Chapter One

The Nature of the Debate

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**The South African Transition**

**An Overview of the Book**

The nature of institutional change in South Africa as it moved towards a democratic state influenced whether South Africa would succeed as a newly industrializing pluralist democratic country. As South Africa enters its third decade of majority rule, the view towards the future is not promising. Clifford Shearing (quoted in Bernstein 1994, p. 291) was prophetic in the early 1990s when he wrote: “You can have all the constitutions in the world, and Bills of Rights. But sheer practice is essential to turn it into a reality.”

In trying to understand the transition and the limits to democratic rule in South Africa, one must begin with the complex and interwoven pattern of forces that have influenced policy makers since the seventeenth century (Brewer 1989a, p. 203). This book deliberately takes a historical approach to debates in South Africa about liberalism, nationalism, and ideology[[1]](#footnote-1), seeing lessons for the future in the rich, complex and often torturous events of the last three hundred and fifty years. Above all this book sees the limits to South Africa’s stability as embedded in the failure of liberalism and liberal thought in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Liberalism, as it is used in this book, is self-defined by its advocates and changes over time. It has come to include political, social, and economic components in its classical eighteenth-century freedom of choice manifestation. The concept also has to be seen within its South African context, where in South Africa it has become entangled in debates about cultural preservation and the assimilation of common values. The definition is deliberately loose in that it relies upon empirical evidence as reflected in South Africa’s history.

The book often equates liberalism with non-interference in individual behavior rather than equating it with socialist or state control systems, though the definition is broad enough to include a Keynesian view of a mixed economy. We suggest here that classical liberalism failed in South Africa resulting in a very low level of confidence in pluralist institutions of governance among the majority of its population. Often historically, including during the negotiations process, liberals opted out of participation in the debate that surrounded them.

The debate about the exact nature of the negotiated transition in South Africa has often resembled the medieval argument about how many angels can stand on the head of a pin. What most observers failed to anticipate in the early 1980s “was the speed with which the political power of the white community would diminish in the 1990s, along with its shrinking share of the total population” (Guelke 1999, p. 191). It is through the negotiations process that we can examine the way that values clashed with power in the waning years of the apartheid regime.

This book is one of a three book series that examine the nature of the transition in South Africa. This volume examines the failures of liberalism within the context of the transitional process that led to the institution, if not the practice, of a non-racial state in 1994. Change in South Africa occurred as a result of external, as well as internal, pressures prior to 1990 and these forces influenced choices despite the failure of the liberal cause in South Africa. These pressures were buttressed by both an economic reality and ideological debates that have constituted South African political history. Focus is on the internal and external pressures that influenced change and on the organizational values of the major negotiating partners. The other two books (Picard 2006; Picard & Mogale 2014) explore public policy with regard to public sector institutions and the nature of national and sub-national governance. At issue in all three books is the extent to which the South African state could be transformed to meet the requirements of a pluralist democracy and the needs of autonomous groups and individuals within civil society. Most importantly we look at the way that debate and competition over policy choices reflects this pluralist model (Du Toit 1995, p. 231).

In this book, we focus on four separate but inter-related issues: First, and throughout, focus is on the ways in which the transformation process in South Africa defined, and was defined by, liberal political values, ideological debates, and institutional governance. Second, the book examines the role that international pressures, and in particular sanctions and the impact of the cold war, played in bringing the South African government to the bargaining table despite a deflation of liberal values. Third, we examine the urban revolt in the 1980s, its impact upon the negotiations, and on the value systems that were reflected in the negotiations process. Finally, the book goes on to raise questions about the potential for representative government and pluralism within the context of the sharp economic and social differences that continue to define the country.[[2]](#footnote-2)

This chapter provides an overview of the environment of apartheid that led to the political crisis in South Africa after 1983 and the ten years of negotiations that followed. In Chapter Two, we examine the shift from colonial modes of governance to the defined segregation established under the Union of South Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century. Chapters three and four examine the grand apartheid system constructed by the National Party after 1959. Chapter five looks at the homelands as entities that would impact upon post-apartheid South Africa. Chapters six and seven examine the historical role of liberalism after World War II and the role of “theory” in the development of the apartheid ideology. Chapters eight through ten provide a history of the mass democratic movement, and the special role that the African National Congress (ANC) played in it, both internally and in exile, from its origins in 1912 to the Township revolts of the 1980s.

Chapters ten through fourteen examine the nature of the reforms that were put into place by P.W. Botha in the 1980s, the process of end game negotiations, the impact of sanctions, the role of the various actors in the negotiations process, the creation of pacts and counter-pacts, and ultimately the establishment of a minimum winning coalition that allowed the transition to occur. Chapters fifteen through eighteen examine the post-apartheid state under Presidents Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, and Jacob Zuma and the nature of the liberal debate in the first two decades of majority rule government in South Africa. Chapter nineteen concludes the book.

**Core Values and the South African State**

There are several images of South Africa that have been perpetuated by ruling elites in the country. These images go back to the nineteenth century and beyond. Anthony Sampson (1987, p. 21) puts it this way: "South Africa seemed not so much a real country as a map of the mind in which anyone could find his own place." In essence, this amounted to a denial that such a thing as South Africa existed. Both liberals and advocates of segregated development have succumbed to this fallacy.

The Dutch and the British brought contending ideologies of colonialism, nationalism, and liberalism to South Africa in the nineteenth century. These "isms" were met and challenged by traditional African values and the values of those from South and Southeast Asia who also contributed to the mosaic of twenty-first century South Africa. This included debates about liberalism and national identity that remain current in the post-apartheid period.

Neither liberalism nor alternative value systems were able to stop apartheid from becoming the dominant belief system for white South Africans. They ended up defining the early version of racial segregation that became the foundation upon which apartheid was built. Liberal values and liberal institutions did, however, define the formula that unlocked the negotiations to end apartheid, but are being challenged by the kleptocracy that controlled much of the politics of South Africa under the Presidency of Jacob Zuma.

Liberalism, as a value system, briefly predominated at the end of the Government of National Unity among South African elites, both among black Africans (if uneasily), Indians, Afrikaans, and English speakers. This reflected a democratic tendency that has won through every political forum in South Africa but whose final status is, as of yet, unknown in the post-apartheid state. Liberal values are what one observer calls the "Anglo centric educational background" of educated elites and are resented by many in South Africa as a luxury in a country that is still defined by poverty (Cartwright 1996, p. 22).

But historically, liberal values were not the first concern of those in power. The situation in South Africa needed more than justice to carry the country out of an otherwise certain disaster and law and order came first, needing to be maintained with mercy and justice if possible, without either if necessary.[[3]](#footnote-3) Both Afrikaans and British values (as well as those of immigrants from the Indian sub-continent) came against Khoi and San social norms and with the value system of the majority of Bantu language speakers who inhabited the sub-continent.

Khoisian values largely died out or have been integrated into the values of the mixed race ("Coloured") population in the Western Cape. "The land of the indigenous nomadic herdsmen, the khoikhoi (Hottentots), was progressively expropriated and eventually they, together with Malay slaves from the Dutch East Indies and the offspring of mixed race marriages, became the Cape Coloured People…" (Hain 1996, p. 5). What remains of this heritage is the political and social culture of the Western Cape, which is different from that of much of the rest of South Africa.

In Bantu culture, a “person is a person through other persons”[[4]](#footnote-4) (Krog 1998, p. 334). Bantu values (*Ubuntu* is sometimes referred to as collectiveness) have survived, although modified, and remain powerful, particularly in the rural areas of the country. To many Europeans, “Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human” (Tutu 1999, p. 31). Critics suggest that “Ubuntu” is both collectivist and authoritarian given its emphasis on consensus-building.

The role that traditional values will play in a future South Africa still remains uncertain, even though millions of South Africans continue to live within traditional value systems in South Africa's rural and urban areas and many others see comfort in the collectiveness that is often labeled socialism in South Africa. This allegiance has caused the ANC led South African government to embrace traditional leadership despite an earlier ideological hostility.

Ideas play an important role in making history. Idealists have sometimes exaggerated the power of ideas, but, while attacking them, historical materialists have never managed to handle intellectual debates very effectively (Thompson 1985, p. 241). In South Africa, the writing of history has both suffered from a historiographic tradition which is limiting and contributed to the mythologies of racial separation. The study of South African history in the early part of twentieth century was dependent on the work of George Mcall Theal, with his focus on missionary values. Historically, the interpretation of history has undergone several significant changes in the twentieth century and continues to be debated in the post-apartheid period. (Davenport, 1997a).

Four historical schools have dominated South African historiography. The first was the Macmillan School, after W. M. Macmillan, who questioned "the validity of the received version, above all in its presumption in favour of the ‘colonial’ as against the ‘missionary’ point of view in the inter-racial controversies of the early nineteenth century" (Davenport 1997b, p. xiii). This is also called the liberal school. A second approach has been labeled the Africanist School that takes an Afro-centric rather than a Eurocentric approach. In the post WWII period, a third approach has emphasized the important role played by the indigenous peoples of Africa in its historical development and on decolonizing the history of Africa. Finally, there is the Marxist School with its critique of liberals for ignoring the influence of rival power groups and class conflict. The debate among these four schools was about the fundamental values that triumphed in a post-apartheid South Africa.

The approach used here, while recognizing the importance of materialism as a motivating force, takes the position that values are based upon a multiplicity of concerns. Power in South Africa was a “socio-political ideal...the spirit of capitalism. For money presents itself as the alternative certitude for those who have already acquired political dominance” (De Klerk 1975, p. 285). It is essential to understand the core values that make up South African society, including traditionalism and communalism, liberalism, trusteeship, nationalism, and modernization. Further, the failure of liberalism in the 19th and 20th centuries weakened (perhaps fatally) South African political institutions in the 21st century.

European and African values, plus ideas generated by immigrants from Asia, such as non-violence, combined with indigenous values to make up the rich mosaic of South African intellectual life. Within the broader context of a Eurocentric world-view, Dutch (Afrikaans) values sometimes clashed with British values and sometimes reinforced them. These intellectual underpinnings of the apartheid and post-apartheid state, debates about liberalism, African nationalism, and a lumpen-Marxism (mangled by more than a dash of corruption and pre-bendalism) remain a theme throughout this book.

There are two views of a post-apartheid South Africa. The traditional view suggests that South Africa remains a divided society that is made up of diverse racial, ethnic, and class-based, contending civil societies that need to be able to interact with each other (Du Toit 1995). At issue is the extent to which South African nationalism was different in kind from the emerging nations in the rest of Africa and other parts of the developing world because of a permanent multi-racial and mixed-race minority of close to 30 percent. The other view is that South Africa is moving towards a common set of values. Our view is that these are the two contending forces in South Africa with the outcome not as of yet clear.

There is much that divides South Africans and there are some things that South Africans of all ethnic backgrounds have in common. Deep in South African culture, however, is the division between black and white, a "division that runs through the psyche of the nation" (Sparks 1990, p. xvii). In spite of this divide, however, there is much that South Africans share in common, common values perched on top of the social, economic, and political divisions of the country. Many people of varying backgrounds have knowledge of more than one language and they are culturally fluid, moving in and out of various language and cultural milieu.

Many South Africans argue, "blacks and Boers have a great deal in common, and are often able to bridge the apartheid divide more easily than English speaking South Africans" (Goodman 1999, p. 267). In South Africa, it was not that long ago that Afrikaners and blacks were both at the bottom of the class scale. As a result, there are increasingly “over-arching and transcending values, to which most people in South Africa feel connected, despite their diversity and cultural differences” (Van Zyl Slabbert 2000, p. 82). As Denis Beckett (2000, p. 69) has put it, “There can be few white men on the planet who have closer physical contact with black men than the working-class Boer….”

During the 1980s and 1990s, there were "cultural borrowings that to some extent crossed racial boundaries" (Beinart 1994, p. 176). The assumption of many of those observing South Africa was that many South Africans are working to create a single nation, what Bishop Desmond Tutu has called the rainbow nation (Barber 1999). It is certainly true that some South Africans, both black and white, have begun to extend their identity to what were formerly “others” (Van Tonder 1996). As Nadine Gordimer (1999, p. 19) notes, increasingly South Africans now accept each other “as a common relative in the human family.”

However, increasingly, critics of the rainbow nation concept suggest that this is a myth. To these critics, South Africa is not the rainbow nation that Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu hoped for (Goodman 1999). And there is concern among scholars that, “this deeply divided society with its complex ethnic language, racial, socio-economic, and class divisions will not be able to contain and manage inherent conflict in a new open democracy with majority government” (Van Tonder 1996, p. 27). To critics of the one nation idea, what is clear is that less than 15% of South Africans identify themselves as such, without reference to race, ethnicity, or culture.

There is some evidence of common values grounded in terms of a South African political culture. At question is whether there can be in South Africa a "peaceful and adaptable society in which disputes could be settled by a patient consideration of recognized laws" (Welsh 1999, p. xxv). For many, but certainly not all South Africans, race is no longer the central organizing force of society (Krog 1998, p. 270). This view suggests that there is a South African bond, which, at an elite level at least, can cross ethnic and racial differences. It is a bond of "mutual attachment to the same country despite racial and political differences" (Sparks 1995b, p. 82).

Nationalism in South Africa should and will not be ethnically based, but derived from common, social, economic, and political concerns and a common history (Fredrickson 1995, p. 285). "What is unique for the RSA [Republic of South Africa]," according to Lane and Faure (1996, p. 1), "is the strong emphasis upon constitutional mechanisms, i.e. for getting the constitutional rules right and the setting up of institutions for the implementation of a large variety of constitutional provisions.” From this, one should conclude that all South Africans share a common patriotism, common values, a shared religious dedication, and a common humanity. At question in this book is whether this community of institutions and values has been, and will be, enough to prevent economic and political disintegration.

The sense of a community of values dominated the ANC-Lusaka meetings between black and white South Africans (on both sides of the political divide) in the late 1980s (Waldemeir 1997). Such a vision assumed that a future South African political culture would be subsumed in a common, distinctively South African synthesis.[[5]](#footnote-5) The intimate relationship between African and Afrikaner, particularly in the rural areas of South Africa, defines this synthesis. For Charles van Onselen (1995, p. 270), "When an authentic South African identity eventually emerges from the troubled country it will, in large part, have come from painful shared experiences on the highveld [the high elevation, open areas of the north central part of South Africa]” (see also p. vi).

The negotiated agreement provided the potential for a common set of values that included an inclusive nation building nationalism, a liberal democratic constitution, and a strategy of economic growth, driven by a competitive market economy (in a fast changing and complex globalized economy). The problem is that one person's non-racial nation building, for someone who continues to advocate ethnic exclusivism, can be either "Jacobian intolerance"[[6]](#footnote-6) or the continued protection of privilege.

In South Africa, there has been a 300-year history of interpenetration of African and European values (Evans 1997). The most important of these values is democratic governance which, while distorted by racism and based upon Afrikaner civil religion since the Second World War, "...stems from a long tradition of popular democracy" (Christenson 1979, p. 138). Community values and democracy through consensus have their origins in African communitarianism. All South Africans have been influenced by the value systems of all of the indigenous and immigrant peoples of South Africa. This value system was to be the hope for the future.

The synthesis, however, is not yet entirely apparent. During the 1994 elections, political territory was defined and bounded by a particular political movement and opposition groups were precluded from certain areas (most townships, parts of Natal, and the Transkei). Electoral patterns of voting in 1994, 1999, and in the 1995-1996 and 2000 local government elections, suggest that ethnic cleavages define voting (the elections became an ethnic consensus) and, for all intents and purposes, South Africa remains a one-party dominant state. The election of Jacob Zuma, despite his obvious flaws as a candidate in 2009 and his reelection in 2014, suggests a weakness in the South African system of party-list voting, as opposed to a first past the post constituency system. Party voting, at least in South Africa has produced a corrupt and self-serving political elite that continues to exploit South Africa’s people.

The Western Cape Province exhibits a different and complex nuance to the one party dominant state controlled by the ANC, where a coalition of White, Coloured, and small African electorate bucked the trend and brought into power the Democratic Alliance (DA) government, first in the City of Cape Town “metropol” and later the Western Provincial government. KwaZulu Natal, early on, unsuccessfully toyed with the idea of federalism and even threatened to take the matter to the international court. Now it supports a unitary state. Yet, despite some sentiment for federalism, the largely white and mixed race Democratic Alliance has not been able to parlay its significant power at the provincial level into a national alternative in support of federalism with appeal to the African majority of South Africans.

**The Institutional State**

The South African institutional state was a colonial inheritance that functioned in historical relationship to a racially fragmented and ethnically defined civil society. For black South Africans in particular, the “local state,” outside of the white areas from which they were politically, socially, and economically excluded, remained colonial and authoritarian until almost the end of the twentieth century. There is continuity in this institutional state that historically has stifled liberal political values and political debate.

We begin in this book with Pierre du Toit’s (1995, p. viii) caution that democratic outcomes depend on the degree to which “democratic institutions are embedded in a wider network of state and social institutions.” This book has been premised on the assumption that stable democracies require social strength to maintain a civil society. A pluralist civil society requires political organizations that accept the basic premises of liberal democracy and social and political competition and a bureaucracy which sees itself as a part of an institution, and as having interests wider then its own organizational or class interests (Du Toit 1995; Migdal 1988). The institutionalized role of the public sector and sub-national governments was, and is, central to that wider net of institutions that have evolved in South Africa.

At the national level, the state was defined by bureaucratic group representation and social segregation from the beginning. Throughout South African history, it was the primary interests of sub-groups that dominated the state. Dutch and Dutch East Indies interests predominated between 1652 and 1808 and were symbolized by the Landdrost or South African Prefect at the local level. During the English period from 1809-1922, English and Anglicized Dutch interests predominated in the Cape and later in Natal.

Prior to the Anglo-Boer War, Boer (Afrikaner) interests dominated the Transvaal and Orange Free State, only to be replaced by Milner’s Kindergarten and English capital investment until the mid-1920s. In the broadest sense, the Afrikaans period lasted from 1924 to 1994 and came to dominate the state sector after 1948. Since 1994, South Africa has been a formally democratic, but one party-dominant, state which continues to grapple with institutionalized mechanisms for guiding political debate into tolerant and productive channels. The debate about liberalism has been critical to this process.

Over the next several chapters, we will examine the common values, sectorial myths, and colonial legacy in South Africa. It is our contention that the political and cultural values of South Africa remain uncertain and fluid and that these values will define the long-term political stability and economic development of the country. In its three-century history, South Africa evolved as a society in which new forms of manipulated domination were grafted on old patterns of control and political development. As part of this process, South Africa has developed new myths about its history. Two are particularly important:

1. The myth of a South African unique solution – In the end it was not unique. Like Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Namibia, the end result for South Africa was simple majority rule, a decline in white economic influence, and a drop in productivity and economic decline. While this was both necessary and appropriate, at question remains the role of the 22 percent of the population in South Africa that is not Bantu speaking.

2. The myth of non-racialism – Africanism, as well as non-racialism, has influenced the national policy of post-apartheid South Africa with the debate about affirmative action and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) as prime examples of this pattern.[[7]](#footnote-7) Non-racialism, however, does not exist in the post-apartheid era. The country remained polarized along racial lines after 1994 and large sections of the political estate in South Africa remain uncomfortable with liberal democratic values.

**Divisions, Governance and Common Values**

Governance and civil society issues were defined in racial and ethnic terms from the beginning in South Africa. South Africa’s fractured society came out of the pattern of race relations that colonial and settler elites defined in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This in turn fed into the myths of nationhood that developed within the Afrikaner community and the African majority. Ultimately, political control and development concerns remained in large part racially motivated.

The apartheid state was racist. Moreover, social and racial relationships were, and are, both more evident, more immediate, and more complex in South Africa than is the case elsewhere in the world where distance often limited contact between races and cultures (Adam 1971). To say this, however, is to say little about the combination of forces that defined the institutional state system in South Africa prior to 1994.

The pattern of race relations that developed in South Africa, and the nature of the institutions that resulted from it, is an important focus of analysis here. Race relationships in the twentieth century were based upon a racial stereotyping that solidified among both English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking political elites prior to 1910. The racial values associated with apartheid reflected a much broader consensus about racial differences that predominated among Europeans not only in South Africa, but throughout the world prior to 1948.

The European population in South Africa, prior to 1994, enjoyed privileges of self-governance and immense economic prosperity within the context of an authoritarian colonial administration that governed blacks. Whites in South Africa emulated and saw themselves as part of Europe. According to Adam and Moodley (1993, p. 159), this “little-noticed value emulation (towards Europe) distinguishes economically integrated South Africa from its segmentally isolated colonial counterparts.”

The South African post-apartheid government is defined by one of the most liberal and democratic constitutions in the world. That, however, says little about the state of liberalism in post-apartheid South Africa, the primary concern of our discussion here. In this book, we trace the continuity of racial and ethnic control during the nineteenth century colonial period and the first forty years of Union history, down to 1948, and through to post-apartheid rule after 1994, ending with an understanding of Jacob’s Zuma’s South Africa within the context of the failures of liberalism. Our goal is to clarify some of the important nuances of the differences between the period before and after 1948 and before and after the beginning of a universal enfranchisement.

Among black South Africans, traditional values that continue to be particularly important have their origins in rural South Africa and, in particular, the dusty isolated “native reserves” that later came to be called “homelands” or “Bantustans” during the apartheid period. These reflect a social world-view that is often neglected by urban-based academics and intellectuals in South Africa and internationally. Given the continuing migration into South Africa's cities, traditional cultural norms remain important in the urban areas of South Africa, as well as the rural countryside, and the bureaucratic structures of the former homelands remain important in understanding the nature of patronage and corruption that continues to define twenty-first century South Africa.

Traditionalism, racism, separatism, and liberalism provide the context within which we examine debates over social development, economic competition, claims of cultural hegemony, and moral discourse as they relate to the transition to a non-racial government in South Africa. The future of South Africa, as it moves from the civil religion of apartheid to a more all-encompassing civil society, will in large part be defined by this historical legacy.

**Negotiations, Pacts and the Winning Coalition**

**An Overview of Negotiations Issues**

A first theme of South African politics in the last decade of apartheid rule was the development of a new strength and influence among both international and internal anti-apartheid forces, including, before February 2, 1990, the United Democratic Front (UDF), the ANC, and their overseas allies. Some coalition of domestic majority rule forces (and other "progressive" elements)[[8]](#footnote-8) represented the successor regime to the Nationalist Party government.

The state of emergency and the effective banning of the seventeen internal organizations in February of 1987 during the second state of emergency (the nadir of the apartheid state), in no way diminished, but rather strengthened, the influence that both internal and external anti-parliamentary groups had among black South Africans.[[9]](#footnote-9) President de Klerk's speech unbanning the ANC and all other political forces in the country, both internal and external, recognized this.

Ironically, and not surprisingly, the strength of the non-parliamentary forces[[10]](#footnote-10) in South Africa was mirrored by the dramatic increase in the influence of the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forces on the right. Spurred on by the limited reforms being introduced by the Botha and de Klerk governments, the right wing Conservative Party, led by Andries Truernicht, took over as the official opposition in the white parliament and by 1989 controlled a significant number of mid-level racially exclusive city councils in the Transvaal, the Orange Free State, and the Northern Cape. The opposition of Truernicht’s Conservative Party to negotiations would prove to be a potential spoiler in any attempt at racial reconciliation under a new non-racial constitution, though its long-term impact on post-apartheid politics was negligible.

Secondly, along with the rise in influence of the extra-parliamentary groups, and no doubt because of it, there developed, under the states of emergency declared by the Botha Administration in the mid-1980s, a system of militarized political control which was both all-encompassing and effective, at least in the short term.[[11]](#footnote-11) The potential to return to this pattern of control, either because of the failure of negotiations as a tool for mobilizing majority rule regime or through ethnic or economic conflict, cannot be ignored. The Marikana mine massacres in 2012 and the Xenophobic violence in 2008 and 2015 are witness to that.

Prior to 1994, control techniques included the use of the military to control the forces of change in the black townships, the effective abolition of all political activity by internally based political forces, and the use of "hot pursuit" to attack guerrillas of the ANC and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) in South Africa's neighboring states. In the four years prior to February 2, 1990, South Africa attacked Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Angola (with its ongoing attacks against SWAPO (Southwest African Peoples Organization) and support for the UNITA guerrillas).[[12]](#footnote-12) It also fatally attacked individual opponents of apartheid both in Africa and around the world.

A third and somewhat ambiguous theme became apparent in South Africa by the early 1980s. There was a growing recognition by the ruling forces in the Nationalist Party under P.W. Botha, and more importantly, F.W. de Klerk, that "Grand Apartheid," the division of the country into ten African homelands, would not provide a satisfactory political dispensation for the rapidly industrializing and urbanizing society that was industrial South Africa. The homelands were too small, too fragmented, and too politically flawed to provide a significant outlet for black political demands within the country.[[13]](#footnote-13)

This led to a fourth pattern of events after 1979. The South African Government introduced a series of conservative, but not inconsequential, reforms designed to create a group defined “multi-racial” state in which market forces predominated within the context of a political "power-sharing" arrangement. While these reforms, before February 2, 1990, did not indicate a real shift away from the geographically based "Grand Apartheid," some of the socio-economic reforms were significant and the political changes created some space for dissension, both within and, more importantly, outside of the racial bounds of the political process.

Of particular importance was the legalization of black trade unions and the end of influx control in South Africa’s cities. In the labor market, moves were made to use the skills needed to do the job (called the “rate of the job” in South Africa), rather than the color of the person, and racially defined job classification and attempts at influx control were gradually ended. In education, an increase in per capita expenditures on African education increased the number of matriculates and university graduates but remained insufficient to bridge the gap between blacks and whites. Social and economic changes out-paced political reform throughout the 1980s.

**Depoliticized Government**

Heribert Adam (1971), throughout his career, has effectively portrayed the oligarchic control mechanisms of the apartheid regime as techniques designed to preserve economic privileges among white South Africans. Elites in South Africa, for much of the twentieth century, rejected a cultural pluralist view of world. Throughout the 1980s, the white oligarchy searched for what they called closure on the South African political problem.

The use of the term closure implied an imposed rather than negotiated reform, but closure did not necessarily imply the cessation of reform or the re-institutionalization of the various legal and administrative mechanisms that conventionally sustained classical apartheid. It did mean significant political change aimed at centralizing power as an integral part of constructing a more effective and rational authoritarian system of control (Adam & Moodley 1986).

Confederation (often labeled consociationalism) at an elite level remained at the base of South African government policy down to the introduction of the Tricameral (or Botha) constitution in 1984. The system was meant to allow for the cooptation of elites in the homelands and the black townships to administer the territories in a political association, such as the (1980s) proposed Confederation of Southern (or South) Africa. Citizens of the homelands would lose any claim to the South African state whether they lived there or not. Cooptation would be on a segregated basis. Federalism, or Confederalism, would become the goal of P.W. Botha’s “reform” apartheid. As a result, Cobbett et al. (1986, p. 149) note that:

During the last half of 1984 and 1985 the state restructured the third and second tiers of government to conform with the procedure laid down in the 1983 President's Council (PC) reports…[which called for the creation of federated structures]…. This abandonment [in 1984] of the PC's consociational/confederal vision…put federalism on the agenda for a wide range of reformists. These include[d] English-speaking liberals, Bantustan [homeland] leaders, influential Afrikaner verligte [liberal] academics, ideologues and politicians, organised industry and commerce, and the Coloured and Indian parliamentary parties.

The emergence of a new and powerful generation of technocrats, oriented towards confederation, in the state bureaucracy and security forces was an important development in this context, with major implications for the short- to medium-term future. The projection of technocratic power at the highest levels of state policy-making was one of the strongest constraints on the implementation of closure advocated in the more ideologically belligerent of conservative Afrikaner circles. Ultimately, the goal was some form of depoliticized federated self-government. The search for technocratic solutions initially survived in post-apartheid South Africa.

Politically, however, by the mid-1980s "the South African government…relied above all on dependency to make the mass of the population toe the line" (Adam & Moodley 1986, p. 142). Black South Africans were dependent upon white South Africans and the apartheid state used this dependency as a mechanism of control. However, demographic changes and the development of both a black urban and a black working class, buttressed by strong unions, broke this dependence. The changing demography in South Africa was an essential component to changes in the political process after 1989.

The Botha government did not see the Tricameral Constitution as a final state. Botha expected that further reorganizations of state structures would be necessary to suit the centralized requirements of a closure-style siege society and placate the black middle class that the Botha administration had hoped to co-opt through a bureaucratic federalism. In South Africa between 1979 and 1989, there was a gap between the Botha administrations’ own conception of what constituted reform and the broader expectations adhered to by even the most conservative black leaders. Yet the nature of the post-apartheid transition was not without promise from a technocratic and a market based economic perspective.

The Botha reform program created slightly more political space for the disadvantaged majority. At the same time, it precipitated revolt and 1) violence between popular organizations and state functionaries; 2) violence between and among disadvantaged groups (so-called “black on black” violence) that would endure in the political landscape as “criminal” violence after 1994 (Gordon 2006); 3) an economic and social radicalism based on a vague collectivism that would heighten expectations to a point far beyond the capacity of any post-apartheid accomplishment; and 4) the development of a series of far right organizations and alliances which, in the short term, would be willing to commit to violence to prevent the more genuine reforms of the 1990s from being completed. Finally, the conflict and elite-based negotiations process, begun in the 1980s, pushed the parties toward conciliation and negotiations in the 1990s, but also towards conflict and patronage-based corruption after 2000.

It is important to understand the major features of the situation in South Africa at the end of the 1980s. In a major, but limited, way, the regime attempted to alter the terms of political domination through the Botha reform process. The effect of the top-down reform strategy adopted by the state was to place local and regional government at the forefront of national political struggles through a controlled and flawed reorganization of sub-national government.

Rian Malan (1990) identified three internal issues that South African elites faced in the 1980s: lingering Afrikaner ethnicity within a society where ethnicity and historical conflict defined conflict and violence; ethnic, urban-based violence (including criminal violence) within and impacting upon the African community; and the need to bring the mass democratic movement, the so-called Charterists, into the political process without abandoning elite pact negotiations. All of these would impact upon the transition in South Africa, liberal debates, and the evolution of a non-racial polity.

**The Need for Elite Negotiations**

Demographic changes in South Africa, as well as domestic urban violence and international economic pressures, forced the government to make adjustments in the apartheid system and finally abandon it. In the 1960's, the government had introduced a program of separate development, based on the creation of ten fragmented Bantustans (homelands), but this had failed to give a new vigor to the apartheid system. In the 1970s, under Prime Minister John Vorster, a number of cosmetic changes were made, particularly in the area of international sport. In the 1980s, P.W. Botha made a serious but flawed attempt to restructure the governance institutions in South Africa, albeit without threatening the dominance of his own Afrikaner based National Party.

The decade of the 1980s saw an attempt to defuse the demographic realities through the managerial and technocratic revolution (described above), which had at its core a de-politicization process, fiercely, and often violently, resisted by the mass democratic movement. The partial failure of both revolution and counter-revolution brought South African society to the brink of a negotiated settlement. As such, the period was characterized by a number of both mutually reinforcing and contradictory themes as South Africa moved slowly toward a negotiated, majority rule, post-apartheid state.

Between 1985 and 1994, focus in South Africa was on the creation of a climate for final negotiations. However, as William Zartman points out, one should not underestimate the importance of "pre-negotiations" or the extent to which difficult issues became resolved during this early period (Zartman 1990). Scenarios for the future of South Africa had long stressed the importance of pacts, elite based limited arrangements for cooperation that required each participating party to modify its own policy opposition. Sparks (1990, p. 380) has described this as a movement towards an "unstable equilibrium" between the ANC and the National Party.

The major problem with such pacts was that they had the potential to cost both political movements considerable support among their constituencies over a compromise which fell short of past promises and was negotiated in secret. There was pressure from the base for both sides, prior to the beginning of formal negotiations, to come forward with bottom line positions that might scuttle the compromise. There was also, at various times, so much opposition from one side or the other that the creation of the final pact was very difficult to consummate.

The 1980s came to be dominated by two intersecting sets of internal forces. The South African government introduced a series of reforms that were designed to buy the National Party time and provide a social and economic framework that was conducive to the development of a black middle class. At the same time, and in response to those reforms, a new internal anti-apartheid movement had developed and, by 1984, violent resistance in South Africa's urban townships had focused new international attention on South Africa.

The creation of the UDF in 1983 marked a turning point in South African history. This was to be a new multi‑class democratic movement that would share goals and have a close relationship with the ANC. It marked the true beginning of a negotiations process. In trying to understand negotiations, one must focus on the complex and interwoven pattern of domestic and international forces that influenced policy makers between 1985 and 1990. Two conditions pushed South Africa towards negotiations. There was a coherent and purposive, though very limited, reform program on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a national liberation movement, their trade union, and their military allies that were able to sustain a level of mobilization, both domestically and internationally. Both sides were effective enough to render the reform program inoperable on the other.

**The Importance of Stalemate**

Political negotiations came about as a result of a stalemate, a less than complete civil war, external as well as internal pressures, and international sanctions, divestment, and the withdrawal of capital investment from South Africa. South Africa was, according to William Zartman, ripe for resolution. (1985), As Allister Sparks (1990, p. 360) points out:

After the longest, most intensive uprising in South Africa's history, the black liberationists failed to overthrow the government. And after the most determined repressive action ever undertaken, the authorities failed to crush the legitimacy of the resistance movement or win legitimacy for its own system. There [was] a stalemate [as of 1989], or what some analysts [called] a violent equilibrium in place in South Africa.

The increase in political violence both contributed to and was a major threat to a negotiated settlement in South Africa. The violence accelerated after February 2, 1990, with right wing bomb attacks and an upswing of so-called "black on black” violence between the ANC and Inkatha, the ethnic Zulu organization created by Mangosuthu Buthelezi. The violence peaked with a bloodletting in July 1990, when over 500 people were killed in one weekend. The outbreak of violence occurred just as the ANC and the South African Government were negotiating the Pretoria Minute (which set forth the basic negotiations framework for South Africa).

The Pretoria Minute, marking the beginning of the elite managed national forum that became the end game negotiations process, was signed on August 6, 1990. However, the savage outbreak of violence, and the government response to it, made it increasingly clear that P.W. Botha’s total strategy included extra-legal operations, secret agents, vigilantes, and hostel Impis[[14]](#footnote-14) that collectively came to be known as the "Third Force."

In the end, all South African political organizations would divide into two camps: an ANC aligned group and a National Party aligned group. Consociational theory and the earlier KwaNatal Indaba had influenced the National Party position.[[15]](#footnote-15) It had proposed a system of two houses in the legislature with a lower house of 100 seats elected by proportional representation. The upper house, with 50 seats, would be given to each of five “ethnic groups” (whites, blacks, Indians, Coloureds, or those of mixed race) with the fifth group being a "South African" group for those who wanted to opt out of ethnic identity. Its advocates, and even some objective observers, argued that the conservative Inkatha Freedom Party wanted and tried to shed its ethnic identification (Lodge 1991).

The liberation theories of Franz Fanon, and others, defined the ANC between 1960 and 1990. Though largely ineffective, the legacy of the armed conflict was important for the mass democratic movement. The ANC may have been "one of the world's least effective 'liberation movements' but...because of its heritage of more than seventy years and because of its ability to wage ‘armed struggle’- however desultory and feeble- [it] kept its grip on black loyalties..." (Lelyveld 1985, p. 328). For the ANC, the down side of the armed struggle was that "it meant unlearning the instinct for openness and trust. For its own preservation, the movement [was] forced to become increasingly wary of outsiders" (Lelyveld 1985, p.332). This legacy would plague the movement and South African society and government after 1994 particularly under the presidency of Jacob Zuma into the twenty first century.

Only the ANC could deliver the votes of the vast majority of Africans in South Africa. Polling evidence in 1990 had suggested that the mass democratic movement would take 60% of the overall vote in a free election and at least 85% of the African vote. This was not far off. Its primary constituency was lower middle class and urban working class and especially that sector of the working class that belonged to organized labor.

The ANC and the UDF were two separate, but inter-related, components of the mass democratic movement in 1990 that also included the trade unions, the military resistance movement linked to the ANC, and many civic organizations. There were significant links between the ANC and the UDF. However, only the UDF had a localized power base that crossed the country. The dynamics of black politics in the 1980s were local (Mufson 1991b). It was from local institutions that the UDF/ANC alliance gained momentum (Lodge 1991).

A significant component of the mass democratic movement was the trade union coalition, a grouping that had not until 1983 been able to define a clear political and economic position. First there was the South African Trade Unions (SACTU) linked to the ANC in exile and, after 1990, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). It was the influence of the trade unions, and especially COSATU, which could not be broken through arrests, detentions, and states of emergency after 1985. The trade unions were embedded in the economy and, by 1990, unions represented an institutionalized force that the state could not break without risking paralysis and eventually wreckage of the industrial economy. The divisions in the trade union movement and the increasing disconnect between the union membership and union elites by 2015 illustrate the seriousness of South Africa’s 21st century crisis.

Despite concerns about the weakness of liberal institutions in South Africa, white liberal reformers were also major, though not critical actors in the move toward negotiations. Among whites, both English speakers and Afrikaans speakers played an influential role in the negotiations process on both sides. Anglophile Afrikaners and mediators within business, government, and the ANC were important actors, at least from a financial perspective. Many white intellectuals and activists also provided technical support for both trade unions and UDF aligned civics. The negotiations process itself was largely financed by the private sector, and especially the mining sector, which carried a legacy of benefiting from the apartheid system and were increasingly impacted by the financial impact of international isolation.

The homeland bureaucracies were an important constituency in the lead up to negotiations as well. By 1990, these bureaucracies represented a large important social group. They had a stake in preserving some variation of the political arrangements brought about by apartheid. In 1980, the Transkei (a homeland in the southeast, south of Lesotho) employed 20,000 civil servants alone. Many of these civil servants saw a continued role for themselves and their class within the newly defined regional civil services. It became clear by the second decade of the twenty first century that this social and organizational group came to define the tawdry patronage and corruption that was Jacob Zuma’s South Africa, our focus in the last section of this book.

After the February 2, 1990 announcement unbanning the ANC and other liberation groups, for the National Party, the search was for moderate "real reformers" with whom the government could negotiate. For the National Party leadership, the end point of negotiation remained multi-racialism, a federal system, and a bill of rights. The stage was set for future clashes between a unitary, socialist (or mixed economy) state vision and the federal, capitalist mode envisioned by the leadership of KwaZulu-Natal and much of the South African private sector.

The goal of the ANC was to take power and they did so in June of 1994. The issue from this perspective was transference of political power to the leadership of the mass democratic movement, despite their lack of influence over the public and private sectors and only a partial control over civil society. A full transfer of power was the scenario favored initially by Umkhonto We Sizwe[[16]](#footnote-16) strategists. Within the ANC, the separation of realists from romantics and politicians from revolutionaries also would have to occur prior to the beginning of negotiations and the less than ideal compromises that would follow. Ironically, it was the South African Communist Party (SACP) leadership that defined the compromises which led the ANC to power and entrenched the institutional forces of the organizational state in place after 1994.

In spite of the fact that the ANC had enjoyed defacto legalization by the end of the 1980s, the suddenness of the February 2, 1990 announcement caught the resistance movement by surprise. The inability to plan meant that the ANC would bring, as a legacy of the period in exile, structural and organizational difficulties, a fractured underground, and little contact with grassroots public opinion in the townships (Barrell 1990). The nature of the elite negotiations and the compromises made are essential to the understanding of the non-racial South Africa that came into being after1994.

**Conclusion**

The racial views of South African whites are part of South Africa’s history. However, it is important to remember that the racial views of both English speakers and Afrikaners were part of a worldview of racialism that dominated social thinking internationally until the 1960s and in some places through the second decade of the twenty first century. It is only within the last forty years that Americans and Europeans have begun to address issues of racialism, multiculturalism, and world empires, a process that remains far from completion.

There was an apartheid ideology in South Africa that was separate from trusteeship and segregation as represented by the old United Party before 1948. However, as an ideology, it was incoherent and short lived. The transition to a non-racial South Africa, though not the transformation of South African society, began in the 1960s as social and economic changes, both in South Africa and internationally, forced the leadership of the National Party to debate reform.

Opposition to apartheid, likewise, had its roots in history and historically was based on the dubious assumptions of cultural assimilation. Classical liberalism adapted into cultural chauvinism in a debate over democratic governance that would continue throughout the twentieth century and into the post-apartheid period. The debate, about non-racialism and democracy would continue to divide liberals advocating incremental change and pluralism and those who defined the transition in South Africa in terms of dramatic social and economic transformation.

Of particular importance in understanding South Africa is the role played by the ANC, its history, and its organizational complexity. Focus, in the end must examine the sanctions debate and its impact on the transition and on liberal thinking. One must understand the long-term impact and the failure of P.W. Botha's limited reforms in the 1980s, the local state security system established in the mid-1980s, and the township uprisings that, as we will see, were the catalysts that pushed the National Party towards elite level negotiations.

The search for change in South Africa led to a significant, though flawed and unsuccessful, attempt to reform apartheid without changing the political order. In many ways, contemporary South Africa in 2018 remains a product of those reforms. In the end, one needs to understand the process and substance of the negotiations and the value system that defined political processes in post-apartheid South Africa in order to understand the impact and limitations of liberalism.

1. Terms such as ideology used in this book take neither a strongly Cartesian or empirical perspective but are contextually based and subject to popular observation. Concern in the book is with values and the relationship between these values and action at both elite and community levels. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The use of history and chronology is the basis for this analysis. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a romanticizing of this among the San, see Van der Post, L 1958, p. 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Umubuntu* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For a discussion and critique of this view, see Fredrickson 1995, pp. 284-286. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. From the French Revolution defining a populist, radical view of social change. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Picard 2006, especially Chapter Three for a discussion of this. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Groups which were committed to unrestricted majority rule in Southern Africa and which were committed to resist the unilateral, and partial reforms introduced by the Botha administration. See Lodge 1987, pp. 1-3 for a discussion of this resistance. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. An eighteenth, the End Conscription Campaign was proscribed by the state on August 23, 1988. See Braun 1988. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Those excluded from Parliament because of their race or because they declined to participate in a race based political body. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See for example Sarakinsky 1988 and Cock 1988 for a discussion of this. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. National Union for the Total Independence of Angola. The best analysis of the conflict between South Africa and its neighbors is Hanlon 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. An analysis of this by an academic close to the then Nationalist Party is Olivier 1986.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. A name used to label Inkatha linked hostel guards. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A Natal based negotiating forum between Inkatha and some conservative white groups. Ultimately, P.W. Botha’s administration refused to accept the formula developed in the forum. Later, (and to his critics, too late) Botha and his reformers came to appreciate the forum’s basic ideas. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Umkhonto we Sizwe* or Spear of the Nation was the military wing of the African National Congress. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)