in these four principles may support the economic pillar (profit), and the social aspect (people) through growth using a new model that may lead to further job creation. The reduction in consumption, recycling, reusing and recovering are principles that, if applied innovatively during the manufacturing process, may assist the environmental pillar (planet). The three pillars are unpacked and integrated with the fashion industry's current state and challenges in greater detail in the following sections.

The sustainable fashion tale from the environment's perspective

There are several factors that present challenges on the environmental impact of the fashion industry: petrochemical products are used to produce modern textiles and the industry is therefore estimated to be responsible for up to 10% of the global carbon dioxide output (Dottle and Gu, 2022). In comparison, the aviation industry is responsible for an estimated 2% of global carbon dioxide output (World Economic Forum, 2016). The fashion industry is also responsible for a fifth of the plastic produced globally, with polyester (a type of plastic derived from oil) having overtaken cotton as the predominant input for textile production (Dottle and Gu, 2022). Polyester is not biodegradable, and together with other synthetic products also requires a lot of energy to manufacture (Palacios-Mateo, van der Meer and Seide, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2016).

Manufacturing practices regarded as unsustainable include polluting coastal areas with wastewater that contains dyes that pollutes water (Muposhi, Nyagadza and Mafini, 2021). On the other hand, even a natural fibre like cotton uses a very large amount of water to produce fashion (La Rosa and Grammatikos, 2019). Water as a source of life is a scarce resource in most countries (Hofste, Reig and Schleifer, 2019). Although one needs to acknowledge that some fibres are more environmentally friendly, and strides have been made in the fashion industry to reduce the negative environmental impact with some interventions (Nasir, Wee, Aris, Abdullah and Ismail, 2022), we agree with Taljaard and Sonnenberg (2019) who point out that the 'tale' of the environment and fashion consumption has always been a contentious one. In the bigger scheme of things, it is also about the volume of fashion that is consumed, and the manufacturing will not stop if the demand from the retailers and ultimately the consumers is constant! It is therefore our opinion that fashion is ultimately no hero from an environmental point of view – but that the socio-economic perspective of fashion might dictate the impact.

The social-economic tale from a human perspective

The story about sustainable fashion that is more positive usually takes on a socio-economic perspective. In this regard, the emphasis is on the contribution of fashion in terms of job creation, economic growth (Goyal, Esposito and Kapoor, 2018; Le Roux, 2022), and of course the basic need for clothing: people need to cover their bodies and protect them against the elements. A critical question that we ask, however,

> Most authors on sustainable fashion agree that apart from the environmental damage contributed by textile and clothing production, there are also the challenges presented relating to labour, disposal, re-tail (models on turnaround), and consumerism

is 'how the character "fashion" in such a heroic tale holds up against the anti-hero, when the tale is told from the environmental perspective?'

Most authors on sustainable fashion agree that apart from the environmental damage contributed by textile and clothing production, there are also the challenges presented relating to labour, disposal, retail (models on turnaround), and consumerism (Niinimäki, Peters, Dahlbo, Perry, Rissanen and Gwilt, 2020; Pedersen, Gwozdz and Hvass, 2018). These themes are unpacked in the following paragraphs.

Labour practices include aspects such as factory working conditions, wages for workers, and workers' rights. The fashion industry is considered not vocal enough on labour practices and working conditions in factories which are aspects of sustainability from the socio-economic perspective (Cernansky, 2021).

Disposal or recycling of fashion has been embraced successfully mostly by large international fashion brands, achieving this by moving from a linear to a circular business model where nothing is wasted – everything is reused, repurposed, and recycled (Williams, 2022). In this regard, there seems to be an effort to improve current fashion systems to enhance sustainability in terms of manufacturing practices as well as disposal of clothing products. Up to this point we are therefore optimistic about the manufacturing practices in the fashion industry that show some improvement over the past years. A logical question might therefore be: 'What is the real issue and why is the fashion industry still an anti-hero in the sustainable fashion story?'

Fashion retailers find themselves in a position where they must balance people, the planet, and profit. This balancing act can be difficult because on the one end the fashion buyers are considered the gatekeepers of consumer choice, and their selection of the product mix dictates the scope, as well as the type of consumer targeted by a company, thereby influencing a company's bottom-line and future opportunities (Zhong and Mitra, 2020). On the other end, there is the constant pressure created by consumers who insist on buying the latest fashion worn by fashion icons and other influencers. The fashion retailer's tale is therefore a tale of meeting demands in a world where the customer is ultimately king. This phenomenon is consumerism (Panizzut, Rafi-ul-Shan, Amar, Sher, Mazhar and Klemeš, 2021) and in this tale the consumer seemingly drives the demand for the latest fashion and is ultimately the villain.

Consumers seem to be fickler and more demanding regarding a faster fashion turnaround (Zhong and Mitra, 2020). This continued pressure for a faster turn-around has sustainability implications, of which a major concern includes people not wearing their clothes for as long as they did in the past. This pushes up the rate of clothing production, which in turn results in tons of excess inventory and waste (Oshri, 2019). This phenomenon is commonly known as fast fashion.

Fast fashion

Fast fashion encourages consumers to buy and wear new fashion and to throw away the old (Choi, Cai and Shen, 2019). It is built on the fabrication of hyper trends, convincing consumers to accumulate more than is needed, and this is further fuelled by offering clothing that is not long lasting, therefore creating the need to buy more regularly (Bédat, 2016). This business model gradually emerged because of the lowering of trade barriers between countries – eliminating or reducing quotas, tariffs, and subsidies between nations (Majaski, 2022). Fast fashion from a consumer's perspective therefore creates the opposite situation of reducing and reusing clothing. Instead, this story is about avoiding looking 'so yesterday' at all costs.

The fast fashion story has its roots in 1947 after World War II, where an agreement known as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was signed by 23 countries, and by the 1990s had grown to include 125 countries. This agreement was further refined over time and lead to the creation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995 (Majaski, 2022). The intention of this agreement was to boost economic recovery. This economic recovery involved the creation of opportunities for fashion brands to source the production of clothing in countries with lower labour costs, in turn providing brands with financial incentives, and consumers with the opportunity to buy more clothes, yet spend less (Bédat, 2016). The result of this story is that the consumer today is conditioned to want cheap things and suffers from a constant drive for the new (Corrigall, 2022). Unfortunately, this fast fashion business model means fast production, followed by rapid waste disposal (Muposhi et al., 2021), the use of more energy, and this has over time turned into problematic consequences for the environment. The implementing of sustainable practices has therefore become more important over the years (Osheri, 2019).

From the above, it is evident that a story of fast fashion leaves little space for the reduce principle of sustainability, particularly with reference to consumerism. To tame the monster that was created by consumerism and retail models such as fast fashion, some sustainable practices have emerged, particularly from the manufacturing side. However, as with any tale, the context matters. The next section therefore offers some important themes in various contexts and what one may learn from both.

The Emergence of Sustainable Fashion Practices in Different Contexts

Some of the world's most renowned fast fashion brands like H&M, Zara, Uniqlo, Stella McCartney and Adidas (Choi et al., 2019; Williams, 2022) have embarked on a new business model, known as the Circular Economy in order, to address fashion sustainability issues. The focus of this business model is to change the traditional supply chain from a linear to a circular chain. This new circular structure is targeted at eliminating any potential waste in the supply chain by repurposing, recycling, or reusing items (Williams, 2022). As Africa is one of the continents that is largely fuelling the current and future growth of the fashion industry (Zhong and Mitra, 2020; Williams, 2022), many of these international fashion brands have entered this market, preferring to do so via South Africa, which has been considered the gateway to the rest of Africa for a number of years now (SAAI, 2012).

There are, however, differences in how developed, emerging, and developing nations view and implement sustainable fashion practices (Cao, Scudder and Dickson, 2017), as well as the aspects and level of importance assigned to different sustainability practices (Euromonitor, 2022a; Euromonitor, 2022b). As argued by Purvis et al. (2019), the original three pillars of sustainability are not always as applicable to developing as developed markets. Sustainable fashion is a growing trend in developed economies (Cao, Scudder and Dickson, 2017), with a good example being the Swedish fashion brand H&M – currently one of the world leaders in the use of sustainable materials (Fashion Network, 2018) and having a sustainable fashion strategy in place since 2009 (Choi et al., 2019). Like other international brands, H&M entered the African continent in 2015 with its first stores opening in Cape Town and Johannesburg in South Africa (Douglas, 2015). Even though this brand is perceived as one of the leaders in sustainable fashion, it finds itself operating in an emerging market (South Africa) where sustainability seems to remain a niche (Cao, Scudder and Dickson, 2017) and where unsustainable manufacturing practices are more prevalent (Muposhi, Nyagadza and Mafini, 2021). These two countries have therefore been identified to serve as examples of sustainable practices and principles in two contexts to explore and contrast. Sweden represents the developed context and South Africa represents the emerging context, and a comparison of the two countries' approaches to sustainability may enlighten us with potential solutions to sustainability that may be shared or adapted.

Sustainability in the South African context

Stakeholders in South Africa are specifically calling on the large retail players to commit to a greater focus on social inclusion, the empowerment of females, as well as a focus on environmental protection. Retailers targeting the mid- to higher-income bracket are especially expected to grow their focus on both sustainability, as well as 'glocalisation' (Euromonitor, 2022a). Examples of this include brands such as Adidas having dedicated store spaces for eco-friendly ranges like PrimeBlue, which has been designed in conjunction with the Parley Ocean Plastic programme, as well as spaces dedicated to designs produced by both South African artists and influencers. Similarly, the Foschini Group is investing heavily in local manufacturing, with a goal of producing 30 million local apparel pieces by 2026 – thereby greatly contributing to its long-term sustainability plan, as well as the acceleration of economic growth by creating employment (Euromonitor, 2022a).

South Africa is also seeing a growing second-hand clothing market, commonly known as 'thrifting'. Where thrifting was previously associated with bargain hunters and fashionistas, there are now several online stores where buyers can either sell or acquire second-hand clothes (Corrigall, 2022). The market for repurposing or upcycling garments arguably remains small, with one designer commenting that supply seems to be a challenge, therefore not making upcycling a viable business model. A potential solution could be to put agreements in place with large retailers to obtain their overflow garments (Shempers in Corrigall, 2022). One could argue that in a country where opportunities for jobs are much-needed, this area could offer such opportunities if explored and driven by consumer demand.

As far as applying the principles of sustainability is concerned, we commend the efforts to create consciousness on sustainable fashion in South Africa but offer a caveat that it is not yet enough. One might argue that in South Africa, the recover principle of sustainability probably causes a smaller issue from an environmental perspective simply because South Africa has a major energy crisis relating to electricity (Aliyu, Modu and Tan, 2018). There are rolling blackouts that might in the long run affect the environment in a less harmful way, but the balance between people, profit and the planet is not there, causing one to ask how sustainable it is in any case? In addition, we also must acknowledge the contention between implementing sustainable practices around reducing, re-using and recycling in an emerging country where growth is the main aim. Growth from the socio-economic perspective often translates to creating more in strategic plans. The problem with 'more', of course, is that conspicuous consumption is likely to be one of those growing/more aspects as confirmed by the statistics on South African fashion consumption (Fitch Report, 2022). One then needs to look at an example in a developed context that is a leader on sustainable fashion to compare the application of sustainability principle.

Sustainability in the Swedish context

The Swedish market has an established consciousness of sustainability principles and is therefore very focused on ethical and environmental aspects (Gupta, Gwozdz and Gentry, 2019). In addition, it has a strong focus on workers' rights, as well as the reduction of waste and carbon emissions. Examples of initiatives driving these focus areas includes the launch of an application called 'Coop', a growing market for second-hand clothing, as well as existing garment recycling initiatives (Euromonitor, 2022b). Coop is a sustainability declaration tool (application or app), specifically designed to inform and educate consumers, so that they may engage in more sustainable purchasing decisions.

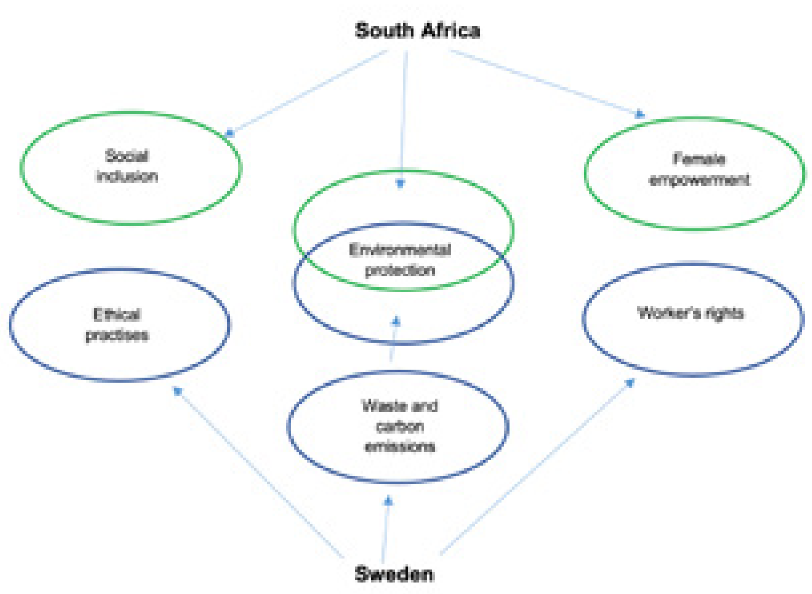
The market for second-hand clothing is growing in four ways: Direct re-selling of second-hand clothes, repairing and customising of second-hand clothes, the renting of clothing and clothing recycling. Polarn O Pyret is a brand that launched second-hand stores in Sweden, Norway, and Finland – customers hand in and are compensated for the old clothes, which the store sells on to new customers (Euromonitor, 2022b). Gina Tricot, in collaboration with Repamera, take in consumers' old denim jeans, and repair and customise and re-sell them. A brand called 'Newbie' offers the opportunity to rent children's clothing via a company called Hyber. In 2020, H&M launched a concept called 'Loop' where consumers are encouraged to bring their old clothing in store, where the garments are cleaned and shredded into fibres, followed by being spun into yarn and then knitted into new fashion items (Euromonitor, 2022b).

The examples from the Swedish fashion retail story offer a strong tale of the application of the principles of sustainability. There is the consciousness for the consumer perspective, as well as from a manufacturing and retailing perspective (socio-economic). The result seems to be more sustainable practices around fashion consumption with reduced manufacturing due to the second-hand clothing market, reuse of materials, products and packaging, recycling of material and products, as well as some reduction of consumption with a combination of efforts such as the renting of clothes. Some themes are overlapping with the South African context and others differ.

Comparing themes on sustainable fashion: South Africa and Sweden

Albeit not an extensive review, Figure 1 presents some initial proposed sustainable focus areas for each country as identified or deduced from the discussions above. These focus areas are broad and contain dimensions that may be relevant to the principles of sustainability.

Figure 1*: Sustainable focus SA vs Sweden*



Source: The authors)

From Figure 1, it is evident that there is a shared theme on sustainable fashion for the protection of the environment. This suggests an area to find a connection between the developed and emerging markets' outlook on sustainable responsibilities. The countries have different economic and socio-economic backgrounds, and therefore its consumers experience different challenges and needs. Operating by incorporating ethical practices, protecting workers' rights, and reducing waste and carbon emissions (Swedish) are all imperative to ensure that a holistic sustainability approach to fashion production is exercised (these address the economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainability), but the importance of social inclusion and women's empowerment (South Africa) is very much reflective of South Africa's challenges, suggesting that the country is not necessarily in a 'holistic sustainable fashion practices' space yet. South Africans are especially cost-sensitive, and even though many buyers may want to support more sustainable products, they often simply cannot afford it, if these are at a price differential to other less sustainable options. The mid to higher income South African consumers are more concerned with sustainable practices, whilst the mass market remains price sensitive (Euromonitor, 2022a; McKinsey, 2022).

Coming from a heritage of racial exclusion from the economy with the Apartheid system only ending in the early 1990s, the country today still struggles to empower previously disadvantaged individuals and is experiencing a massive unemployment crisis (Lubinga, 2020). The need for a focus on social upliftment and inclusion from the fashion industry is therefore a logical theme. Similarly, the country has a lot of challenges with low-income and unemployed females (Msimanga and Sekhampu, 2020) – explaining the need for female empowerment. The two countries' needs in terms of sustainability can almost be contrasted as being at different levels of the Maslow hierarchy of needs. Consequently, the satisfaction of these needs is motivated either from an external force or an internal force. In this regard, the Swedish consumers seem to be driven internally due to the governance of sustainable practices over years.

Fashion brands from developed countries could therefore take a dual approach with their sustainability practices – focusing on growing a holistic awareness of sustainability and best international practice, whilst also demonstrating commitment and sensitivity to country-specific sustainability needs. Implementing such initiatives might, however, be easier said than done, as much of the success of any business remains at the mercy of the economic principles of supply and demand.

With specific regard to the South African market, one can argue that as much as the sustainable aspects for the South African market exists, the drive for sustainability remains limited in practice (Cao, Scudder and Dickson, 2017). As much as the fashion supply chain (from retail buyers, to the retailer, all the way to the manufacturer) exerts its own extent of influence on consumers' levels of consumption, a change in consumer needs and expectations may offer a strong starting point for a country such as South Africa to gradually exert pressure backwards on the supply chain – forcing it to adapt and change. Therefore, the consumers who keep to the same unsustainable practices become the culprits in an unsustainable fashion system.

The South African consumers are described as cost conscious (McKinsey, 2022), conditioned to want cheap things, and their keen support of fast fashion shows with a big uptake in purchases from companies such as Shein, that have recently overtaken Zara in terms of the speed and pace of the release of new collections (Corrigall, 2022). This situation can be extremely challenging to change. We argue for a call to gradually move the emerging consumer from fast to appreciation and slow fashion, by driving and applying the unique African heritage of storytelling (Bailey, 2022). In this regard, every garment – like every consumer – has a story and these tales should be honoured. The argument is that if the tale of a garment and the person who wears the garment is honoured, such unique tales may counter the conspicuous consumption in a fast fashion retail context.

"Fashion brands from developed countries could therefore take a dual approach with their sustainability practices – focusing on growing a holistic awareness of sustainability and best international practice, whilst also demonstrating commitment and sensitivity to country-specific sustainability needs."

Conclusion

In this paper, we argued that the application of all four principles of sustainability in the fast fashion retail model is very challenging in an emerging context where more and growth might be viewed as synonyms in relation to strategies that enhance socio-economic growth and upliftment. We have also offered a few of the most prominent themes in sustainable fashion in South Africa, illustrating that a reducing principle is usually applied to the context of the manufacturing of clothing while it could be like in Sweden from a manufacturing, retailing and consumer perspective. South Africa can therefore work with Sweden to learn from their practices, particularly on the retail of fashion, to apply principles of sustainability on another level as well. The very thought of reducing consumption for the sake of the planet particularly in an emerging context could seem daunting due to the socio-economic story that needs to be balanced with regard to how the people and the profit enables survival and the improvement of an unequal society. Nevertheless, we have faith in the storytelling culture of Africa, and specifically South Africa, and call upon the storytelling fashion influencers to offer a new focus on the tale we tell in terms of our clothing/fashion. In this regard, the storytelling can be shared with

Sweden in collaborative fashion design or upcycle projects with South Africa.

The four principles of sustainability seem simple and pockets of application to reduce, reuse, recycle, and recover may be evident in the South African context. Nevertheless, we argue that consumers have the ability and the power to **reframe** the meaning of their clothing and for that matter the fashion that they consume. Both South African and Swedish consumers may benefit from the aspects around reframing their viewpoints on fashion products. To reframe what fashion could and should not be in the South African context also means to 're-tell' the tale of the role that retailers play as well as their direct influence on what consumers wear, the same may apply in Sweden. The title of this paper contains the word 're-tale' as opposed to retail; with this term we wish to propose that reframing (in a re-told story of fashion) is explored by fashion influencers to guide consumers to honour every story of every garment, be it a new garment, a repurposed or a thrifted garment. The uniqueness of our stories might best be captured by a mix of old and new and retailers need to consider a larger buy in mending/repairing (repurposing), reusing, and reselling those garments that are usually viewed as 'last season'. Influencers of Sweden and South Africa may consider collaborating on the reframing of fashion.

It is an idealistic viewpoint, we admit, but we end this paper with the following food for thought: would it not be nice for all people and the planet if fast fashion becomes 'so last season'?

Notes

1. Conspicuous consumption is the practice of spending money on luxury goods or services to show off one's affluence and success (Hammad, Muster, El-Bassiouny and Schaefer, 2019).

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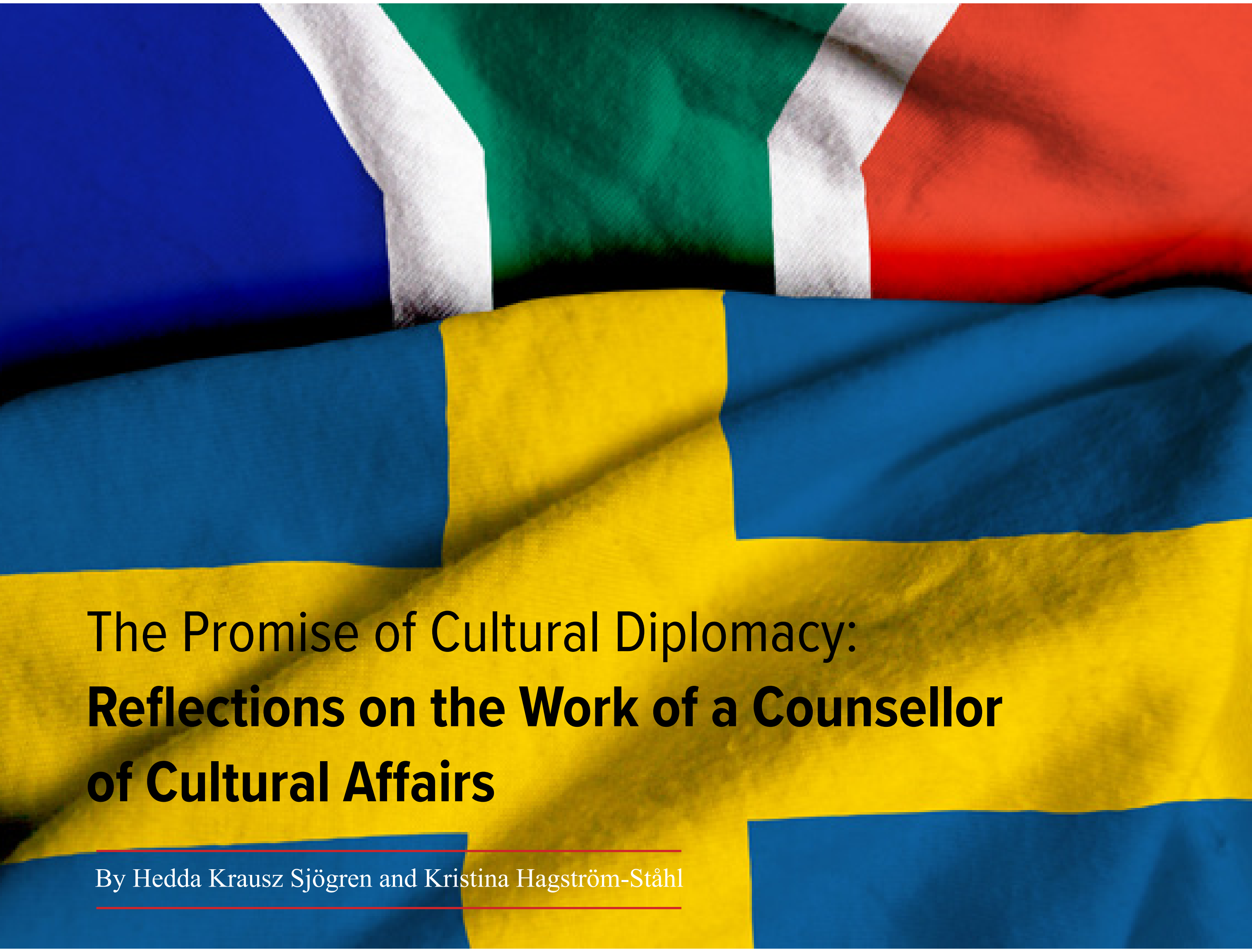

The Promise of Cultural Diplomacy: **Reflections on the Work of a Counsellor of Cultural Affairs**

By Hedda Krausz Sjögren and Kristina Hagström-Ståhl

Abstract

This article offers a reflection on the potentials of cultural diplomacy and cooperation, situating itself in the long-term relationship between South Africa and Sweden as well as the specific context of the professional practice of Sweden's first counsellor for cultural affairs in South Africa, Hedda Krausz Sjögren. Providing a first-hand account of cultural diplomacy, it adopts a self-reflexive position and, largely, a first-person perspective. Co-authored by Krausz Sjögren and one of her collaborators during this period, a theatre director and researcher, Kristina Hagström-Ståhl, it also attempts to reflect the shared experience of collaborative work in this sphere. As such, the text is written from within a combination of diplomatic, cultural, and professional practices, as well as from within a diverse set of skills informing the practices that shaped the body of work to which the article refers. We use a combination of personal and collective pronouns throughout this article to place emphasis on our reflections; the use of personal pronouns denotes Krausz Sjögren's reflections. We aim to share a sense of the possible impact of work dedicated to democracy, freedom of expression, and gender inclusion.

> *I am trying to recall the feeling I had when it was confirmed that South Africa would be the guest of honour at Scandinavia's biggest literary fair? As an organization, it sounded like an opportunity to showcase some of the best stories from the tip of tvhe continent. It sounded like someone believed in our stories and was willing to listen. Albeit through technical difficulties, being in Sweden with South Africa's hardest working young writers is exactly what the poetry community needs. It is as though we need to leave home in order to reach deep within ourselves. Sweden serves as a mirror into our artistry. From an administrative lens, it is intriguing to watch poets and writers learn from like-minded individuals. How conversations form and how new work unfolds. With every visit, a community of literary role players and enthusiasts becomes bigger and stronger. What of these relationships? The trips birth connections and opportunities for cultural sustainability, but the experiences themselves are always life changing. Being in a room with Hedda and Ntate Lefifi Tladi was a special moment in many ways. The moment itself was exemplary of Sweden South Africa relations. It was even more momentous for young poets who had travelled all the way from South Africa to meet and fellowship with a literary giant in Sweden.*
>
> — Phomolo Sekamotho, poet, co-founder of Hear My Voice

Introduction

Sweden and South Africa have a long history of diverse bilateral connections involving trade, development cooperation, research and educational exchange, as well as traditional diplomacy (concerning security, foreign policy, etc.) to name a few major areas. Formal relations between Sweden and South Africa date back to the 1930s when a South African legation was opened in Stockholm. Sweden strongly supported the struggle for democracy in South Africa during the apartheid period, keeping its own legation in Pretoria but upgrading relations to the ambassadorial level only in 1994. More recently, in 1999, the South African-Swedish Bi-National Commission was inaugurated by then-President Thabo Mbeki and then-Swedish Prime Minister, Göran Persson (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009: 4).

For decades, culture, arts, and civil society contacts have also been part of the many primarily unofficial connections that have impacted both countries. With the Swedish government's 2016 decision to appoint its first Counsellor for Cultural Affairs to South Africa (indeed the first ever to the African continent), a new channel of bilateral connections that had not been in place previously was established, in what can be labelled a *cultural diplomacy connection*. Hedda Krausz Sjögren, a cultural producer with a background as an actor and playwright, was appointed in 2017 and served as Counsellor for Cultural Affairs until 2021. Prior to her appointment, in 2016, she had written a report on cultural relations between South Africa and Sweden in her role as Expert Advisor to the Swedish Ministry of Culture.

This article offers a reflection on the potentials of cultural diplomacy and cooperation, situating itself in the long-term relationship between South Africa and Sweden as well as the specific context of Krausz Sjögren's professional practice. Providing a first-hand account of cultural diplomacy, it adopts a self-reflexive position and, largely, a first-person perspective. Co-authored by Krausz Sjögren and one of her collaborators during this period, a theatre director and researcher, Kristina Hagström-Ståhl, it also attempts to reflect the shared experience of collaborative work in this sphere. As such, the text is written from within a combination of diplomatic, cultural, and professional practices, as well as from within a diverse set of skills informing the practices that shaped the body of work to which the article refers. We use a combination of personal and collective pronouns throughout this article to place emphasis on our reflections; the use of personal pronouns denotes Krausz Sjögren's reflections. We aim to share a sense of the possible impact of work dedicated to democracy, freedom of expression, and gender inclusion.

Methodological considerations

As authors, we are cognisant of our position within this complex and will attempt a self-reflexive approach to analysing and describing the work. We are conscious of our role in the co-construction of knowledge (Finlay, 2002) and seek to steer clear of the (remnants of) colonial perspectives often informing encounters between actors of the Global North and Global South. As such we are wary of assuming our own position as somehow privileged in terms of assessing and understanding impact. The central argument that we want to advance is that the arts, and with it, creative practitioners as 'voicebearers of democracy'[1] who contribute to and deserve inclusion into foundational principles of democracy such as freedom of expression, equality and transparency, as well as sustainable peace and security, are of vital importance for long-term effects toward democratisation and peacekeeping. From this follows that cultural diplomacy has the potential to create sustainable impact within but also beyond the cultural sphere.

Reflections from a counsellor of cultural affairs

When I was appointed as Counsellor of Cultural Affairs in March 2017, I had been following the South African cultural scene for some time. Having limited time (a three-year contract, with the possibility of a one-year extension) and additionally limited resources (my budget on arrival was in the realm of SEK 100,000/€10,000), I was particularly interested in how we could have the biggest impact with what I had at my disposal. The analysis I had conducted in my role as Expert Advisor at Sweden's Ministry of Culture had shown that while South Africa was no longer a recipient of international development funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the country was not yet a 'market' for Swedish arts and culture, nor were South African organisations or institutions resourced enough to invest in Swedish guest performances or culture. The need to develop new forms of collaborations and financing was urgent and dependent on collaborations being reciprocal and partnership oriented with equal vested interest, with big outcomes from small budgets.

I could see that there was a need for new platforms for interaction between young creatives from both countries. Interviews I conducted[2] with young South Africans revealed that in spite of the numerous and long-standing contacts between Sweden and South Africa pre-1994, and in spite of there being a priority for Swedish public diplomacy in South Africa, the generation born after 1994 had scant or no relationship to, nor knowledge of, Sweden. (Moreover, the same seemed to be true of young Swedes' knowledge of South Africa, although that impression is anecdotal.) I could also see that several priorities of the cultural and foreign policies of the then-Swedish government, such as the Agenda 2030 priorities for the foreign policy, the feminist foreign policy, the focus on artistic freedom within the Ministry of Culture, and the 2019 Drive for Democracy campaign, could be used as a lever in establishing stronger cultural ties between the countries. My intention was therefore to identify areas where these perspectives could intersect.

I had for some time been following the South African spoken word scene. I noticed that young artists (born around or after 1994) self-organised (often collectively and inclusively beyond language, gender, and cultural background); started to get bigger followings; worked in several platforms and media (some of which were international); and experimented with multiple forms, including mixing languages and art forms, to express life experiences. In other words, the poetry and spoken word scene in South Africa seemed to promote democracy, equality, access, by virtue of its own developing form**.** This was not poetry about democracy or promoting democracy, but rather a practice of writing, performing, developing, distributing, spoken word poetry in a manner that embraced all these qualities.

Another important area identified was how witness accounts of women during Apartheid started to emerge in 2017 through two ground-breaking publications: An interview by journalist Carl Collison in October 2017 in the *Mail & Guardian* with Sibongile 'Promise' Khumalo, who stepped forward to talk about the abuse she experienced from male counterparts as a freedom fighter in exile and the publication in September 2017 of the book titled *Khwezi: The Remarkable Story of Fezekile Ntsukela Kuzway* by

> The 'Drive for Democracy' campaign initiated by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs aimed to ensure that support for, defending and promoting democracy continued to be a priority for the Swedish Government. The 'Drive for Democracy' aimed to create conditions for dialogue and greater knowledge about democracy throughout the world.

lauded journalist Redi Tlhabi. The biography details, through interviews, the life of the woman called Khwezi, who suffered serial rapes as a child by former president Jacob Zuma who was acquitted in 2006 while Khwezi proceeded to be vilified by Zuma's supporters and got nation-wide attention.

With this analysis, I set out to test and examine possible artistic collaborations, with a primary focus on building trust and gaining a deeper understanding of the premise of practitioners in the arts and culture sector.

Policy context

If Sweden's relations with South Africa in the cultural field until 2016 had been primarily characterised by formal and informal cultural relations, a decisive step toward government-led practice was taken by the addition to the diplomatic corps in Pretoria of a counsellor for cultural affairs. The mandates of this inaugural counsellor, beyond promoting Swedish cultural expression or advancing national interests, were to strengthen bilateral cooperation and exchange through specific artistic and cultural practices. Drawing on her experiences in the cultural sector, Krausz Sjögren sought to extend and reinvigorate cultural cooperation and collaboration by paying attention to, as well as learning about and from, existing and emerging cultural actors in South Africa.

Meanwhile, this work was grounded in, and sought to implement, values and positions on international cooperation as articulated in Sweden's government policies, including the priorities of Agenda 2030, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Drive for Democracy campaign centring artists and cultural workers as voice bearers of democracy (Government of Sweden, 2019), and the feminist foreign policy adopted by Sweden in 2014.

The 'Drive for Democracy' campaign initiated by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs aimed to ensure that support for, defending and promoting democracy continued to be a priority for the Swedish Government. The 'Drive for Democracy' aimed to create conditions for dialogue and greater knowledge about democracy throughout the world. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs had identified ten focus areas for the drive that were to provide the point of departure and inspiration for continued efforts. These included protecting human rights and strengthening free media as well as women's political participation. Trade union rights and the rights of LGBTQI+ people were other examples of priority areas. Efforts to protect these issues were to be integrated into all activities, and there was to be a special focus on highlighting young people and their voices.

Key among established policies was also the feminist foreign policy adopted by Sweden in 2014. Seeking to 'systematically integrate a gender perspective into our foreign policy agenda' (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019: 6), this policy posited gender equality as 'an objective in itself' but also as 'essential for achieving the Government's other overall objectives, such as peace, security and sustainable development' (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019: 9). The Swedish government's *Handbook on Feminist Foreign Policy* additionally mentions 'cultural cooperation actions' as a 'method for norm changes and gender equal values' (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019: 56), drawing attention in particular to its support of staged readings of the documentary play *Seven*, which had been organised since 2009 in cooperation between local Swedish embassies and cultural actors around the world, under the direction of Krausz Sjögren, who initiated the project in collaboration with Sweden's National Touring Theatre (Riksteatern) and the Swedish Institute.

With the intention of promoting democracy and human rights, the staged readings of the documentary play *Seven*[3] – which depicts seven women's rights activists from Afghanistan, Cambodia, Guatemala, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Pakistan, and Russia – were undertaken with local stakeholders, ranging from government agencies to civil society actors taking on the play's different parts. By naming this project as a part of an official government strategy, supported by Swedish embassies across the world, the Swedish government thus drew on initiatives that would perhaps not be characterised as traditional cultural diplomacy to exemplify and operationalise its foreign agenda promoting sustainability and democracy through gender equality and gender equal values. It could be argued that what is at hand is cultural cooperation *as* democratisation process as an already established working method, via the comprehensive production model developed by Krausz Sjögren (see end note 3), based on local ownership and agenda setting while all the time using the Swedish Embassy in Pretoria as a lever for local stakeholders. In keeping with this government strategy and the methods developed through, for example *Seven*, as Counsellor of Cultural Affairs Krausz Sjögren concentrated on locating actors working to integrate cultural work and democratisation, including questions of gender equality, the rights of women and children, and LGBTQ+ rights, and offering support and collaboration by Embassy means.

Reflections from a counsellor of cultural affairs (continued)

In early 2017, the performance poet Koleka Putuma (b. 1993) had published her first collection of poetry, titled *Collective Amnesia*, with uHlanga, a small press started by writer Nick Mulgrew (b. 1990). I had been following her trajectory, moving between theatre and performance poetry, and had noted the attention her poem 'Water' was receiving, not in the least in the digital sphere. It seemed to embody a particular moment, a decision to move from stage to page and explore a new means of reaching audience/readers. When Putuma was scheduled to come to Pretoria to launch her book at the main library downtown, I sought out the organisation that was to host her, Hear My Voice. I asked them if the Embassy, with its limited resources, could support the event in any way.

Hear My Voice is a non-profit organisation based in the City of Tshwane, South Africa. They describe themselves in the following way: 'Our focus is developing spoken word artists as well as creating open and uncensored platforms for self-expression through spoken word poetry. We achieve this through organising local and international exchange programs, workshops, live spoken word shows, open mics and other literature programs for schools, private companies, government, libraries, festivals and other cultural institutions.' Importantly, the organisation was doing this in 2017 without much external support, and had developed a model that worked, but could be expanded, deepened, and harnessed.

I took a chance – or a risk – with the launch of *Collective Amnesia*, given that Embassy resources can only be used in service of Swedish interests or activities with a Swedish connection. I proposed to support the event with 1,000 rand, about 600 Swedish krona. The question did indeed come up at the Embassy – the Ambassador, signing off on the decision, asked what the Swedish connection was. I replied that uHlanga Press was due to travel to Sweden to attend the Gothenburg Bookfair, in order to scout for Swedish books to translate. At the time this was merely a suggestion I had made to uHlanga, that they apply for the Gothenburg Book Fair fellowship. However, as it turned out, uHlanga received the fellowship and did travel to Sweden in September of that year. That trip in itself resulted in something rather unusual, possibly unique, namely the direct publishing of a Swedish author via a South African publisher, without going through the major English language publishing houses based in Great Britain and the US. The book in question was the translation into English of *White Blight (Vitsvit)* by acclaimed poet Athena Farrokhzad. This in turn led to Athena travelling to South Africa in 2018 to take part in a program curated by Hear My Voice, spanning several cities, workshops, single readings, and festivals.

Hear My Voice accepted my contribution toward the launch of *Collective Amnesia* in Pretoria in May 2017, and I went to the highly anticipated and ultimately packed launch, attended by over 200 fans roughly between the ages of 18–30. I was the only white person in the audience, and I was probably the only one over 45 years old. Many copies of the book were sold at the event, in spite of most young people very rarely having the means to buy books, and the event was well organised and communicated to the media (Pretoria Rekord, May 25, 2017 Book tour to open a can of worms). I had been asked to speak at the event as a sponsor, but I deemed it was inappropriate to speak about Sweden and Swedish interests in such a setting, and limited my remarks to about three sentences, saying we were excited to support great writing. This was the starting point of a work that would eventually branch out into a number of Swedish and South African contacts, and long-term activities, some of which will be detailed below. The next step in this work was to deepen the collaboration with Hear My Voice.

In November 2017, we signed our first collaboration contract, where Hear My Voice (HMV) would host and curate programs for early-mid career Swedish poets and writers over the coming year with HMV self-organising a tour in Sweden, with me as a liaison. For this I used parts of my Sweden promotion budget and part of the support I had applied for from Swedish Arts Council, earmarked for cultural attachés ('Projektbidrag för utsända kulturråd', project funding for sent out counsellors for cultural affairs). HMV invested their time and began themselves to apply for funding and to seek partnerships in Sweden and South Africa to harness their long- and short term-plans, using the embassy connection as a lever.

An important step in the process was also to invite HMV to arrange poetry readings at the Ambassador's residence, both as 'entertainment' during receptions for stakeholders other than in arts and culture, and eventually to host evenings at the residence wholly curated by HMV. This was a break away from more traditional ways of organising events in the diplomatic corps, especially the mandate HMV had from me to curate, plan and also invite their followers to the residence. We used this as a way to signal mutual respect and trust, and it elevated the status of HMV in other contexts. It also provided them with a rapidly expanding network, a fact that they could use both in contact with Swedish and South African stakeholders and funders. I believe this was, in all its simplicity, a crucial move. It was made possible by the strategic work to create trust with the Ambassador and the embassy staff and vouch for the quality of the work of HMV and the purpose of the work of HMV being in line with Swedish priorities, and create trust with HMV and their community of young, often radical born-free followers, who would have a natural hesitancy to engage with western European states, not differentiating between those with a colonial past and those who supported freedom. The mantra on my part was: 'The Swedish Embassy supports and collaborates with great writers/poets/performers in Sweden and in South Africa whether early career or established.'

Incorporating a Swedish context

Meanwhile, at the University of Gothenburg, the interdisciplinary arts platform 'Platform for Artistic Research Sweden' (PARSE) was initiating a series of thematic research 'arcs' with the intention of establishing and strengthening relations in the international arts research community, as well as with artists and civil society sectors. One of these research arcs was to be headed by Kristina Hagström-Ståhl, then a professor at the university's Faculty of Fine, Applied, and Performing Arts. Entitled 'Intersectional Engagements in Politics and Art', the research theme aimed to explore, in diverse ways, the nexus of gender, race, sexuality, and

(de-)coloniality in contemporary artmaking, scholarship, and artistic research. Focusing on socially engaged practices related to memory, history, and embodiment, the project sought to initiate collaborations and invite speakers from diverse disciplinary and geographic areas, exploring practices at the intersection of the artistic and the political and addressing questions of intersectionality in artistic practice.

Over the course of roughly two and a half years, between 2018 and 2020, 'Intersectional Engagements' collaborated with local as well as international academic and cultural institutions to host dialogues, talks, and conference strands with speakers from various locations and artistic disciplines, and additionally resulted in a peer-reviewed issue of *PARSE Journal*[4].

With existing research interests in post-apartheid art and theatre, and aware of the appointment of Krausz Sjögren as counsellor for cultural affairs, Hagström-Ståhl saw in the attempts to form new collaborations and explore relationship-building a potential for the kinds of co-thinking and exchange that lay at the heart of the research theme. A research trip to Johannesburg in early 2018 was combined with conversations with the Embassy and other stakeholders on ideas to take forward. What resulted was a multi-faceted form of interaction and collaboration taking place through research output, creative expression, and public events in both countries.

Reflections from a counsellor of cultural affairs (continued)

Prior to Kristina's first visit to Johannesburg, I had been in conversation with the Market Theatre – one of South Africa's landmark arts institutions, the first theatre to mix black and white audiences and casts, with a number of offshoot departments like the Market Theatre Photo Lab and Windybrow Arts Centre. While a long-time collaborator with several Swedish institutions, as well as a recipient of Swedish development funding, the Market Theatre's relationships with – and memories of – Swedish stakeholders were dormant and played no real role in our re-kindling of contacts. As Kristina arrived, Market Theatre was planning a public, fairly controversial conversation, titled: 'Pro-Black is Not Anti-White' on questions of race in contemporary South African society. Again, I asked if the embassy could contribute in some small way, and if they would be open to including Kristina on the panel, as a scholar/artist active in this complex matter, but from the northern hemisphere. The organisers agreed to include Kristina as one of six speakers, and what resulted was a broad-ranging conversation engaging many of the attendees and drawing a large number of viewers through the event's livestream on Facebook. This collaboration with The Market Theatre marks a 'moment' with parameters similar to that of the *Collective Amnesia* book launch. It included risk-taking on our part, as well as an attempt to build mutual trust; it contained investments from all stakeholders, and the Embassy functioned as a lever.

Outcomes

Both of these 'moments' became catalysts for a string of collaborations and exchanges that were eventually shooting off in many directions. For example, Hear My Voice went on to create numerous exchanges involving poets and writers from South Africa and Sweden, forging relationships with individual artists as well as with agencies like the Swedish Institute and the Swedish Arts Council, in addition to organisations like Göteborgs Litteraturhus, Olof Palme International Centre, The Global Square, the Swedish Church, the theatre company Unga Klara, the cultural journal Glänta, and notably, Gothenburg International Book Fair.[5] The Book Fair is Sweden's largest cultural event, visited by roughly 100,000 persons, with several thousand events over four days.

“This collaboration with The Market Theatre marks a 'moment' with parameters similar to that of the *Collective Amnesia* book launch. It included risk-taking on our part, as well as an attempt to build mutual trust. Both of these 'moments' became catalysts for a string of collaborations and exchanges that were eventually shooting off in many directions.

While Koleka Putuma had visited Sweden already in 2017 to participate in the 20-tal International Poetry Festival, and featured on Swedish television and radio on that occasion, an invitation to Gothenburg through the 'Intersectional Engagements' research arc in 2018 resulted in several readings, performances, and dialogues, widespread public interest and media attention, as well as, eventually, a translation into Swedish of *Collective Amnesia*. This visit was undertaken in the context of PARSE's collaboration with the Embassy in Pretoria as well as through 'local' cooperation with the International Book Fair and the literary festival *Scener och Samtal* (approx. 'Stages and Conversations', arranged by Göteborgs Litteraturhus and the Museum of World Culture).

The connections to Gothenburg International Book Fair were further cultivated in 2019 through an exchange with the Swedish Embassy in Pretoria that included a study visit to the Bookfair of that year and culminated in the curated program for the Fair in 2022. In South Africa, Hear My Voice came on the radar of several institutions through the Swedish collaborations, and their curation of programs for visiting Swedish writers and performers came to include Nirox Foundation, the Department of Sports Arts and Culture, South Africa's National Library, the Open Book Festival, the European Union Commission, Centre for the Creative Arts in Durban, as well as the Market Theatre. In most, if not all, of these contacts, the aim was to develop relationships between Swedish and South African writers, to jointly deepen their artistic skills, to perform and teach workshops together, instigate dialogue about relevant topics for the poets and writers, such as multilingualism, minority languages, and questions of translation. A key aspect of the work was to introduce audiences in both countries to new writers/performers and trends in poetry and spoken word poetry.

Reflections from a counsellor of cultural affairs (continued)

An important outcome of the relationship with Hear My Voice became apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic. With the advent of Covid-19 in Europe and South Africa, the South African government decided on a strict lockdown, virtually closing down the country.[6] In short, the country closed, and people were not allowed out at all. In a crisis, communication, hope, and ability to adapt quickly is crucial. While the Embassy quickly moved into working to safe-guard Swedish citizens stuck in South Africa, there was no real strategy for communication or for maintaining contacts within South Africa. As the Cultural Affairs Office at the Embassy of Sweden in Pretoria was not included in the crisis management, I decided to see how we could contribute from our end.

The result was the co-creation between Hear My Voice, my communication consultant Sara Chitambo, and myself of a public diplomacy channel, entitled Digitally Yours, initially brought about to create some modest income for artists who had seen their incomes vanish overnight, both in Sweden and South Africa. The idea was to broadcast digital programs over Facebook, with live conversations and performances by artists in both countries, as well as with welcoming remarks by the Ambassador. The program was launched mere weeks after the South African lockdown, quickly drew (mostly South African) digital audiences of more than 30,000, and was later named best practice by the Swedish Institute. The traffic to the Embassy's social media channels went up enormously, and a strong line of live communication was established.

The success of this initiative can be attributed to several factors; among these were arguably the long-standing relationship developed to a young, local, digitally savvy organisation with deep ties to Swedish counterparts, the capacity to delegate mandate to a local organisation (indicative of mutual trust), and risk-taking in the form of trying new formats while learning on the job. Additionally, the possibility of using the Embassy as a lever for this new format, in addition to my own ability to re-allocate funds, quickly, from activities planned for 2020 to the digital platform, including funding for the performers on the program. From this initiative emerged yet another collaboration between Sweden and South Africa, as stakeholders at Gothenburg International Book Fair engaged Hear My Voice online programming for the 2020 digital bookfair, several of which are still available for streaming through the digital channel Bokmässan Play.

Outcomes (continued)

From the first visit and public conversation in 2018 at the Market Theatre flowed ideas and discussions between the authors of this article, The Market Theatre, and South African/Swedish/Ethiopian, Johannesburg-based curator Katarina Hedrén on taking another step in the work around women and experiences of war/struggle and narration. An important backdrop for this discussion was the publication in 2017 of Carl Collison's and Redi Tlhabi's journalistic work mentioned earlier. The first instalment, in October 2018, of our joint initiative became a conversation and reading at the Market Theatre Lab under the heading of 'Women, War, Struggle, Stories'.[7]

In this public conversation, the participants together with the audience explored definitions of war, struggle, and heroism, as well as the impact of the exclusion of women's contributions, experiences, and voices. A vital part of the instalment was the exploration of the narratives of women who have shared their experiences of armed conflict and struggle in different parts of the world. Introductions were made by the ambassador of Sweden Cecilia Julin. The event, mixing personal, written testimonies with those of established writers, artists and academics on the panel, was fully booked. It was broadcast live and recorded, it reached record numbers of viewers, and audience responses reflected how the conversation was breaking taboos and bringing new voices into public discourse. This event confirmed the impact and fruitfulness of choosing a catalyst role for the cultural affairs office, over a merely promotional or producing one.

Outcomes from this project dovetailed with the activities including Hear My Voice and Koleka Putuma mentioned earlier, and also resulted in the publication of several essays across South African and Swedish languages (Sami, Khoi-san, English, Swedish and more), performances, seminar series and knowledge exchange. The Embassy of Sweden added cultural activities to its political reporting; Putuma's *Collective Amnesia* was published in Swedish by Rámus Förlag; a second installment in the public dialogue series, entitled *Skin + Bones (with-nessing whitenesses)*, took place at the Market Theatre as well as at Drama for Life/Wits University in February 2019, featuring a performance by Stacey Sacks with audience discussions to follow.

Other activities and outcomes, which followed and were linked to these initial contacts and collaborations, included a Memorandum of Understanding on arts and culture between Sweden and South Africa, which stipulated special attention to literary exchanges and encouraging a culture of reading; South Africa becoming the Guest of Honor at the 2020 Gothenburg International Book Fair (postponed to 2022 due to the pandemic); Hear My Voice being included by the National Library South Africa in the reference expert group on curating and proposing participants and topics for the 2022 Book Fair; South Africa's Guest of Honor presence in Gothenburg in 2022, including more than forty South African writers visiting Sweden and taking part in seminars, readings, and performances; and spoken word performances by Swedish and South African poets taking place at venues in Gothenburg and Stockholm during this visit.

Conclusions

In this article, we focus primarily on two threads of activities enabled by efforts of cultural diplomacy as catalyst: spoken word and what we can call the women's voices thread. This is because they represent our collaboration. Activities undertaken under Krausz Sjögren's tenure in the areas of design, fashion, and fine arts can also be said to fall within the same method of approach. What we hope to demonstrate with the above examples, which are tokens of the web of interlinked activities and contacts created, re-ignited and nurtured by the cultural affairs office in Pretoria between 2017–2021, is a certain promise of cultural diplomacy. Envoys with specific expert knowledge may function as a catalyst for relationships and artistic endeavours, as well as for strengthening local networks of independent artists to the benefit of the democratic infrastructure of that country – by developing stronger international ties. The expertise includes, but is not limited to, a capability to analyse and identify emerging cultural expressions and actors, trends, artistic quality, and deploying the diplomatic skill of creating trust between emerging cultural players, state actors, and non-government actors in local as well as international actors including cultural institutions.

The analysis made by envoys of local cultural organisations and practitioners must include aspects of relevance to foreign policy such as in the cases demonstrated; inclusion, gender parity, and democratic structures within the organisation. In addition, this catalyst and trust building approach can be crucial in crises when the need for trustworthy communication channels as well as senders are a vital part of keeping functioning societies. This was demonstrated during the severe lockdown policy of the South African government and the restrictive travel policy of European countries during the pandemic, and the response of Swedish and South African cultural actors to create a virtual, public platform for continued dialogue and expression ('Digitally Yours').

As the cases show, the embassy was involved not as producer, nor as determiner of communication messages, but simply as lever and catalyst allowing emerging actors the trust and endowment of the embassy to forge deep contacts nationally and bilaterally. Their artistic work was inherently shaping democratic and stabilising networks of artists and civilians exercising their freedoms. There was never a message or other greater goal underpinning or set for the interactions. This is a concrete work to strengthen civil society and thereby democracy, and indeed the voice bearers of democracy.

A policy that wants to avoid a propaganda stance (and here the difference between ways to achieve successful 'nation branding' and propaganda can be quite difficult to define), to promote the idea of arm length to artists and cultural workers while being resource conservative, the Promise of Cultural Diplomacy can deliver on multiple goals of both foreign policy (equality, freedom of expression) as well as on UN sustainability goals – now including cultural aspects, since the 2022 Mondiacult congress in Mexico[8]. By being a catalyst for emerging (and established) cultural exchanges and collaborations, the foreign missions contribute to the sustainable existence of cultural practitioners who exercise their right to artistic expression and freedom and thereby also form a durable part of a democratic societal fabric necessary for stable peaceful and democratic societies.

We would like to add, finally, that in a world riddled with complex conflicts, instability, and a radically shrinking space for civil society, it might be well worth for state actors to reconsider and expand the notion of cultural diplomacy, less as a tool to promote nation branding, or market separate cultural goods, but rather as a necessary ingredient and catalyst for peace and prosperity. In light of our documentation and our arguments, we are concerned that the cultural affairs office at the Embassy of Sweden in Pretoria has been closed down and the position annulled, and that the Swedish government is considering letting several other cultural affairs positions, including the one in Moscow, remain vacant after current counsellors' mandates are at an end. This points to ineffective policy in the short-term and to the detriment of the potential for flourishing cultural cooperation (as mandated by MOUs, recent and promising networking and projects). It will also, in our estimate, counteract reaching the long-term goals of Swedish and European policies for peace, security, and democracy.

Notes

1. The notion of 'voicebearers of democracy', in Swedish *demokratins röstbärare*, was coined by then-state secretary for international development cooperation Per Olsson Fridh. The term refers to those actors who by their actions (painting, writing, organising civic engagement, i.e., exercising their freedom of expression) create the democratic fabric outside of the state actors.

2. The interviews were conducted as part of an internal analysis for the Ministry of Culture in my previous position as expert advisor (2016–2017) and are not referenced in this paper.

3. *Seven* is a documentary play by Paula Cizmar, Catherine Filloux, Gail Kriegel, Carol K. Mack, Ruth Margraff, Anna Deavere Smith and Susan Yankowitz for which Hedda Krausz Sjögren developed a production model employed in 30+ countries. For more information, see: voicesprojects.com/portfolio/seven-on-tour/

4. For more information about the research theme, and to access this issue of *PARSE Journal*, please visit: parsejournal.com/themes-archived/#intersectional-engagements-in-politics-and-art

5. This work is partially documented in the reports from first, second and third project in democracy and literature exchange Gothenburg Literature House and Hear My Voice 2019–2022 for co-funder Swedish Institute, diarised with the Swedish Institute, available from Gothenburg Literature House and Hear My Voice.

6. See: www.tralac.org/news/article/14617-south-africa-s-policy-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic.html

7. Participants in the seminar were Beverly Ditsie (Director and Producer for Film and TV/Activist), Kristina Hagström-Ståhl, Mmabatho Montsho

(Actress/Filmmaker/Visual artist), Gail Smith (Writer/Journalist/Spokesperson) and Redi Tlhabi (Author/Broadcaster/Talkshow host). The forum was moderated by Katarina Hedrén (Film curator/Writer) and featured Phemelo Motene (Actress/Radio host) and me in an old role – as actor.

8. For more information on this 2022 UNESCO conference, please see: www.unesco.org/en/articles/mondiacult-2022-states-adopt-historic-declaration-culture

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Hope Springs Eternal: The Image of South Africa in Swedish Media

By Ylva Rodny-Gumede

Introduction

When South Africa is covered in the Swedish media, the focus is often on the history of South Africa, the role of Sweden in the anti-apartheid movement and, in more recent years, the political and socio-economic landscape of post-apartheid South Africa, marked by increased wealth gaps, social unrest, and corruption. How South Africa is covered by foreign media is important and politicians, as well as businesses and organisations such as Investment South Africa, Brand South Africa, and South African Tourism, keep a keen eye on the media as a gauge for maintaining diplomatic relations, as well as for attracting foreign investment. As a former journalist who has covered South Africa for Scandinavian media, I have had ample opportunity to ponder and research the media coverage of South Africa and the African continent in the Swedish media, as well as Scandinavian and wider international media. Drawing upon my own experience, as well as an analysis of coverage of South Africa in the Swedish news media, I ask what the image of South Africa is in the Swedish media, how this has changed over the last 30 years and, importantly, what this might mean for South African-Swedish relations?

On an overall level, coverage of South Africa in Western media has a significant impact on politics, foreign policy, diplomatic relations, and the country's image of itself. Positive coverage can help to improve the country's image and reputation, while negative coverage can harm it. For example, coverage of South Africa's political and economic progress can help to attract foreign investment and promote positive diplomatic relations. Conversely, social unrest, coverage of crime, corruption, and other negative issues can harm the country's image and discourage investment and tourism. In my current position as Head of the International Office at the University of Johannesburg, I have first-hand experience of how negative media coverage of South Africa in international media impacts social structures and organisations in South Africa. The coverage of xenophobia, for example, hampers our quest to attract international students to South Africa. In particular, students and their parents often ask about the xenophobic violence that surfaced in 2008, widely covered in the international media, and the risk of further xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa.

On the upshot, in relation to Scandinavian and Swedish media, South Africa is covered much more than any other African country. This is part explained by South Africa being seen as the powerhouse of the African continent, even though not without rivals. Swedish media have also traditionally stationed their correspondents in South Africa – a practice which continues today. In addition, and importantly, the links between Sweden and South Africa have always been very strong and historically this is grounded in the role that Sweden played in the anti-apartheid movement. In general, the image of South Africa in Swedish media can be seen as relatively positive and influenced by the role of Sweden in the struggle against apartheid and the fact that many South Africans, including high-profile political leaders such as Oliver Tambo, spent time in Sweden. This is also reflected in what journalists themselves say about the way in which South Africa is covered. In 2014, I interviewed foreign correspondents for an article on awareness among foreign correspondents of alternative narratives and news frames, as well as attitudes towards alternative practices and models for journalism in relation to the way in which South Africa and the African continent is covered. Although these interviews were conducted almost ten years ago, the two Swedish journalists interviewed had many interesting things to say about their relationships to the foreign desk, their editors, and their audience – comments which still resonate today. The then-correspondent for the Swedish Public Broadcaster, Sveriges Television (SVT), poignantly pointed out that:

> Sweden by virtue of being a smaller country with a well-defined and quite homogenous audience, actually has more space for more nuanced stories and analysis. There is also a real focus on positive news from the continent in terms of development in various areas. (SVT respondent, interview with author, 17 August 2014)

This also related to a sense of 'convention' and how Swedish news editors and audiences relate to coverage. The then-correspondent for Sweden's largest national newspaper stated that:

> [E]ditors back home and audiences I suppose like an intermediary, someone who speaks the same language and shares the same conventions for reporting. (Dagens Nyheter respondent, interview with author, 26 August 2014)

This builds on the fact that the post-apartheid era is often highlighted as a period of progress and change in terms of political, economic, and social development. The role of Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) in the fight against apartheid and the subsequent formation of a democratic society has also been frequently highlighted in the media.

However, the media also covers other aspects of the country, and in later years, issues of increasing wealth gaps, raising poverty, gender-based violence, crime, and corruption are highlighted. The country's high levels of income inequality and poverty, as well as its high crime rates, are often reported on, particularly in relation to their impact on the country's development and political stability. Corruption is also a topic of coverage in the Swedish media, particularly in relation to government officials and business leaders. And, while in the immediate aftermath of the first democratic elections in 1994, media coverage was heavily centred on the peaceful political transition and the role of Nelson Mandela as the man who 'ended' apartheid and united South Africa, in recent years coverage has tended towards narratives centred on corruption and a failed post-apartheid state and an incompetent post-apartheid government.

The aim of this article is to give insight into South Africa-Sweden relations by looking at how South Africa is depicted in the Swedish news media, and as this is, strictly speaking, not an academic article, also to provide some of my own impressions of how the news media has covered South Africa post-apartheid. This will inevitably include my own work as a foreign correspondent and a 'running commentary' on the media politics matrix that I have been part of for the last 25 years.

The role of Sweden in the anti-apartheid movement

Sweden played an important role in the anti-apartheid movement, which aimed to end the system of racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa. The Swedish anti-apartheid movement and the relationship between South Africa and Sweden are often emphasised as fundamental to continuous diplomatic relations. Sweden was one of the first countries to impose economic sanctions on South Africa in the 1960s, in response to the country's policies of racial segregation and discrimination. These sanctions included a ban on arms sales, as well as restrictions on trade and investment. In addition to economic sanctions, Sweden also supported the anti-apartheid movement through diplomatic means. The Swedish government was a vocal critic of apartheid, and actively lobbied other countries to impose sanctions on South Africa. Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme, who was assassinated in 1986, was a particularly outspoken critic of apartheid and a strong advocate for sanctions against South Africa, something that was highlighted in the media as well and centred in theories around the murder of Olof Palme as a potential motive.

> “The Swedish anti-apartheid movement and the relationship between South Africa and Sweden are often emphasised as fundamental to continuous diplomatic relations. Sweden was one of the first countries to impose economic sanctions on South Africa in the 1960s, in response to the country's policies of racial segregation and discrimination.”

Sweden also provided support to anti-apartheid organisations and activists, both financially and through the provision of political asylum to those fleeing the regime. Many anti-apartheid activists, including Nelson Mandela, were given political asylum in Sweden.

Sweden also supported the cultural boycott of South Africa, which aimed to isolate the country culturally and to deny its artists and athletes the international recognition they craved. Furthermore, the Swedish government supported the United Nations General Assembly resolution 3151 (XXVIII) which declared the policy of apartheid as a crime against humanity and that all states should refrain from providing any form of support to the South African government. Apart from state support from the Swedish government, the Africa Groups of Sweden, also sometimes referred to as the Isolate South Africa Committee, formed in the mid 1970s, were particularly active in supporting the liberation movement and the struggle against apartheid. By the early 1990s the 'Africa Groups' had about 1,500 members in Sweden (African Activist Archive, n.d.). Such a membership, taken together with a widespread support for the government policy of sanctions against the apartheid regime and the continued support for many of the core ideals of social democracy in South Africa, has contributed and continues to contribute to the support for the post-apartheid democracy project in South Africa and, by extension, continues to influence media coverage.

Coming to South Africa and the role of a foreign correspondent

As stated above, this is not an academic research article; instead, it is a reflection that draws upon research as well as my own lived experience of covering South Africa. That said, I have also drawn on academic research, my own and others, and also conducted a desk top analysis of media coverage of South Africa in Swedish media over the last 20 years. In doing this I have looked at the online archives of the main news media outlets in Sweden, filtering my searches through a few keywords related to stories that have made headlines not only in Scandinavia but globally, such as the release of Nelson Mandela from prison, the first South African democratic elections in 1994, the Arms Deal Saga, and the many corruption stories surrounding former South African President Jacob Zuma. But there are many other stories that have attracted attention as well and the South African story is both well-covered and nuanced as reflected through the Swedish media.

I first came to South Africa in the late 1990s after falling in love with a South African journalist. At the time, I had been working on the Balkans as a foreign correspondent and was enrolled in an MA degree in journalism at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands. My first years in South Africa were exhilarating and there were quite a few Swedish and Scandinavian journalists stationed in South Africa at the time, mainly in Johannesburg and Cape Town. In other words, there was healthy competition and this generated interest in the Swedish media for stories on South Africa.

However, as the years have gone by, the interest for South Africa waned and the demand for stories from South Africa dwindled from Swedish as well as Scandinavian media more generally. This coincided with me falling pregnant with my first son and, as I also covered stories from the rest of the continent and Southern Africa in particular, I quickly realised that travelling was becoming more and more cumbersome. So, after a brief stint in the NGO sector, working for the U.S. National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the South African Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) amongst others, I completed a second MA degree in Political Science at the University of the Witwatersrand and got my first university teaching job in the communications department at the University of South Africa (UNISA). This was followed by a few years in London where I completed a PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies at London University before finally returning to South Africa in 2009 and taking up a position in the School of Communication at the University of Johannesburg (UJ).

During my years as a foreign correspondent, I always had a sense that foreign journalists stationed in South Africa had a genuine interest in the country and truly wished to see it succeed, as one of the last countries to gain independence on the continent. I had a sense that journalists, Swedish and others, tried to report on stories that transcended the politics of apartheid and instead embraced a new democratic South Africa, full of hope and energy. Of course, on the other hand, much critique has been levelled against coverage of the African continent, South Africa included, and the South African ANC-led government has at times lashed out at the news media, local as well as foreign, accusing them of political bias and racism in their coverage. The news media fraternity, on the other hand, have often labelled this coverage as fair and as a true reflection of the current state of society and political affairs (Rodny-Gumede, 2015).

Studies have established that there is an overwhelming emphasis on war and conflict in the news media (Bratic and Schirch, 2007; Carruthers, 2011; Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Lynch and Galtung, 2010; Rodny-Gumede, 2012, 2015) and critique has been levelled against the news media and foreign correspondents, postulating that the news media thrives on a logic that seeks out sensational stories, in particular those that emphasise conflict and 'bad news' (Carruthers, 2011: 5). This is, however, somewhat mitigated by my own academic research conducted on foreign coverage and the work of foreign correspondents that shows that, in general, foreign correspondents covering and working on the African continent express a wish to report on other issues than politics, war, crime, illness and disease (Rodny-Gumede, 2016). Rather than over-emphasise conflict, foreign correspondents understand their role as to report on what is seen and experienced, while staying clear of stereotyped and sensationalist coverage (ibid: 90).

In my own writings and coverage of South Africa, I have had the great advantage of living in South Africa for the last 25 years and of being married to a South African author and journalist. This has given me unique access to a broad swathe of debates and sources over a long period of time, as opposed to coverage sourced either from Swedish correspondents who are temporarily deployed and/or from international news agencies. When I first came to South Africa in the late 1990s, the South African story was as previously stated still full of hope and energy. I arrived in an era where I thought global leadership was forever going to be shaped by the polo-necked trio of Thabo Mbeki, Tony Blair, and Koffi Annan. But, of course, there was also the Arms Deal corruption story making headlines and allegations of corruptions and rumours of 'deal sweeteners' were circulating around the sale of the Swedish Saab Gripen fighter jets to South Africa in 1999. Of course, the Arms Deal and the corruption allegations surrounding it later resulted in the Seriti Commission of Inquiry (2011–2016) which attracted considerable coverage from Swedish and other foreign media.

The biggest news story to have come out of South Africa in the last 30 years is of course the unbanning of the ANC, the release of Nelson Mandela, and subsequently the first democratic elections in 1994. As this all happened before I came to South Africa, I missed out on these stories. I did, however, cover the death of former President Nelson Mandela. I also covered a story that backdates to the 1980s, namely that of the murder of Swedish Prime minister Olof Palme, a social democrat who embodied Sweden's anti-apartheid stance and the potential of South African involvement. This is a story that resonates hugely with Swedish audiences as the murder remains unresolved; it is, in many ways, a Swedish JFK story. For me, this was my first story for South Africa's *Mail & Guardian*, and the story ran simultaneously in *Aftonbladet* in Sweden. It was also my first investigative news story.

As stated earlier, South Africa has always gotten proportionally more coverage in the Swedish news media than other African countries, and the coverage over the last 30 years has been fairly diverse. This said, there are a few stories that have dominated.

The media image of South Africa in Sweden

With the caveat that this is in no ways an academic article, the following is based on a very limited desktop analysis scanning the online archives of four major Swedish newspapers: the liberal left-of-centre *Dagens Nyheter* (DN); the more conservative newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* (SvD); two tabloids, *Aftonbladet*, with a social democratic political leaning; and the independent liberal *Expressen*. In addition, the online archives of the Swedish public broadcaster (SVT) and commercial Channel 4's coverage of South Africa, filtered by using just the key word 'South Africa' in the years 1990–2020, generated over 40,000 news stories. These searches were followed up and additional keywords added to the search as patterns and/or themes of stories making the headlines emerged. In the main, though, these are my reflections, and mine alone. Here it is important to note that while the South African news media are thought of as independent and free of any political leanings, the Swedish news media have always been stratified along political lines, with news media outlets openly declaring their political leanings and stance. The editorial pages of the Swedish newspapers directly reflect this.

Overall, the image of South Africa in Swedish media is framed within a context of the history of South Africa and historical relations. The coverage has changed substantially over the years from the heady days of the 1990s, the first democratic elections, and the promise of a new and prosperous democratic South Africa, towards the increasing and ongoing challenges of growing poverty, inequality, and corruption. In later years, stories have also focused on issues related to land reform, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, race relations, and racism. There is still a strong focus on bilateral relations, highlighting historical and cultural ties, cooperation in different areas such as trade, investment, and development, and the potential for increased cooperation in areas such as renewable energy and sustainable development.

To a lesser extent, the Swedish media covers culture (including literature, art, and music), tourism, and wildlife. A prominent story in the last 15 years is the story of wildlife conservation and the threat posed by poaching, with a clear focus on the plight of rhinos and their diminishing numbers. Most of these stories have a positive angle in the sense that they are focused on projects of conservation and the efforts put in place in the fight against poaching and the trade in rhino horns.

What follows is an outline of some of the most notable stories over the last 30 years. By far the most prominent story is Nelson Mandela's release from prison in 1990 and the subsequent end of apartheid.

This was a major story covered by most foreign media representing a major turning point in South Africa's history. The late Nelson Mandela, of course, has also become an international icon and symbol of hope, equality and justice, all aspect reflected in the coverage. There have also been some interesting shifts in this story from a focus on the armed struggle, support for, and/or condemnation of the Swedish support to the African National Congress (ANC) and the armed struggle, to the focus on Mandela the global icon of peace and reconciliation. Out of the 40,000 stories, the search for 'South Africa' with the added keyword of 'Nelson Mandela' generated over 15,000 stories. In 2013, when Nelson Mandela passed away, he was the sixth most-searched-for 'topic' on Google in Sweden. This is an indication of Nelson Mandela's status as a South African icon, and there is a sense that the man is, in some ways, more known than the country itself. This also come through in coverage where stories of South Africa often include a reference to Nelson Mandela.

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In terms of coverage of South African politicians, the coverage of the rise and fall of Jacob Zuma (President of South Africa from 2009 to 2018) has been less than positive. Zuma's tenure was marked by several controversies, including corruption scandals and economic mismanagement. His rise and fall as President were widely covered by foreign media, and his presidency had a significant impact on South Africa's reputation and international relations. The Swedish media has in the main focused on the corruption charges and supposed lack of accountability and failure to prosecute. Equalling the coverage of corruption in the case of Jacob Zuma is the coverage of the Zuma rape trial in 2006 in which he was later acquitted. Some of these stories have also focused on clampdowns on media freedom and Jacob Zuma's criticism of the news media in the wake of the rape allegation as well as of corruption.

The issue of land reform, and in particular the expropriation of land without compensation, has been a major topic of discussion in South Africa in recent years and has been widely covered by foreign media, including the Swedish media. It is a topic that comes up particularly in relation to Zimbabwe and analogies are often made of South Africa as 'going the same way as Zimbabwe', with farm invasions and forced land appropriation without compensation to famers and landowners. However, history plays a big role here and while land reform in the British media for example is enmeshed in the colonial project of Britain, in the Swedish media coverage has instead tended to explanations citing historical injustices and economic exclusion based on race as the basis for the calls for land reforms. When analogies between South Africa and Zimbabwe were made in Swedish media, arguing that white farmers were being targeted in South Africa, the Swedish Public Broadcaster's Africa and South Africa correspondent Johan Ripas quickly refuted this, stating that instead we should be concerned by the treatment of unregulated, low-salaried black farm workers (Global Portalen, 2018).

Issues related to economic reform and the inequities of the past also surfaced in the coverage of the Marikana massacre. The Marikana massacre, i.e. the shooting and killing of 34 miners (with a subsequent death toll of approximately 44 people and many more injured) at the Lonmin mining company's Marikana mine in South Africa on August 16 2012 has gone down in history as the worst act of violence displayed by the South African Police Force (SAPS) in the post-apartheid era. The Marikana massacre is seen as a major setback for South Africa's image as a democratic and human rights-respecting nation. While the Marikana massacre, when covered in South African media, generated different narratives around what actually happened on the day, why it happened, and who was to blame, particularly in the first week following the massacre (Rodny-Gumede, 2015b), Swedish media was very quick to label what happened a 'massacre' and did not shy away from highlighting the shootings by the police and putting the blame on structural injustices in the mining industry.

Another story that has made headlines in later years is the rise in xenophobia. In 2008 and 2015 there were widespread xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals living in South Africa. This was covered widely by foreign media and was seen as a major setback for South Africa's image as a welcoming and inclusive nation. As with many other stories, headlines are made but then the story dies down. However, the idea of South Africa having gone from being the beacon of hope and the champion for racial integration and a global leader in promoting non-racialism has been severely dented. The explanations offered for the rise in xenophobia are in the main financial instability and increased poverty gaps, and several stories have been filed from 2008–2019 on the topic.

In the lead up to the soccer World Cup hosted in South Africa in 2010, these stories reflected a changing attitude towards South Africa and a post-apartheid democracy project in jeopardy. More recently, and as to be expected, coverage of South Africa decreased during the Covid-19 pandemic and in particular during the many months of hard lockdown that the country experienced. However, when South African scientists first revealed the discovery of the new Omicron variant this made headlines around the world and many countries, including Britain and the U.S., banned travellers from southern Africa. When the South African government protested citing discrimination and racism, this was not immediately covered by the foreign media. The Swedish media coverage, however, quickly picked up on the story. The travel bans and their consequences were covered with an emphasis on the unfairness and inequality of the restrictions imposed, as well as fears of future reluctance to report on new variants for fear of similar reactions.

What does this mean for relations between South Africa and Sweden?

Globally, Mandela has achieved a saint-like status, and it is important to note that, in the fight against apartheid, deliberate choices were made by the ANC in exile to build up the name and myth of Nelson Mandela, the individual. These efforts, together with subsequent work to build Mandela up as an icon, around whom the post-apartheid nation of South Africa could rally, ensure that what people say of Mandela is difficult to separate from the myths about him (Chasi and Rodny-Gumede, 2017: 345). The idea of pushing for favourable coverage is of course part of nation branding as well and the Mandela brand is still closely linked to the South African nation brand.

In addition, the lines are increasingly being blurred between journalism and public relations (Koch, Viererbl and Schulz-Knappe, 2021). To counter bad publicity and to promote a positive image of South Africa in the international media, organisations such as Brand South Africa, South African Tourism, and Investment South Africa push for more favourable coverage. Media coverage have a significant impact on the country's politics, foreign policy, diplomatic relations, and importantly self-image. I came to South Africa during a time when there was still a strong sense of optimism among South Africans about the country's trajectory. Equally, there was a strong interest in the Swedish media for the South African story, a positive story in the main. Sadly, this has changed. The South African story today is one marked by the country's ascendance to topping the list of the highest gap between rich and poor in the world, lack of faith in governance, and the multiplying impact of global environmental and energy challenges, among many other challenges. This is impacting the global image of South Africa negatively. There is therefore an increasing pressure for South African institutions to find positive stories to promote in and through the international media, while at the same time these stories are becoming increasingly difficult to find. Pressures are also put on foreign journalists who, at times, have been heavily criticised by officials within the South African government and other public figures in South Africa for reinforcing a negative image of South Africa abroad. While studies have shown that news media and foreign coverage in particular often put the emphasis on conflict and sensationalism and that bad news 'sells' newspapers, being a journalist is not pushing the good story, and for foreign correspondents, the role of journalism is simply to try to convey and interpret a different national reality and context to audiences back home (see Rodny-Gumede, 2016). One explanation for a more balanced and less sensationalist coverage of South Africa in the Swedish news media might also be attributed to the fact that there are so few Swedish correspondents permanently posted in South Africa and/or southern Africa, which means less competition.

This said, questions have been raised around the media image of South Africa in Swedish media. South Africa was the theme for the annual Swedish book fair in Gothenburg in 2020 and Petterson (2020) writes that the book fair left her with an overwhelming sense that Swedish coverage of South Africa needs to become more nuanced and reflect the challenges facing the country better. She says that we need to move away from casing issues in nostalgia and what she calls 'the special bond' between the two countries and argues that the image of South Africa in Swedish media is stuck in a sentimentality that contributes to a smug and rancid nostalgia. Solidarity is important, but in celebrating what has been, it should also be possible to openly assess what has gone wrong post-apartheid, she says (Petterson, 2020).

Not working as a journalist anymore, and through being a media academic, I am privileged in the sense that I can take a step back and reflect on the state of journalism and the coverage of both South Africa and Sweden in both countries, without having to make any editorial choices about what to write about or how to cover often very complex issues. This is a privilege, as it would pain me to have to write the contemporary South Africa story, yet Swedish-South African relations are still steeped in a relationship in which hope springs eternal.

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South Africa-Nordic Relations:

Exploring the Prospects for a Strategic Partnership

By Nora Hattar and Kine M. Bækkevold

Abstract

Since the democratisation of South Africa in the mid-90s, South Africa and the Nordic countries have cooperated multilaterally as well as in bilateral settings in areas such as education and research, business and trade, and peace and security. By exploring the research question 'What are the prospects for a strategic partnership between South Africa and the Nordic region?', this article provides insights into the nature of South Africa-Nordic contemporary relations and advances our theoretical understanding of what factors influence the formation of strategic partnerships. The analysis is informed by Thomas Wilkins' strategic partnership model, which sets forth that the formation of strategic partnerships hinges on three core factors: environmental uncertainty, strategic fit, and a system principle. It is argued herein that a fourth factor, international and domestic political context, also plays a role in the formation phase of a strategic partnership; an argument which is supported empirically by the South Africa-Nordic case. Data for the analysis is mainly collected from South African and Nordic government documents, while occasionally also drawing upon party documents, academic publications, and news articles. The paper concludes that the plurality of common national interests and shared values make fertile ground for a comprehensive and mutually beneficial strategic partnership between South Africa and the Nordics. Nevertheless, current political contextual factors diminish the likelihood that such a strategic partnership will emerge in the immediate future.

Introduction

During the 1960s to 1990s, the relations between South Africa and the Nordic countries were overshadowed by the South African anti-apartheid struggle (Akamo et al., 2022: 16).[1] In post-apartheid times, relations between South Africa and the Nordics have continued to evolve; South Africa and individual Nordic states have cooperated bilaterally, as well as in multilateral settings in areas such as education and research, peace and security, and business and trade.[2] While relatively uncommon, there are also examples of some or all of the Nordic countries entering jointly into agreements with South Africa (DIRCO, 2008; DIRCO, 2001).

Both South Africa and the Nordics have expressed a desire to mobilise new partnerships in the international arena for the advancement of national interests (DIRCO, 2022a: 14; Denmark Government, 2022: 31; Denmark MFA, 2021: 39; Iceland MFA, 2018a: 6,12; The Finnish Government, 2020: 32; Norway MFA, 2018: 79; Sweden Government, 2017: 4).[3] Elevating state relations to the strategic partnership level has several advantages. Firstly, it provides a framework for regular high-level dialogues that may facilitate an exchange of perspectives on matters of common interest. Additionally, it signifies mutual trust and commitment, which can foster deeper relations and cooperation in various domains. Furthermore, it creates opportunities for joint initiatives and projects that leverage the strengths and resources of both parties (Wilkins, 2008: 364). Denmark, which has made strategic partnerships central to its foreign policy, maintains that strategic partnerships contribute to building political and commercial relations with partner countries on several levels and thereby to creating opportunities to promote Denmark's foreign policy interests and priorities, including spreading Danish solutions and expertise (Denmark MFA, 2022). This article assumes that elevating the current South Africa-Nordic relations to the strategic partnership level could yield benefits including those mentioned above, and it is therefore considered pertinent to explore the prospects for such a partnership to emerge. It is worth noting that the article does not attempt to provide policy recommendations nor advocate for or against the establishment of a strategic partnership; its sole purpose is to evaluate the potential for a South Africa-Nordic strategic partnership to develop.[4]

By conducting a qualitative content analysis of South African and Nordic government documents, as well as drawing on insights from party documents, academic publications, and news articles, this paper explores the prospects for a strategic partnership between South Africa and the Nordic region. It does so by turning to Thomas Wilkins' strategic partnership model, which sets forth that the formation of strategic partnerships hinges on three core factors: *environmental uncertainty, strategic fit,* and a *system principle*. It will be argued that a fourth factor also plays a role in the formation phase, namely *international and domestic political context*, defined as the broader societal and historical circumstances in which political events and phenomena occur. The research is novel in multiple senses. Firstly, it employs the formation variable of the strategic partnership model to analyse the prospects for the emergence of a strategic partnership that does not yet exist. Secondly, it considers a strategic partnership in the case of South Africa and the Nordics. Thirdly, it aids in the development of the framework outlining strategic partnership formations by adding a fourth factor, *international and domestic context,* to the formation phase of the strategic partnership model. Notably, this article assumes that interests and values set down in government documents from individual Nordic countries can represent interests and values in the Nordic region as a whole, as the below paragraph will explain in further detail.

Justifying the grouping of the Nordic countries

The Nordic region is comprised of the sovereign states of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland as well as the autonomous territories of the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.[5] The region is united by a proximate geographical location, intertwined historical relations, and several social, political, and economic similarities (Akamo et al., 2022: 14). More specifically, the region adheres to the *Nordic Model,* which consists of social-democratic systems characterised by capitalism, welfare, and social inclusion (Hammerstad, 2012: 3). Institutions for Nordic cooperation include the Nordic Development Fund (NDF), the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO), the Nordic Women Mediators, and the Nordic Council, the latter being the region's official body for inter-governmental cooperation (NDF, 2022; NORDEFCO, 2022; PRIO, 2015; Nordic Council, 2022; Norden, 2022). Tellingly, the Nordic Council envisions that by 2023, the Nordic region will become the most integrated region in the world (Nordic Council, 2020). The Nordic countries also cooperate within the European Union (EU)/European Economic Area (EEA) institutions.[6] Furthermore, as Sweden and Finland applied to become members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 2022, and the latter officially becoming a NATO member in April 2023, all the Nordic countries are likely to soon be part of the Alliance (Akamo et al., 2022: 6–7; NATO, 2023). Furtermore, the Nordics have a similar approach to foreign policy, entailing 'an activist but consensus-seeking multilateralism; a strong ethical dimension reflecting the urge to spread the ideals of the 'Nordic model' of equality, redistribution, and peaceful resolution of conflicts to the rest of the world; support for the United Nations (UN) and its agencies; and generous aid and assistance to the developing world' (Hammerstad, 2012: 3).

As the Nordic states share fundamental values, interests, and worldviews, interests and values expressed in government documents from individual Nordic states will in this article be considered to represent the entire region. While the Nordics do not have a joint Africa strategy, several agenda-setting arenas exist. This includes the Nordic-Africa Institute, the Nordic-African Business Summit, and the annual African–Nordic Foreign Ministers' Meeting (NAI, n.d; NABA, 2022; Akamo et al., 2022: 9). According to Akamo et al. (2022: 6), the Foreign Ministers' Meeting

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has broadened 'African–Nordic relations beyond development cooperation and towards a more politically-oriented and interest-based strategic partnership.' The authors recognise that the Nordic countries have not previously jointly entered into a strategic partnership with another state. However, due to the high degree of interconnectedness, shared foreign policy agenda, and similar interests amongst the Nordic countries, it is pertinent to consider the entire Nordic region, rather than individual Nordic countries, when exploring the prospects for a strategic partnership with South Africa.

Strategic partnerships in the International Relations literature

There is currently no consensus in the literature on a definition of the term *strategic partnership* (Tyushka and Czechowska, 2019: 8–10). Since the world became increasingly interconnected and new forms of partnerships were needed to achieve policy goals during the '90s, the term has been frequently used by both academics and governments, albeit often without defining its meaning, to describe relationships between states and other actors in the international arena. Sean Kay (2000: 15) documented the US's use of the term during the 90s and set out to conceptualise it, stating that 'a strategic partnership enhances or justifies a close relationship between two states that seek mutual gains but whose interests may be competitive rather than shared.' A year later, commenting on Russia's strategic partnerships, Andrew C. Kuchins (2001: 260) argued that 'the Russian leadership has elevated some bilateral relationships to the level of "strategic partnership" because of perceived long-term and important shared interests; they are not necessarily directed against a third party.' In 2003, in a book chapter on Chinese relations, Avery Goldstein (2003: 75) holds that core elements of strategic partnerships include 'a commitment to promoting stable relationships and extensive economic intercourse, muting disagreements about domestic politics in the interest of working together on matters of shared concern in international diplomacy, and routinising the frequent exchange of official visits, especially those by representatives of each country's military and regular summit meetings between top government leaders.' In yet another effort to delineate the concept, Surjit Mansingh writes in his 2005 paper on the US-India partnership that a strategic partnership occurs when:

> …two governments agree to raise the level of their regular interactions to embrace levels from the lowest to the highest, to deal with the great variety of issues that concern each of them in a cordial and holistic manner seeking cooperation or understanding, and to make long-term commitments for mutual benefit and furthering their respective goals but do not enter into an alliance. (Mansingh, 2005: 2221).

Drawing on previous definitions, Thomas Wilkins (2008: 363) defines a strategic partnership as a 'collaboration between states (or other actors) to take joint advantage of economic opportunities or to respond to security challenges more effectively than could be achieved in isolation.' He argues that strategic partnerships are: 1) organised around a common goal that reflects the general purpose of the partnership (a system principle); 2) are primarily goal-driven rather than threat-driven; 3) tend to be informal and entail low commitment costs; and 4) that economic exchange is one of the key drivers of the partnership, alongside security concerns (Wilkins, 2008: 360–361). Drawing on literature from Business and Organisation Studies, Wilkins proposes the *strategic partnership model*, an analytical framework for analysing strategic partnerships from an International Relations perspective. The model considers three phases of strategic partnerships: formation, implementation, and evaluation. The framework has so far been applied to analyse the strategic partnerships between Russia and China (Wilkins, 2008), Japan and Australia (Wilkins, 2011), EU and South Africa (Adelle and Kotsopoulos, 2017),[7] South Africa and Russia (Geldenhuys, 2020), and China and the United Arab Emirates (Bin Huwaidin, 2022). Differing from previous analyses, this article employs solely the *formation phase* of the strategic partnership model to explore the *prospects* for the emergence of a currently non-existing strategic partnership.

Wilkins' strategic partnership model: The formation phase

According to Wilkins' strategic partnership model, the formation of a strategic partnership is shaped by three main factors: environmental uncertainty, strategic fit, and a system principle (Wilkins, 2008: 363–364). *Environmental uncertainty* refers to uncertainties in the external (international) environment. By joining forces in strategic partnerships, actors seek to mitigate competitive elements and threats in the international security order by increasing their flexibility and capabilities to respond to these uncertainties. Potential collaborators are assessed based on an overall *strategic fit* elicited from mutual interests and shared ideologies and values. Potential partners must also bring some worthwhile capability or benefit, and preferably complementary resources. Once a suitable partner has been identified, the partnership's purpose becomes solidified into a core framework based on mutual agreements and understandings. The overarching purpose or goal of the strategic partnership is known as the *system principle*, which is grounded in mutual interests and values that make up a joint worldview. Importantly, strategic partnership-building is a top-down process that requires support and involvement from top leaders in the respective countries or institutions.

South Africa and the Nordics: Environmental uncertainty

Environmental uncertainty is defined as uncertainties in the external (international) environment (Wilkins, 2008: 364). Shared environmental uncertainties that have been identified in the South African and Nordic governments' foreign-policy documents include climate change and environmental degradation; conflict and instability on the African continent; and threats to the rules-based international order (DIRCOa, 2022; Denmark Government, 2022; Norway MFA, 2008; Sweden Government, 2022b; Ulkoministeriö, 2021; The Finnish Government, 2020; Norway Government, 2021; Norway MFA, 2021; Iceland Government, 2019).[8] [9] The subsequent section will elaborate on these points.

Climate change and environmental degradation

According to a report titled *Framework Document on South Africa's National Interest and Its Advancement in a Global Environment* (hereafter: South Africa's National Interest Document) produced by the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), 'climate change, natural disasters, environmental challenges, and infectious diseases' is considered to be one among the 15 identified risks that can prevent the achievement of South Africa's national interests (DIRCO, 2022a: 30). Climate change and environmental degradation is also identified as a global and national threat in South Africa's National Development Plan 2030, the South African Climate Change Bill, and a white paper on South Africa's foreign policy (National Planning Commission, 2017: 33, 75; South Africa Government, 2022: 2; South Africa Government, 2011: 15). The Nordic region is just as clear in its concerns regarding climate change and environmental degradation and its potential impacts on national interests and security (Norway MFA, 2008: 11; Denmark Government, 2022: 31, 32; Sweden Government, 2022b: 3; Iceland Government, 2019: 26; Ulkoministeriö, 2021: 2). For example, in a parliamentary statement on government policy, the former Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde stated that the 'climate is of critical importance to our security' (Sweden Government, 2022b: 3). Moreover, the Nordic Council recognises climate change as 'one of humanity's biggest challenges' (Nordic Council, 2020: 7).

Conflict and instability in Africa

In the South African National Interest Document, DIRCO (2022a: 14, 30) considers 'regional instability, terrorism, and extremism' to be another of the 15 risks to the achievement of national interests, recognising that security and stability in Africa is 'an indispensable requirement for the security and stability of South Africa.' Similarly, the Nordic countries connect security in Africa to their national security, linking African instability to increased irregular migration and the spread of terrorism in Europe (Ulkoministeriö, 2021: 7; Denmark Government, 2022: 24; Norway MFA, 2008: 12). For instance, a government report on Finnish foreign and security policy states that 'the recent years have shown increasingly clearly that instability in Africa and the Middle East is having more direct impacts on the security of Europe and Finland than before. The Finnish participation in crisis management, therefore, also enhances the security of Finnish people' (The Finnish Government, 2020: 48). In a similar vein, a government report on Norway's strategy in the Sahel states that 'Norway has a clear interest in promoting improvement in the security situation in the Sahel and stabilisation of the region as a whole. Poverty, climate change, health crises, international terror, organised crime, human trafficking, and irregular migration have direct consequences for Norway and all of Europe' (Norway MFA, 2021: 3).

Threats to the rules-based international order

A third shared environmental uncertainty central to South African and Nordic national interests is threats to the rules-based international order. As can be read in South Africa's National Interest Document: 'a rules-based international system favours smaller to middle-power states for the simple reason that it attempts to curtail the excesses of realpolitik underpinning major powers' foreign policies…' (DIRCOa, 2022: 20). The document stipulates that South Africa should defend multilateralism and the rules-based international system, while also opposing the unfairness in the current system by promoting reform of global political and economic governance to become fairer (DIRCO, 2022a: 14). The Nordics too highlight the importance of a rules-based international order to seek solutions to common challenges and that deterioration of this system would be a threat to their security (Norway Government, 2019: para. 1; The Finnish Government, 2020: 11; Sweden Government, 2022c). In a report on Nordic foreign and security policy requested by the Nordic Foreign Ministers, it is stated that the Nordics are heavily reliant on a functioning rules-based international system and that a disruption of this system would undermine core principles of the Nordic countries such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law (Bjarnason, 2020: 20).

South Africa and the Nordics: Strategic fit

This chapter will discuss South Africa and the Nordics' mutual interests as identified in: increased trade and business relations, including the promotion of the green and blue economy; cooperation and exchange of expertise on mediation and peacebuilding; and the promotion of democracy, human rights, a rules-based international system, and reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Trade and business relations

Currently, the trade between the Nordics and South Africa is not very extensive. The top commodities that South Africa exports to the Nordic countries include fruit and vegetables, wine, vehicles, and minerals

(Trading Economics, 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2021d; 2021e) at a total sum of approximately 470 million US dollars in 2021 (UN COMTRADE, n.d.). Top commodities exported from the Nordics to South Africa vary between the different Nordic countries and include machinery, electronics and technology, paper and paperboard, and different types of chemicals (Trading Economics, 2021f; 2021g; 2021h; 2021i; 2021j), at a total sum of approximately 1,75 billion US dollars in 2021 (UN COMTRADE, n.d.).[10] South Africa has highlighted the importance of positioning itself to become an integral player in the global economy and strives to attract sustainable investments to grow its economy (DIRCO, 2022a: 20). Simultaneously, the Nordic countries are expressing interest in further developing and strengthening trade around Africa (Finland MFA, 2021: 3, Sweden Government, 2022: 4, Norway MFA, 2008: 4, Denmark MFA, 2020: 1). For example, Finland states that 'from the perspective of Finland's interests, it is important for Finland to contribute to positive development in Africa and to build new political and economic cooperation with its African partners that benefits both parties' (Finland MFA, 2021: 3). Moreover, the annual Nordic-Africa Business Summit can be understood as a manifestation of Nordic and African interest in stronger trade and business cooperation.

Many promising trading sectors between the Nordics and South Africa could be explored. The *blue economy*, referring to economic activity in and around lakes, rivers, oceans, and bodies of water, has been called the 'new frontier of African renaissance' by the African Union (AU, 2022). As well as being important for business, sustainable fishing, which is a part of the blue economy, could help prevent food security threats that the world is facing (Akinmade, 2019: para. 4). The necessity to accelerate growth in both the blue and green economies has been highlighted in South Africa's National Interest Document (DIRCO, 2022a: 13). Given the centrality of oceans in the Nordic economies, particularly Norway and Iceland, there is potential to explore these markets further (Akinmade, 2019: para. 5). Moreover, the Nordics have over several decades accumulated expertise on over-exploitation, water resource management challenges, and pollution risks that could benefit South Africa (ibid.). Both Iceland and Norway state that they are seeking to offer expertise in areas such as sustainable fishing (Iceland MFA, 2018b: 10; Norway MFA, 2008: 22). Furthermore, another underexplored arena for collaboration is technology start-ups, a sector in which both South Africa and the Nordics ecompass different types of expertise and knowledge that can be exchanged (Akinmade, 2019: para 11). The start-up ecosystem in South Africa is increasingly gaining global attention and South Africa is the only African country represented in the start-up Blink top 50 rankings, identified as a country with accelerating entrepreneurial innovation. The Nordic countries are also represented in the top 50 rankings, with Sweden ranking the highest (StartupBlink, 2022: 31). In 2022, Sweden hosted a business delegation from Sweden to South Africa for companies to explore opportunities for building relationships with new stakeholders and to get first-hand insight into the local tech-start-up scene in South Africa (Business Sweden, 2022). Exploring the potential of the blue and green economy, technology start-ups, and other promising trading sectors between the Nordics and South Africa could not only benefit both economies but also contribute to the green shift and sustainable solutions.

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Renewable energy

Cooperation and trade in renewable energy have been highlighted as lucrative opportunities for South African and Nordic companies (Akinmade, 2019: para. 8). The Nordics have over the past decades developed innovative and viable energy systems with a focus on sustainability, system integration, and grid stability

(Nordic Energy Research, 2021). During the Nordic Energy Days conference held in Pretoria in 2017, Norway's former State Secretary at the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, Ingvil Smines, said that there are many opportunities for Southern African countries to strengthen their partnerships with the Nordic countries regarding renewable energy (Odendaal, 2017). During the same conference, South Africa's former Presidential Special Energy Adviser, Silas Zimu, stated that it is time that South Africa learns from what the Nordics have done (ibid). South Africa and the Nordics already cooperate on projects related to sustainability and green energy. For example, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the South African Department of Environmental Affairs are cooperating on a project which focuses on waste management (Naturvårdsverket, n.d). Also, as part of an initiative targeting support for renewable energy in countries relying on coal power, Norway has provided funding to solar energy projects in South Africa (Akamo et al., 2022: 56). Moreover, cooperation on green energy between the Danish Energy Agency, the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy, the Independent Power Producers, and Eskom[11] has been established to provide better opportunities for South Africa to achieve their climate objectives (Center for Global Cooperation, 2021).[12]

Peacebuilding and mediation

South Africa and the Nordics also have mutual interests related to peace mediation and peacebuilding, particularly on the African continent. South Africa is involved in continental peace-making, UN-mandated peacekeeping operations, and peacebuilding. Indeed, it has become somewhat expected of South Africa to play a large role on the continent in this respect (van Nieuwkerk, 2014: 6). The motives as to why South Africa is concerned with peace and security in Africa include that South Africa sees it as a responsibility to reciprocate the support it received from other African countries during the liberation struggle; the idea that the specific South African liberation experience of internal negotiation and agreement could serve as an example for other conflicts; and the recognition that own political and economic achievements will depend on the condition of the rest of the continent (Sidiropoulos, 2007: 2). South Africa's National Interest Document highlights that 'South Africa's African Agenda is based on the understanding that there can be no development without peace and no peace without development' and that the security and stability of the continent is a requirement for South Africa's own security and stability (DIRCO, 2022a: 14). Like South Africa, the Nordic identity is connected to the promotion of peace. For instance, in 2017, the Nordic Council launched the idea that 'peace should be made the trademark of the Nordics' (Norden, 2017). Particularly concerning Norway, studies have described the country's 'peace brand' as a self-enforcing identity, but also as a means to achieve national interests in terms of gaining influence on the international arena (Leira, 2013; Stokke, 2012). In addition to promoting their peace identity, the Nordics are interested in peace advancement and stability of the African continent because this could reduce threats of migration and terrorism as well as improve conditions for trade and business, as discussed previously in the article.

Interestingly, civilian and humanitarian support to South Africa's anti-apartheid movement was among the Nordics' first peace engagements abroad and played a central role in shaping the peacebuilding element in Nordic foreign and development policy (Hagemann and Bramsen, 2019: 15). There are also several examples of modern South Africa-Nordic cooperation initiatives related to peace and security in Africa. Training for Peace (TfP) is an ongoing collaborative initiative established by Norway in 1995 to support the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which later expanded to the rest of Africa (Nantulya, 2017: para 9–10). The TfP Programme is funded by the Norwegian government and has two South African partner institutions (NUPI, 2022). Additionally, South Africa and the Nordics collaborate within the UN on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda to promote capacity building on the African continent. Peace-making and peacebuilding are areas that hold great potential for cooperation, expertise-sharing, and mutual inspiration. For example, the Nordic Women Mediators (NWM) network was inspired by a similar initiative in Southern Africa (PRIO, 2015). Joining forces in the area of peace and security promotion can help achieve mutual interests related to South Africa and the Nordics' peace identity as well as peace and stability on the African continent.

Democracy and human rights

Another area of mutual interest is the promotion of democracy and human rights. The Nordic countries are often seen as being at the forefront of promoting democracy and are all considered to be highly democratic and with low levels of corruption (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020: 4; Transparency International, 2021).[13] The Nordic countries' Constitutions put a strong emphasis on democracy, human rights, and equality among all, and on the importance of spreading these values (Norway Moj, 2022; Denmark Parliament, 2019; Iceland MoJ, 2018; the Swedish Parliament, 2021; Iceland Parliament, 2004). Their strong pro-democracy stand was once again proven when the Foreign Ministers of the Nordic countries gathered at a meeting in September 2022 to discuss the promotion and protection of democracy (Sagheer, 2022). Additionally, Sweden explicitly states that 'ensuring support for, defending and promoting democracy is a priority for the Swedish Government' (Sweden Government, 2021: para. 7). Like the Nordics, South Africa's Constitution puts prominence on democracy and human rights. The Constitution has been celebrated globally for its inclusiveness and does not only serve as a legal framework but importantly also as a statement of socio-economic transformational goals (South Africa Government; n.d.). In South Africa's National Interest Document, it is stated that South Africa's normative posture is mainly seen to be characterised by principles such as democracy and human rights outlined in the Constitution (DIRCO, 2022a: 15). However, it is worth noting that South Africa has been ranked as a 'flawed democracy' (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020: 48) and is currently faced with issues such as corruption and human rights abuses (Freedom House, 2022a; Amnesty International, 2021).

South Africa's National Interest Document states that the vision for the country is to establish a society based on fundamental human rights, social justice, and democratic values (DIRCO, 2022a: 11). It also states that the country supports and leads global trends that are in favour of human rights, peaceful settlements of disputes, as well as respect for international law and collective action through multilateralism (DIRCO, 2022a: 17). Additionally, South Africa aspires for a global world order that is rooted in equality, solidarity, and unity of purpose (DIRCO, 2022a: 27). An initiative for promoting democracy that South Africa could benefit from could, for instance, be related to sharing Nordic expertise on coalition governments. Research suggests that coalition governments are the most likely alternative to foster an inclusive democracy, nation-building, and development for a politically, ideologically, and racially diverse South Africa (Gumede, 2016). Nordic expertise in coalition governments could therefore serve as an example of South Africa-Nordic cooperation to strengthen democracy. Considering that authoritarian regimes are gaining increasingly more power in the international system and that the world is experiencing a shrinking of democracy globally, coordinated action to promote democracy internationally is of importance to states who support the democratic model (Freedom House, 2022b: 2).

Increased African representation in the UNSC

Both the Nordics and South Africa are in favour of increased African representation in the UNSC. This has been an outspoken foreign policy point for South Africa for a long time (Venter, 2003: 29). A statement from Ambassador Mathu Joyini, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the UN, clarifies the country's position: 'Africa calls for not less than two permanent seats with all the prerogatives and privileges of permanent membership including the rights of veto' (DIRCO, 2021: 7). Furthermore, Ambassador Joyini stated that Africa demands five non-permanent seats (DIRCO, 2021). Likewise, a recent statement to the UN on behalf of all the Nordic countries reads: 'The Nordic countries support a balanced expansion of the Security Council from all regions to better reflect current global political and economic realities, and to ensure increased representation of developing countries… particularly both permanent and non-permanent seats for Africa in order to redress the historical injustice against Africa' (Denmark MFA, 2023: para. 3). Both Norway and Finland mention their support for Africa's demands for increased representation in the UNSC in their foreign policy documents, with Norway noting that a 'strengthened and reformed UN is in the interests of both Norway and African countries' (Norway MFA, 2008: 19; Ulkoministeriö, 2021: 6). Furthermore, at a seminar held on the sidelines of the 2022 African-Nordic Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Helsinki, Norway's Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt reaffirmed Norway's commitment to securing a permanent seat on the Security Council and to expanding the number of elected seats for African countries (NAI, 2022).

South Africa and the Nordics: The system principle

The system principle is the *reason* that a strategic partnership exists and tends to be grounded in common interests and values that inspires what becomes the common goal of the partnership (Wilkins, 2008: 364). As a strategic partnership between South Africa and the Nordics does not yet exist, such a system principle naturally has not been created. However, the common interests and values that were mentioned in the above paragraphs would make a good foundation for a system principle to be discussed and implemented if the two actors were to establish a strategic partnership. Referring to the analysis above, the overarching goal of a potential strategic partnership between South Africa and the Nordics would likely be anchored in their mutual interests in sustainability efforts, promotion of democracy and human rights, peace and security initiatives in Africa, enhancement of both regions' economies, and protecting the rules-based international order.

South Africa and the Nordics: International and domestic political context

This article argues that Wilkins' strategic partnership framework would benefit from adding international and domestic political context, defined as broader societal and historical circumstances in which political events and phenomena occur, as a key factor within the formation phase. This includes factors such as the domestic political system, social and cultural norms, developments in the global economy, and international relations. Wilkins' framework does to some extent capture elements of this point by briefly mentioning that support from leaders is central to the formation of a strategic partnership (Wilkins, 2008: 364).[14] The following section will illustrate how factors related to international and domestic political context reduce the likelihood of a South Africa-Nordic strategic partnership taking form in the immediate future, even though shared environmental uncertainties and a strategic fit have been identified.

South Africa has experienced a shift in its foreign policy orientation since it transitioned to a democracy in 1994. Whereas Mandela's ANC led the country into a new democratic era with a focus on the multilateral and a promise that human rights would 'be the light that guides our foreign affairs' (Mandela, 1993: 88), a decade later Zuma's ANC increasingly turned towards Russia and China (Matthee, 2016: 14). Indeed, Zuma's foreign-policy strategy deliberately altered economic and diplomatic links away from the US and Europe, and voices within the ANC became increasingly critical to the West (Alden, Sidiropoulos, 2019: 30). Stronger cooperation between emerging economies, including though foras such as the BRICS,[15] creates arenas for consolidating South Africa's ties to these countries, including authoritarian regimes. A recent ANC policy document emphasises the importance of forming closer relations with 'fraternal parties' and expanding the BRICS (ANC, 2023: 10–11). This view was underscored at the ANC's 55th national conference in January 2023, where the party stated that South Africa should use its 2023 BRICS chairmanship to push for the admission new members to the group (ANC, 2023: 11). Several states have expressed interest in joining the BRICS, including countries with poor human rights and democracy records such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Algeria (Human Rights Watch, 2022; Global State of Democracy Initiative, 2022; Devonshire-Ellis, 2022).

A core element of the ANC's foreign policy is solidarity with countries that supported the liberation struggle against apartheid (Sidiropoulos, 2022: para. 13). While the Nordic support was limited to peaceful aid only, the Soviet Union provided weapons and other military

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aid as well as military training to the ANC (Gottschalk, 2022: para. 7-9; Sidiropoulos, 2022: para. 13). These historical links, coupled with what parts of the South African political left considers to be Western double standards in multilateralism, the use of force, the rule of law and democracy, make the ANC and the South African political left inclined towards Russia (Sidiropoulos, 2022: para. 15). Quoting from the ANC document 'A Better Africa in a Better and Just World' (ANC, 2015), which set parameters for foreign-policy discussions at the ANC's National General Council in 2015, Mills and James (2016: 8) display these sentiments:

> As a revolutionary national liberation movement which is an integral part of the international revolutionary movement to liberate humanity from the bondage of imperialism and neocolonialism, the document declares the ANC's staunch support for China and Russia and its opposition to the 'imperialist' and 'aggressive' US... From the ANC's vantage, 'The sudden collapse of socialism in the world altered completely the balance of forces in favour of imperialism. It ushered in a new world hegemonic era of global socio economic agenda of capitalism and free market imperatives'... According to the ANC, 'They have vowed in Washington that there will be Russia or China to challenge the US hegemony' since 'The US does not appreciate the resurgence of China and Russia as dominant factors in the arena of international power relations. It has instead declared a cold war against these two emerging world powers'.

Importantly, in a more recent ANC policy document, the party is not as explicit in its scepticism towards the Western and US hegemony (ANC, 2023). However, a significant part of the South African political left still sees Russia as a country that opposes US hegemony and respects national sovereignty and the rule of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs (Alden and Sidiropoulos, 2019: 31). As a political party stemming from South Africa's liberation movement, opposing imperialism is a central part of ANC's history and legacy. The party often criticises or opposes what it understands as the West's arrogance and imperialist behavior, whether it concerns Iraq, Afghanistan, or Libya, or ignoring development countries' voices (Sidiropoulos, 2022: para. 14). As such, the Nordics' close association with the US and the West might lessen South Africa's interest in entering into a strategic partnership.

In the case of the Nordic states, due to their geographic proximity to Russia, their current international and domestic political context is notably affected by Russia's efforts to expand its power. This became even more evident with the Russian war on Ukraine that started in February 2022. Commenting on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Swedish Ambassador and Sweden's Defence Attaché to South Africa condemned Russia for its actions and put a strong emphasis on the importance of supporting fellow democratic states (SABC News, 2022). While the Nordics strongly condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Norway Government, 2022), South Africa abstained from the UN resolution condemning Russia's actions (DIRCO, 2022b). However, South Africa maintained that the Russian military intervention in Ukraine has violated international law and holds that they are pursuing a non-aligned path in their foreign policy (DIRCO, 2022c). Due to the current political context experienced by the Nordics; the closer South Africa gets to authoritarian regimes with poor human-rights records, the less eager the Nordics will be to enter into a comprehensive strategic partnership with South Africa.

Conclusion

Although Wilkins' framework is traditionally used to evaluate whether a strategic partnership will endure or not, the ambition of this paper has been to apply the framework to a non-existing strategic partnership to comment on the prospects for such a partnership to emerge. The article has exemplified how Wilkins' strategic partnership model can be applied to analyse not only already existing strategic partnerships, but also which strategic partnerships *could* exist, *why* they could exist, as well as the benefits that would follow *if* they existed. The plurality of identified common environmental uncertainties (climate change and environmental degradation, conflict, and instability in Africa, and threats to the rules-based international order) and shared values and interests related to economy and security (increased trade and investment, promotion of the blue and green economy, peace mediation and peacebuilding, promotion of democracy and human rights, and increased African representation in the UNSC) makes for a fertile ground for a strategic partnership between South Africa and the Nordics. Elevating South Africa-Nordic relations to a strategic partnership would lead to increased interactions on all levels of government which could increase both regions' capacity and ability to find joint solutions to promote national interests and tackle environmental uncertainties. However, the current international and domestic political context experienced by South Africa and the Nordics, an element this article has added to the formation phase of the strategic partnership model, diminishes the likelihood of such a partnership emerging in the immediate future. This article represents an initial analysis of the prospects of a strategic partnership between South Africa and the Nordics, creating a foundation for further analysis. More research is needed on South Africa-Nordic relations, including the potential for cooperation in areas such as global health and cybersecurity. Additionally, academic investigation on how political context can affect the formation of new partnerships in various cases is needed, as implications of political context will play out differently from case to case. Moreover, further research on strategic partnerships between regional blocks and bodies, such as SADC and the Nordic Council, could yield interesting results.

Notes

1. The African National Congress (ANC) was a central actor in the liberation movement and received civilian and humanitarian support from some of the Nordic countries (Akamo et al., 2022: 16). When South Africa transitioned to a democracy in 1994, the ANC's Nelson Mandela became President and the ANC has remained the country's ruling party since then (ANC, n.d).

2. Indeed, the action plan for a so-called 'green' strategic partnership, focusing on green energy and green growth, between Denmark and South Africa is currently being developed (Denmark MFA, 2022).

3. Existing strategic partnerships of South Africa or the Nordic countries include South Africa-European Union (European Union, n.d), South Africa-Russia (Geldenhuys, 2020; Lessa, 2010), South Africa-China (Alden and Wu, 2014), Denmark-China, Denmark-South Korea, Denmark-Japan, Denmark-Mexico, Denmark-India (Denmark MFA, 2022), Norway-Brazil (Norway Government, 2011), Norway-AU (Norway Government, 2018), Norway-Germany (Norway Government, 2023), Sweden-the Gulf countries (Sweden Government, 2022a), Sweden-Poland (Embassy of Sweden, 2022), Sweden-France (Sweden Government, 2019), Sweden-Brazil (Sweden Government, 2015). Strategic partnerships with the states of Finland or Iceland as members were not identified. A strategic partnership involving the Nordics as a common actor was also not identified. Please note that this list cannot be understood as a complete overview. Also note that these arrangements are identified as strategic partnerships by their members, while not necessarily fitting into Wilkins' definition of a strategic partnership.

4. A discussion arguing *in favour of* or *against* the establishment of a South Africa-Nordic strategic partnership would require a deeper analysis of geopolitical developments, which this article does not provide.

5. In this article, only the relationship between the Nordic sovereign states and South Africa is considered.

6. Although South Africa already has a strategic partnership with the EU, the authors consider that it is relevant to discuss the prospects for a separate South Africa-Nordic strategic partnership. A potential South Africa-Nordic strategic partnership would likely differ greatly from the South Africa-EU strategic partnership, as the former would be specifically shaped by the shared values and strategic fit between the Nordics and South Africa.

7. Adelle and Kotsopoulos (2017) concentrate particularly on the climate-change relations under the EU–South Africa Strategic Partnership.

8. In the Icelandic government documents, only the threat of climate change was identified.

9. In addition to the three mentioned environmental uncertainties, both South Africa and the Nordics also identify threats related to global health

and cybersecurity as important risks to national interests. However, these will not be discussed further in this article.

10. In recent years, there has been an overall decreasing trend in exports between South Africa and the Nordics, with a few exceptions of increased exports from South Africa to Denmark and Iceland, and from Finland to South Africa (Trading Economics, 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2021d; 2021e, 2021f; 2021g; 2021h; 2021i; 2021j).

11. Eskom is South Africa's primary electricity supplier.

12. The cooperation is based primarily on three areas focusing on capacity development in energy planning and wind resource mapping, development of a liberalised energy market with grid planning and higher rates of renewable energy sources, and integration of renewable energy sources and grid codes.

13. As of 2022, all Nordic countries ranked highly on various peace, democracy, and human development indexes (UNDP, 2022; World Population Review, 2022).

14. Wilkins also recognises that a range of factors, including external pressure and changes in partner status, can affect the prospects of a strategic partnership. However, this is only mentioned in the evaluation phase of the framework (Wilkins, 2008: 366–367).

15. The BRICS is a group bringing together major economies. Current members are China, Russia, Brazil, India and South Africa (BRICS, n.d: para. 3).

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South Africa-Sweden Relations: An Appraisal

By Sven Botha

Introduction

Sweden's support for the Anti-Apartheid Movement is well documented and has prompted some observers to comment that both states share a "special relationship." And while some aspects of South Africa-Sweden Post-Apartheid Relations have been interrogated by scholars and covered in the media, a more generic and comprehensive account of South Africa-Sweden Post-Apartheid Relations, as provided in this article and this special issue as a whole, is missing. Using an analytical framework, of the author's own design, that incorporates social, economic, and political indicators, this paper provides an appraisal of South Africa-Sweden Relations while simultaneously offering a conclusion to the special issue on South Africa-Sweden Relations. This paper argues that the aforementioned framework is necessary to glean a more comprehensive understanding of bilateral relations that the two states share. Furthermore, the rudimentary understanding of South Africa-Sweden Relation provides the foundation for increased research on South Africa-Sweden Relations and Africa-Nordic Relations more broadly.

Introduction

South Africa and Sweden share a special relationship. This sentiment has been echoed by both government and the academic community alike. The roots of this "special relationship" are often grounded in the support Sweden afforded the African National Congress (ANC) in its fight against the Apartheid regime. In the post-Apartheid era, Sweden and the now ANC national government have elevated their diplomatic exchanges to the ambassadorial level. And while post-apartheid South Africa-Sweden Relations have been monitored by both scholars and the media, there remains, as the forthcoming literature review will show, a lamentable lack of scholarly attention being given to formulating a more generic and comprehensive understanding of the nature of the bilateral relationship that both states share. In response to the gap in the literature this paper, and the accompanying special issue as whole, intend to provide a more far-reaching overview of the various aspects of South Africa-Sweden Relations encompassing historical, contemporary, and possible future accounts. For its part, this paper will attempt to apprise the state of South Africa-Sweden Relations using the author's own analytical framework for the assessment of bilateral relations consisting of political, economic, and social cooperation. This framework has emerged given the gap that exists within the realm of bilateral relations assessment frameworks which is mostly historical, emotive and exploratory in nature. The application of the author's analytical framework finds that while South Africa and Sweden have made impressive progress in their relationship, particularly in the post-Apartheid setting (see Table 1), more can be done in the realms of social and political cooperation. Finally, this paper suggests how the discourse on South Africa-Sweden Relations can be advanced.

Bilateral relations: What does the literature say?

South Africa-Sweden Relations

As the introductory contribution for this double special issue has already noted, the literature on post-1994 bilateral relations between South Africa and Sweden is "scant." The current literature on South Africa-Sweden Relations can be divided into two pools. The first pool of literature is rooted in history with a focus on Sweden's support for the Anti-Apartheid Movement (Sellström, 1999; Sellström, 2002a; Sellström, 2002b), while also making a minor reference to Swedish investment in South Africa during the Apartheid era (Magnusson, 1974). The second pool of literature is more contemporary in its composition focusing on the Gilpin Deal (Coetzee, 2020; Coetzee, 2021) and the early post-Apartheid efforts to strengthen South Africa-Sweden Relations through the Sweden-South Africa Partnership Week held in 1999 (Glover, 2021). While both pools of liturature are notworthy and help to advance one's unserstanding of the bilatural relationship that both states share, there is an ever-pressing need to go further. The litrature that exisits at presrnt leans towards the economic ties. As a result, there is little understnading of the political and social relations that South Africa and Sweden share given the effrots that both sides have undertaken in this areas. Furthremore, the mutual advanages to be gained in social and political cooperation are plentiful. It is worth noting that the litrature tends to focus more on inter-regional relations between Africa and the Nordic states (Wohlgemuth, 2002; Kiljunen, 2016; Hammerstad, 2018; Akamo et al., 2022). This further illustrates the gap in the literature thus further necessitating the need for greater scholarly focus on South Africa and Sweden's bilateral relations.

Assessing bilateral relations

Bilateral relations are often viewed as the foundation of international relations (Pannier, 2020: 19). Bilateral relations are best conceptualised as a means of pairing two states with one another. Rana (2018: 1) notes "[e]ach pairing works on relations in different fields for their mutual benefit, facilitating cooperation between their institutions and citizens. Countries may also work jointly to solve mutual differences or overcome disputes." Traditionally, bilateral relations involved representing, information and negotiation; however, these functions and activities have transformed in promotion and protection with the rise of the mass media as well as diversification of actors being able to represent a state (Rozental and Buenrostro, 2013: 230). The easement of the movement of persons across the globe necessitates those diplomatic missions remain on hand to facilitate the administration, delivery, and exchange of passports, visas, and other travel documents (Rozental and Buenrostro, 2013: 230). Promotion meanwhile concerns itself with a state's national interests. These include: trade and investment, maintaining a state's image, connect and communicate with the diaspora, commence negotiations or support the work of summit diplomacy (Rozental and Buenrostro, 2013: 230). The centrality of bilateral relations within international relations is perhaps best understood through three lenses, namely: the historical, the strategic and the numerical lens (Pannier, 2020: 19). Historically, key events saw the evolution of bilateral diplomatic practice. Beginning with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, all states were seen as equal within the international system, which resulted in Euro-centric bilateral diplomacy. Two world wars latter coupled with the rise and fall of colonial empires widened the scope of bilateral diplomatic practice so that it was no longer a Northern concept, thus connecting the former colonial empires of the Global North with the former colonies of the Global South (Pannier, 2020: 19). Strategically, bilateral relations are often considered to be the bedrock of international negotiations as mutual internets and common positions are initial determined at the bilateral level thereby allowing states to form diplomatic blocs and/or clubs more effectually within multilateral settings (Pannier, 2020: 19). On the numeric front, it should be noted that bilateral relations are a prefeed form of diplomatic practice. Between 1990 and 1999 the United Nations (UN) recorded the signing of 5,000 bilateral agreements; this coupled with the growing fragility of certain multilateral forums helps to ensure that bilateral diplomacy remains anchored firmly at the epicentre of the international system (Pannier, 2020: 20).

With the nature and purpose of bilateral relations firmly understood, the question becomes: 'how does one measure or assess bilateral relations between two states?' The answer to this question is not straightforward. This is largely due to the fact that scholars have derived different ways access bilateral diplomatic relations. Kielinger (1996), and Anderson (1997), in their papers on Anglo-German relations and Sino-Russian relations respectively, adopt for a descriptive approach to assessing bilateral relations whereby attention is given to the unpacking of historical detail; little to no theory is used in this approach. Adebajo (2008) opts for a similar approach when examining South Africa's bilateral strategy on the African continent. Other schoolers such as Hornsby and van Heerden (2013) offer a more conceptual approach wherein they argue that middle power states will only be seen to have strong bilateral diplomatic relations if both parties adhere to five common condtions, namely: obligation of the Global North to the Global South, moral identity, diaspora links, mutual economic interests and the risk of non-cooperation, and partnerships for development. Tam and Kim (2017) propose The Relationship Assessment of Diplomatic Interaction Outcomes (RADIO) framework to measure the success of public diplomacy in bilateral diplomacy. RADIO categorises the quality of bilateral relationships into two, namely: experimental and reputational. The former type of relationships are based on direct exposure to an entry while the latter is symbolic and is usually developed by means of hearsay from others and/or the consumption of narratives produced and distributed by the media (Tam and Kim, 2017: 216 and 217). In determining which category, a bilateral relationship falls into, a number of common and bespoke variables are used. The common variables include: international bilateralism, power mutuality, trust, and empathy. Experimental bilateral relations will include relational satisfaction and relational continuance while reputational bilateral relationships will include relational attentiveness as their respective bespoke variables (Tam and Kim, 2017: 223). Pehlivanturk (2019) argues, in his assessment of Japan-Turkey relations, that Role Theory can be used to assess the quality of bilateral relations. Role Theory posits that a state's policymakers should be the primary objective of the assessment as it is their understanding and vision which informs a sate's role and actions within the international system; these understandings are informed by both domestic and international factors which act upon a state (Pehlivanturk, 2019: 106 and 107). In determining the nature of bilateral relations between Asian states and China, Takahara (2021) proposes that a number of domestic and international factors influence the decision-making processes which can impact how a bilateral relationship evolves. These factors are arranged into the Four Factor Model and include: peoples, perceptions, emotions, and identity, domestic politics, economic interests, and the international environment Takahara (2021: 158 and 159). Finally, Hassan, Al Rabaani, and Nejjari (2022) argue that state identity (such as state size and state-type) can impact the nature of bilateral relations that states seek to form as is the case with Oman and Brunei.

The above literature review clearly shows how the study of bilateral relations has evolved over time. Assessment of bilateral relations has grown from a largely descriptive field to one that that now has a conceptual and theoretical character. This is not to suggest that the field of bilateral assessments has reached its peak, nor that one means of assessment holds more value than the other. Each approach is chosen depending on the scope or desired outcome of the assessment. The ability to adjust the scope of an assessment provides for a shortfall in that they cannot provide a comprehensive overview of the state of relations as the social connections between the sending and receiving states. A comprehensive understanding spanning political, economic, and social bilateral connections allows for the identification of new and sustainable areas of cooperation even if tensions are afoot in another area of cooperation. This framework has been employed by author in previous research that sought to assess Nigeria-Cameroon Relations within the context of counter-terrorism cooperation.

Assessing Bilateral Relations: Political, Economic, and Social Factors

Unpacking the framework

“The framework employed by the author posits that states do not only have political or economic interests, but social ones too. Consequently, bilateral relations should be assessed by political, economic, and social variables. The political variable refers to bilateral cooperation or common positions on areas of mutual interest and concern in the international space”

The framework employed by the author posits that states do not only have political or economic interests, but social ones too. Consequently, bilateral relations should be assessed by political, economic, and social variables. The political variable refers to bilateral cooperation or common positions on areas of mutual interest and concern in the international space (Botha, 2020: 427). Within the context of this article, political cooperation further speaks to the installation of essential instruments to ensure the facilitation of diplomatic exchanges. Economic cooperation will refer trade relations between both countries (Botha, 2020: 428). Finally, social cooperation refers to people-to-people exchanges (Botha, 2020: 428). Within the context of this article, the social variable will refer to both formal and informal diplomatic relations that may occur between two states. Formal social relations occur when the two states in question agree to initiate exchanges that have a people-to-people relations. Such exchanges may include undertakings in culture, education and research, and public diplomacy more broadly. Informal social relations occur when two states have a rich people-to-people relations that are not facilitated via diplomatic means.

The author’s framework maintains that while a trifecta of harmony between the political, economic, and social variables is ideal for the neutering of strong bilateral relations, it is not required for two states to have strengthening bilateral relations. From this perspective, each veritable is assessed both in isolation as well as part of a coherent whole. This two-pronged approach not only provides a comprehensive overview of bilateral relations between two states, but it also allows for an in-depth foresight on how to sustain and energise bilateral relations in another area of cooperation if tensions arise in another (Botha, 2020: 427). It should be noted areas of cooperation may overlap between the three variables.

Applying the Framework South Africa-Sweden Relations

Given the wealth of knowledge that exists on the historical aspects of South Africa and Sweden’s relationship, this analysis will primarily focus on South Africa-Sweden Relations in the bilateral exchanges following the former’s democratic transition. South Africa and Sweden have undertaken firm political commitments that began in 1993 when both states agreed to elevate the status of their diplomatic relations from a legation to an embassy thereby resulting in ambassadorial representation on both sides (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1993: 2 and 4). To date South Africa and Sweden have entered into 22 agreements with South Africa, which span both bilateral agreements and multilateral agreements including the rest of the Nordic and Scandinavian states (South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2023). The majority of these agreements (73% or 16/22 agreements) were signed in the post-Apartheid era. Refer to Table 1 for a comprehensive overview.

Table 1: A summary of bilateral and multilateral agreements between South Africa and Sweden from 1994-present

Title of agreement	Date of signature	Date agreement entered into force
Memorandum of Understanding on South African - Swedish Development Cooperation	28-11-1994	28-11-1994
Convention for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with Respect to Taxes on Income	24-05-1995	25-12-1995
Agreement on General Terms and Conditions for Development Co-operation	17-10-1996	17-10-1996
Agreement on the Promotion and Reciprocal Protection of Investments	25-05-1998	01-01-1990
Agreement on Co-operation in the Fields of Science and Technology (South African-Swedish Research Partnership Programme, 1999-2005)	23-11-1999	23-11-1999
Agreement Concerning Defence Cooperation	02-06-2000	02-06-2000
Memorandum of Understanding on Air Services between Republic of South Africa, Denmark, Norway and Sweden	09-11-2001	09-11-2001
Bilateral Air Services Agreement	09-11-2001	26-09-2002
Exchange of Notes Relating to the Designation of Airlines in Terms of Article Three of the Air Services Agreement	11-09-2001	26-09-2002
Memorandum of Understanding on Co-operation in the Area of Public Service and Administration	29-04-2005	29-04-2005
Declaration of Intent between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Governments of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden Concerning Partnerships in Africa	09-06-2008	09-06-2008

Protocol Amending the Convention for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with Respect to Taxes on Income	07-07-2010	03-18-2012
Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Kingdom of Sweden on Cooperation in the Fields of Science, Technology and Innovation	10-11-2013	Not in force
Letter of Intent between the Department of Environmental Affairs of the Republic of South Africa and the Ministry of the Environment and Energy of the Kingdom of Sweden in the Field of Environmental Protection and Climate Change	20-10-2015	20-10-2015
Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Kingdom of Sweden on Cooperation in the Field of Arts and Culture	25-09-2020	25-09-2020
Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Kingdom of Sweden and the Government of the Republic of South Africa on Cooperation in the Field of Environmental Protection and Climate Change	11-11-2021	11-11-2021

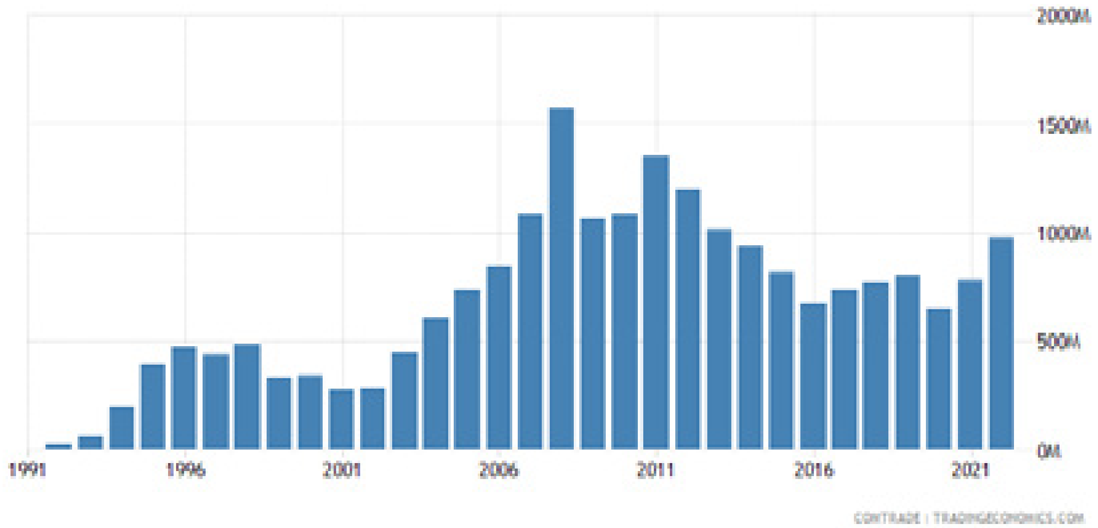
(Source: DIRCO's Treaty Section)

Table 1 clearly shows that the standard of political cooperation is encouraging. To this end, a number of essential instruments are in place with common positions on matters of defence, climate change, and cultural exchanges in place. The foundation for this, and other forms of cooperation, was laid down in November 1999 when then Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson led a delegation of an estimated 800 Swedes to South Africa to participate in the Swedish-South African Partnership Week (SSAPW). The SSAPW saw the hosting of 70 events across six cities in South Africa (Glover, 2021: 42). Notworthy outcomes of the SSAPW included the estbalishmement of the South Africa-Sweden Bi-National Commission, both national soccer teams playing agianst each other, a number of workshops and seminars on possible areas of cooperation were held in Cape Town, and finally, a tradeshow was hosted in Johannesburg (Glover, 2021: 42). Sweden had invrsted SEK 25, 000, 000 into the SSAPW; this was more than double then what Sweden had invested into the World Expo held in Lisbon over a four month period in 1998 (Glover, 2021: 42).

Both South Africa and Swedn have also become keen trading partners. Swedish exports to South Africa increased sharly following South Africa's transation to deomnracy. Figure 1 illustates this phenomenon. However, it should be noted that there is an embalance of experts between both states. Swedish expoprts to South Africa total an estimated SEK 10, 000, 000, 00 (or $962,361,000) while South African exports to Sweden total an estimainted SEK 3, 000, 000, 000 (or $288,708,300) (Embassey of Sweden, 2023).

Several outlets such as Business Sweden, the Swedish Trade Council, and the Nordic-South African Business Association are in place to help drive trade and investment between the two states. In February 2021 the Swedish Embassy collaborated with Business Sweden, the City of Cape Town, Invest Cape Town, Wesgro, and The Loudhailer to launch the Cape Town-Stockholm Connect (CSC) Initiative. The CSC has been designed and introduced to concert an array of actors including companies, developers, customers,

Figure 1: Swedish exports to South Africa from 1991-2022



(Source: Trading Economics, 2023)

investors, entrepreneurs, and institutions from both cities to promote economic exchanges (Wesgro, 2021). As Ambassador Håkan Juholt noted at the time: "It's time to accelerate and intensify business exchange between Stockholm and Cape Town. Geographical boundaries don't exist in the digital world, but we have identified gaps when it comes to knowledge and understanding about the respective markets. By connecting these two nodes of digital excellence, we want to close those gaps and create new business opportunities."

A CSC Business Summit was held in April 2021 which brought together companies, developers, customers, investors, entrepreneurs, and institutions to brainstorm possible means by which both cities could collaborate to connect both regions to new markets (Silicone Cape Initiative, 2021). In the September of the same year, the CSC hosted a webinar to layout solutions to gender inequalities that are present in the technology sector within both countries (iAfrica, 2021). More recent activates of the CSC have been less widely publicised and are therefore harder to showcase.

On a social level, both states enjoy warm bilateral relations. While there have always been cordial relations between Swedes and South Africans, there are a number of commitments within the various bilateral agreements that have been entered into over the years. Following the SSPW in 1999, South Africa and Sweden signed a bilateral agreement resulting in the establishment of the South African-Swedish Research Partnership Programme (the Programme), which ran from November 1999 until March 2005. Article Three subsection two of the agreement notes: "[the] overall objective of the Programme is to facilitate, promote, develop and support research co-operation between the two countries in spheres of mutual interest in all domains of science on the basis of equality and mutual benefit" (DIRCO, 1999: 3). Subsection four of the same article goes on to note that: The specific objective of the Programme is to facilitate co-operation between South African researchers at universities and technikons and Swedish researchers at universities and university colleges by financing their joint research proposals" (DIRCO, 1999: 4).

In June 2000 South Africa and Sweden entered into a bilateral agreement pertaining to defence cooperation. The scope of the defence agreement places a further emphasis on knowledge-sharing as can be seen in Article One of the agreement: "The Parties shall promote cooperation in defence related matters, especially in the fields of research, development, projection, acquisition, logistic support and peacekeeping matters in accordance with the terms of this Agreement and any associated annexures, subject to each Party's domestic law and contractual or international obligations." In October 2013 both counties would attempt to expand their cooperation in the area of research by signing a bilateral agreement fostering cooperation in the areas of science, technology, and innovation. This agreement mandated the Ministry of Education and Research in Sweden and the then Department of Science and Technology in South Africa to coordinate exchanges of research and ideas between experts and institutions in both states (DIRCO, 2013: 1 and 2). This agreement is not in force at the time of this writing (see Table 1).

Despite the above development, collaboration in the area of research saw an enhancement with the launch of the South Africa-Sweden University Forum (SASUF) in 2017 by a cohort of university vice chancellors from both South Africa and Sweden who submitted a funding application to the Swedish Foundation for Cooperation in Research and Higher Education, otherwise known as STINT. To date, SASUF has connected over 3, 000 students and researchers from both states and has become an essential instrument for the practice of knowledge diplomacy (see Sven Botha and Helin Bäckman Kartal for more information on South Africa and Sweden's practice of knowledge diplomacy).

The social linkages between South Africa and Sweden moved on from research to include closer cooperation in arts and culture. In March 2017, Hedda Krausz Sjögren became Sweden's first Counsellor for Cultural Affairs on the African continent. Krausz Sjögren's experiences and achievements are documented in her own article of this special issue and will therefore not be discussed in-depth here. However, it should be noted the creation of this diplomatic posting helped to fulfil a long-term commitment to cooperate in arts and culture via a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the subject in September 2020, which was fuelled by a later of intent pertaining to the same subject which was signed in 2015. The MoU notes that its purpose "is to maintain and develop an intercultural dialogue and to enrich knowledge of the other country's culture and arts and promote cooperation between cultural institutions, independent groups and individual artists. The Participants will encourage exchanges between artists, representatives and experts in various fields of culture and the arts" (DIRCO, 2020: 1). The MoU is rooted in the desire to "consolidate and strengthen the friendly ties and reciprocal understanding between [Sweden and South Africa's] peoples" with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of life for people from both states (DIRCO, 2020: 7). Moreover, the MoU will span cooperation in the areas of: schools of art, associations of artists and writers, museums, archives, film, and other heritage orientated institutions (DIRCO, 2020: 8). Some of the areas of cooperation in the area of culture include The Future of Fashion Indaba, the collaboration between H & M and Mantsho, and the Digitally Yours Campaign hosted by the Embassy of Sweden at the hight of the COVID-19 Pandemic (Embassy of Sweden, 2021; Mbude, 2019; Botha, 2023). It is also important to note that the Sweden and South Africa have enjoyed some successful informal social relations as is the case in the higher education space. For example, cooperation between practitioners of higher education has also resulted increased awareness pertaining to gender-based violence (see Cornè Davis's article for more on this collaboration).

Discussion: Unpacking the special issue

The application of the author's framework to South Africa-Sweden Relations has yielded a pensive of insights spanning the individual and the collective. Politically, both states have made encouraging progress by maintaining bilateral relations at the ambassadorial level and have bi-national commission at the level of vice heads of government. Additionally, a vast number of bilateral agreements spanning travel, defence, research, higher education, arts and culture, and environmentalism and climate change have all been initiated. The progression of bilateral cooperation suggests that the firm political foundations have allowed economic and social cooperation. On the economic front, South Africa and Sweden have enjoyed a keen partnership. However, it should be noted that there is an imbalance in trade with Swedish exports to the Republic outweighing South African exports to the Kingdom. Despite this imbalance, both states still work together on connecting the markets within both states; the Cape Town-Stockholm Connect Initiative is indicative of this. Finally, there has been much social cooperation between South Africa and Sweden. The joint commitment to research and the exchange of ideas and knowledge, both within traditional research, science, and technology agreements, formal research forums such as SASUF, and within a broader sense as is indicated in the agreement on defence cooperation and the MoU on arts and culture suggests social cooperation is the strongest type of cooperation both states share. Combined, the three variables suggest South Africa and Sweden have established a strong bilateral relationship which is rooted in historical solidary and sustained through a collective desire to cooperate on issues of mutual concern. However, it should be noted that the possible expansion of the BRISC bloc and South Africa's neutrality over Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2021 may cause tensions in the relationship going forward, as discussed by Beakkvold and Hattar's article in this special issue.

This special issue has provided a number of unique contributions which result in a greater understanding of the relationship South Africa and Sweden have come to form and, perhaps more importantly, what could be done to sustain and strengthen it going forward. Anna-Mart van Wyk and Tove Sternehäll ground the special issue by offering enriching insights into Sweden's opposition to Apartheid and how this would come to shape initial trade relations between both states respectively. Suzanne Graham investigates how both states grapple with the concept of good international citizenship and finds that both South Africa and Sweden bear the credentials of good international citizens to some extent and further notes that common positions on human rights and UN working methods provide avenues for future cooperation. Comparative studies by Pragna Rugunanan on migration and Suzanne Graham and Muvumba-Sellström on E10 membership to the UN Security Council provide insights on a host of domestic and internal issues of concern, which paves way for an opportunity for political leaders, diplomats, and scholars to reflect on how South Africa and Sweden could share examples of best practice and lessons learnt in their dual capacity as middle powers. Other contributions such as those by Elise Dermineur Reuterswärd and Unathi Kolanisi, Hedi Richards, and Lipnizki, Corné Davis all illustrate the strong social bonds South Africa have formed via research collaboration. Finally, the contribution by Stiehler-Mulder and Tselepis introduces an enhance of the principles of sustainability and how they are applied within the fashion industry yielding a means of fostering closer economic and social ties between Sweden and South Africa. May these forms of cooperation evolve and thrive.

Conclusion: Proposing a new research agenda for South Africa-Sweden Relations

The purpose of this article was to provide a means of concluding this double special issue on South Africa-Sweden relations by offering a brief appraisal of the bilateral relationship shared by both countries. This appraisal was undertaken by employing the author's own analytical framework which considered the political, economic, and social aspects of South Africa and Sweden's relationship. In doing so, their bilateral relationship could be understood both individual silos and as a coherent whole. The application of these three variables finds that the Republic of South Africa and the Kingdom of Sweden have established a stable bilateral relationship steeped in rich historical context. this has resulted in the emergence of a keenness to cooperate in areas such as trade, defence, climate change, research, higher education, and science and technology. Of the three areas of cooperation assessed in this paper, social cooperation is the strongest while economic cooperation is the weakest means of cooperation. The strong social cooperation that both states share is thanks to an evergreen commitment to higher education, research, and past work in arts and culture. Political cooperation remains lukewarm and under threat given ongoing geopolitical tensions on the international stage.

With possible tensions afoot it is important to look beyond the ordinary discourse on bilateral relations and consider how the stronger variables within the South Africa-Sweden relationship could be leveraged to help sustain the relationship. This special issue has provided a number of possible leads as how this could possibly happen with four possible areas of further research emerging. Firstly, both states share common positions on key international issues which should explored in greater detail to see if and how these political platforms can be leveraged to ensure future cooperation. Furthermore, cooperation between South Africa and Sweden from April to December 2005 aimed at strengthening the institutions of the state in the Democratic Republic of Congo provides a unique opportunity for reflection and evaluation as such cooperation could be extended to other states in need. Secondly, both states are middle powers and regional hegemons which places them in a unique position as ideal case studies for scholars to compare and contrast within both classifications. Thirdly, both South Africa and Sweden have demonstrated an ardent appetite for knowledge generation and exchange. Nowhere is more potent than SASUF. As a result, future research should focus on the impact SASUF exchanges are having. This research should focus both on the impact individual SASUF-funded projects are having on the communities in which they implemented, and how cooperation and collaboration via SASUF is impacting people-to-people perceptions of both countries. Lastly, South Africa has at times been found to collaborate multilaterally with the wider Nordic region. This provides researchers with an opportunity to reinvigorate the broader research agenda on Africa-Nordic Relations focusing on regional and international issues of mutual concern. It is hoped that this special issue has provided a platform for much food for thought as governments, diplomats, students, and scholars continue their work to foster ties between both states and ultimately both regions.

Notes

1. The author acknowledges that Anderson's work discusses the concept of strategic partnerships within international relations. However, it should be noted that Anderson's work offers little conceptual and theoretical insights into what constitutes a strategic partnership and instead focuses on a chronological order of events. Hence, the citations categorisation. It should also be noted that strategic partnerships are not considered in this paper's literature review on bilateral relations as strategic partnerships require a firm bilateral relationship to be in place before it can be elevated to the level of a strategic partnership. For an assessment of weather South Africa could formulate a strategic partnership with Sweden and wider Nordic region, refer to Beakkvold and Hattar's article in this special issue.

2. The terms 'Nordic' and 'Scandinavian' are not to be used interchangeably. Nordic states include: Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark while only Norway, Sweden, and Denmark are classed as Scandinavian. This difference is noted as one of the agreements mentioned in Table 1 are limited to the Scandinavian states.

3. While this paper is primarily concerned with bilateral relations, multilateral agreements are included in Table 1 as they help to enhance the analysis offered in this paper.

4. This is a multilateral agreement between South Africa, Sweden, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

5. Values for Figure 1 are in US Dollars.

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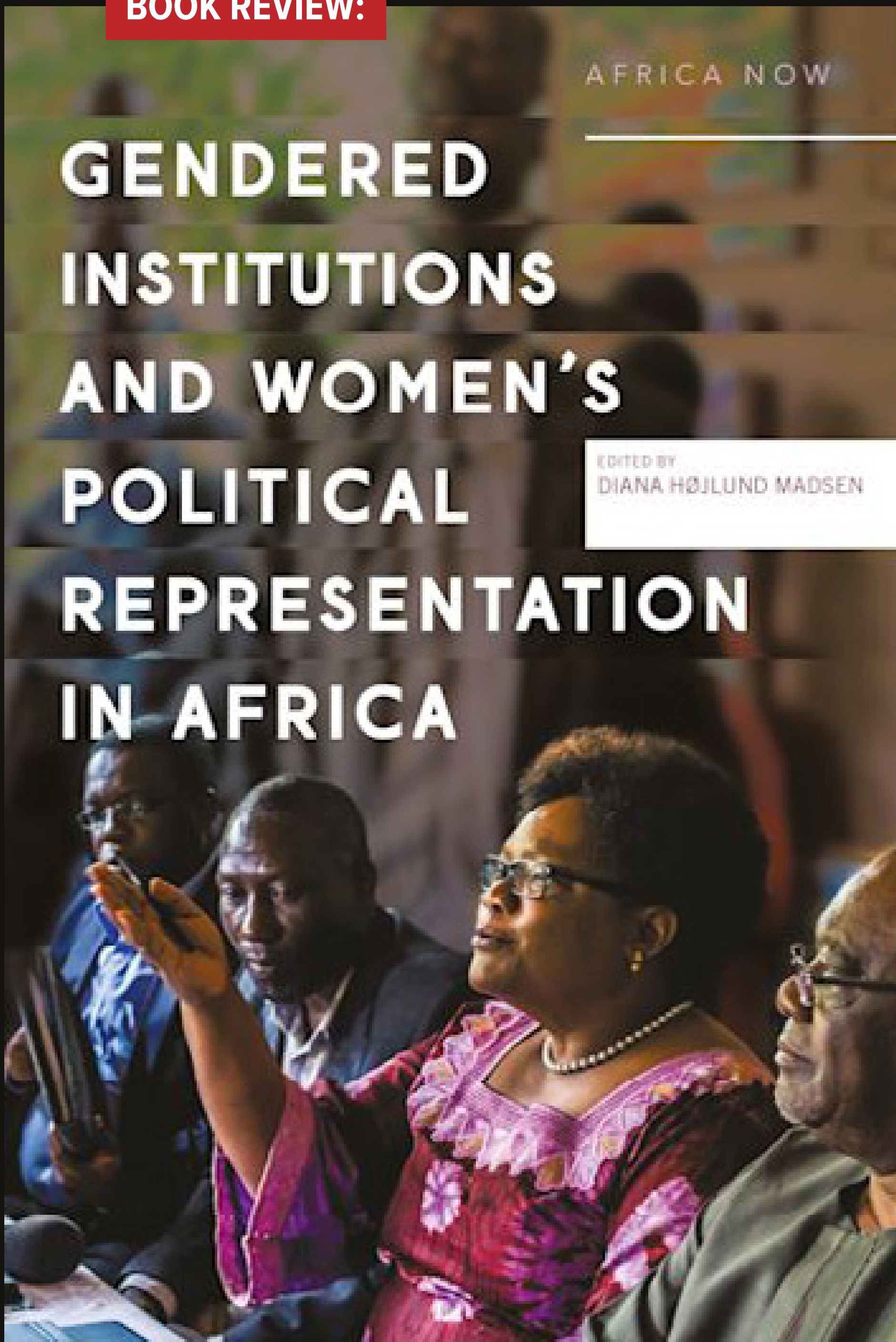
BOOK REVIEW:



Reviewed by Lesego Motsage

Gendered institutions in this book are described as social structures, norms, and practices that maintain gender inequalities and stereotypes, often to the advantage of men. Many political systems in Africa are patriarchal, with traditional leadership structures dominated by men. The book highlights the formal and informal political institutions that make it difficult for African women to gain access to political power or to have their voices heard within the African political establishment. Additionally, many of the rules and customs of African political institutions are biased against women and sometimes require candidates to have a certain level of education or financial autonomy that may be more difficult for women to attain. These gendered institutions have contributed to the under-representation of African women in politics. While there has been progress in recent years, women remain significantly under-represented in African decision-making bodies such as African National Parliaments. This book has eight chapters, with each chapter representing a unique case study of a country in Africa. The eight African countries that the book focuses on are South Africa, Tanzania, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, and Botswana.

Female political leaders from these countries face many political challenges, including sexism, gender bias, negative media coverage, societal stereotypes, and expectations about women's roles and abilities. Sexism and gender bias often manifest in various ways, including through double standards around appearance and behaviour, as well as discrimination and harassment. For example, female candidates have been scrutinised for their clothing, hair, and makeup choices. Furthermore, they have been expected to conform to traditional gender roles and stereotypes in order for them to be seen as competent. Negative media coverage has also significantly impacted African female political leaders, with women often receiving less favourable or more critical coverage than their male counterparts. This has led to public perceptions of female candidates being shaped by biased or inaccurate information, which can be challenging to overcome. Furthermore, societal stereotypes and expectations about women's roles and abilities continue to pose challenges for female political leaders.

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African women oftentimes face pressure to balance their professional and personal lives in ways that men do not and have sometimes been perceived as being less capable or qualified than male candidates due to their gender. Another challenge the book highlights is the lack of support and resources available to women who wish to enter politics. Women in these African countries face social stigma and barriers discouraging them from seeking political office. They have limited access to funding and the resources necessary to run a successful campaign. As noted on page 7 of the book: 'Women have to negotiate with their husbands over funds, use their professional and private networks for fundraising, taking loans and receiving gifts'. Additionally, women who do enter politics may face hostility or harassment from male colleagues or constituents, leading to further marginalisation and disempowerment. These challenges make it more difficult for female political leaders to succeed in their campaigns and can contribute to ongoing gender disparities in political representation and leadership. However, many women have been able to overcome these obstacles and achieve successful careers in politics, paving the way for future generations of female leaders.

The book highlights the need to adopt a feminist institutionalist perspective. Furthermore, it advocates for the need to modify and adapt 'feminist institutionalism' to African realities on the ground and African conceptions of power, feminism, and institutions. The three components of African feminist institutionalism are the re-excavation of the past, the role of African feminisms in reshaping patriarchal institutions, and the development of specific African concepts on gendered institutions. The book provides a more nuanced perspective on African concepts such as Femocracy and the First-Lady Syndrome, as well as a new emphasis on a Politics of Insults, Ridicule, and Rumours that works against the participation of more women in politics. A lot has been written about Africa and African women, but there is a need for Africans to write about themselves. Page 242 of the book notes that 'It has been important to ensure that the majority of contributions are written not just about Africa but also by African researchers'. An element that makes the book unique is that female African scholars contributed to the book; African women were part of telling their own story for a change.

A critique of the book is that the sampling of the countries was not fairly done, as there is a lack of representation from other parts of Africa. No country from North Africa was represented; only two East African countries and one country from West Africa were chosen. The remaining five countries are from the southern parts of Africa, more specifically the SADC region; therefore, the title would have been more fitting as Gendered Institutions and Women's Political Representation in SADC instead of using the term 'Africa'. However, the author indicates that these eight countries were chosen strategically as some countries, like Ghana, Nigeria, Botswana, and Malawi, have low representation of women in politics, while others, like South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Kenya, are known to have high representation of women in politics. Nonetheless, using case studies from eight countries out of a continent that consists of 54 countries is not enough to draw a conclusion on women's overall political representation in Africa.

While efforts have been made to address some systemic barriers to women's political representation in Africa, addressing the root causes of gendered institutions requires significant social and cultural changes, political will, and investments in women's leadership development. Some countries have implemented quota systems and affirmative action policies to ensure women are represented in political institutions. Others have focused on increasing access to education and resources for women or on changing public attitudes toward women's political leadership. There have also been initiatives to train and mentor women interested in pursuing political careers, providing them with the skills and support necessary to succeed in a challenging environment. By working together to address these challenges, we can create more equitable and inclusive political systems that benefit all members of the society.