**Chapter Seventeen**

**Thabo Mbeki:**

**The Provinces Political Culture**

**and the Origins of State Decline?**

**Problems in the Provinces**

**The Challenge of Administration**

Over the first decade under the permanent constitution (1996-2006), the public service at the national and provincial levels faced a difficult transition that was defined by and linked to their capacity to deliver on the promises made by the ANC-led government. As we have tried to demonstrate, the government’s economic and social development goals required an effective and efficient public service equipped to be able to address tasks that even the most experienced bureaucracy would find difficult to deal with, particularly at sub-national level.This civil service did not exist and there was a concern that even basic functions of government might decline further if there was a significant loss of capacity within the public sector.

In March 1995, the minister in charge of administration, Zola Skweyiya announced a radical shakeup in the Public Service Commission that had a particular impact upon provincial government. The Public Service Commission’s new role was to be that of research, monitoring the public sector, and acting as a review body (Davis 1995). At the same time, Provincial Service Commissions were abolished leading to a recentralization of the personnel function at national level.

Although all of the provinces embarked on extensive management training programs over the next several years, particular attention was directed towards capacity building efforts in the Eastern Cape and Northern Provinces. This was required, in large part because of the cumbersome integration of their former homelands.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Eastern Cape inherited two homelands and the Northern Province three. There was an inability of provincial governments to deliver services ((with the partial exceptions of Gauteng and the Western Cape) to carry out their responsibility central services. Staff morale was low, and the leadership was overwhelmed by the weight of challenges facing the provinces. The Western Cape and Gauteng seemed to function better than other provinces, although the Commission did have concerns about the Western Cape's progress with respect to representation and transformation (*Towards a Culture of Good Governance* 2000, p. 63).

The government introduced performance-oriented contracts in 1997 in a move aimed at eradicating non-performing civil servants in the provinces (“Service Contracts” 1997). By then, two institutional structures had been established to address the problem of provincial shortcomings: the Presidential Review Commission (PRC) and the Provincial Task Team. Both the Commission and the Task Team submitted reports that addressed general and specific deficiencies in public service management (Skweyiya 1997). According to the PRC, "[I]n a written response to questions from the PRC, the FFC [Fiscal and Financial Commission] acknowledged that un-funded mandates were causing major problems,” particularly in the provinces with large rural populations (*Towards a Culture of Good Governance* 2000, p. 178).

Paseka Ncholo was appointed to head the PRC task force set up by President Nelson Mandela. Deputy President Thabo Mbeki and Public Service Minister Zola Skweyiya were appointed to further investigate the state of the public service in the nine provinces. Ncholo’s brief in October 1998 was to investigate how prepared the nine provinces were to implement government policy and determine whether the provinces had the administrative capacity to formulate and implement corrective measures where necessary. Ncholo conceded that the government had underestimated the crisis in the public service at the provincial level, particularly in those areas that had inherited homeland administrations. Ncholo’s report, according to Pottie, was "damning and very explicit - quite terrible, actually" (Pottie 1999, p. 27). The government, Ncholo said, would have to mobilize the nation's resources, including those of the private sector, to prevent the disintegration of the public service in certain provinces. (Ncholo 1997).

There were fears that provincial administration had come close to collapse. Public Service Director-General, Ncholo, said that it would take at least ten years, because of the chaotic state of administration in the provinces, to build the necessary management skills in the provincial level public service. Ncholo did state that the cabinet would act on the report, which included recommendations. The government secured a R212 million grant from the European Union for training and capacity building, mainly in the provinces, with longer-term funds to come from the United Nations and British Commonwealth of Nations.

Government policy at the national and provincial levels was set within the organizational and financial weaknesses of the provinces (Pottie 1999). The Ncholo Report and the PRC both concluded that there was an absence of effective governance at the provincial level and below. Provinces had failed. The 1999 elections proved a watershed in central-provincial relationships. The worst problems were in the former homelands that had inherited inadequate administrative structures and had failed to keep certain records, for as long as ten years.

Public Works Minister, Jeff Radebe, said that a register of public buildings compiled over the previous six months had discovered some 12,000 government properties, worth a combined R1 billion, which had previously been unknown. The PRC report confirmed Director-General Ncholo’s findings. The public service in the provinces was in a deplorable condition. The PRC reported “wide spread confusion over the different roles of political and administrative leadership; a range of problems in human resource development; over-centralized financial decision-making and poor management of funds; general lack of strategic planning; and the poor state of information technology” (Pottie 1999, p. 28).

**Provincial Fiscal Challenges**

By the end of the GNU and the Mbeki administration, the ANC was concerned about the costs, both financial and political, of provinces and more concerned about bringing provinces more closely under the control of the central government (Lodge 1999b). There was, however, less recognition of the capacity issues faced by provincial government. There was a very limited fiscal base in the provinces and provincial autonomy weakened because of management and fiscal limitations (Mokgoro 1995). Increasingly, it was clear that many of the financial problems consolidation of the former homelands had not been solved and that this seriously undermined the effectiveness of government departments.

Provincial powers strained the political and fiscal systems of government throughout the GNU and through the Mbeki Presidency (Sampson 1999). This was a legacy of the apartheid period. Close attention to provincial capacity was essential for those concerned with initialized financial and fiscal institutions (Heymans 1995). The way in which fiscal and human resource issues were addressed over the next few years would determine the nature of intergovernmental relations between provinces and the national state and the evolving local authorities that would be at the social service delivery end of the policy system and that would be the centerpiece of efforts aimed at social and economic development.

Many fiscal problems had been inherited from the homelands. In effect, what was needed in 1994 was a series of structural adjustment like agreements with the former homeland areas as part of the transition process (Mokgoro n.d.).Homelands had obtained revenue from two sources. They had taxing authority, and taxes, fees, and licenses were directly under their control. In addition, there were block and categorical grants provided from the central government through parliamentary allocation. Practically, however, such income was limited. In the end, it must be kept in mind that the “total income of each of the homelands [was] smaller than that of an American town or medium-sized business firm" (Butler et al. 1977, p. 124). The new Provinces, particularly in the rural areas, faced many of these same dilemmas.

In early 1994, the South African government took over financial management of the homeland structures as part of the process of restructuring into the nine new provinces. The dire legacy of the homelands however only began to come clear in the two years after the 1994 elections. Apartheid had created spatial duality as well as racial duality in terms of expenditures with the lion’s share of expenditures going to white provinces. The result was both wide provincial disparities and intra-provincial disparities. In the end, decentralized structures needed to capture more capacity to both raise and manage money if there was to be an impact on social development.

Most of what government does in South Africa is provincial in one way or another. Provincial government in 1994 spent two thirds of the national budget and employed the vast majority of the country's 1.2 million civil servants. Some 400,000 of these were formerly employed in the country's homeland governments (Lodge, 1999b). The Provincial administration, in any year, was to spend no more than 35 percent of total expenditures on salaries. Central government, by contrast, would spend 38 percent of its expenditure on salaries. The reality was that provinces received 95 percent of their budget from central government and almost all of their spending went to fixed costs such as salaries, wages, pensions and health projects.

Provincial grants made up to 54 percent of the national budget, and provincial overspending quickly led to a disjunction between planning, implementation, budgeting, and service delivery (Fitschen 1999). Many provinces submitted returns late, and they were often incorrect. There was poor financial control, weak internal audits, and a severe shortage of skilled people in provincial government service. Spending occurred without prior approval. In a number of provinces, bookkeeping was a cause of considerable concern.

From a fiscal perspective, spending autonomy has changed very little since 1994. Provinces have responsibility for a large percentage of the central government budget and have primary responsibility for the management of health, education, and many of the social welfare functions (Dickovick 2005). Poverty alleviation and social projects at the provincial level were often extremely dysfunctional. The bureaucracy at the provincial level, which represented important political and economic interests, did, however, have significant power through their ability to control taxation, expenditure, and borrowing functions.

At the provincial level, the PRC noted, “there is a substantial mismatch between government revenues which provinces could potentially [raise] and their increased spending obligations under the Constitution." According to the Public Service Commission, "Constitutions have been deleterious to the public service in the provinces. The existence of the provinces has tended (though only temporarily we hope) to consolidate the bloated civil service of the Bantustan and the various apartheid administrations" (both quotes from *Towards a Culture of Good Governance* 2000, p. 167). Most provinces had poor financial control. As a result, the PRC recommended that, "The National Government should therefore not hesitate, in certain dire circumstances, to resume functions delegated to certain provinces or their departments, where those provinces provide irrefutable evidence of inability to carry on those functions" (*Towards a Culture of Good Governance* 2000, p. 67).

In July 1997, the Northern Province, Eastern Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal were said to be on the verge of fiscal collapse, according to a provincial audit report released at that time. According to one press report, "KwaZulu Natal and Eastern Cape had applied for [financial] assistance, and the rest [of the provinces] would [have to] manage on what they had allocated in the 1997-98 budget"(Loxton 1998, p. 6). Surprisingly, none of the other provinces opted for central government assistance, despite the fact that only Gauteng and the Western Cape were able to function effectively.

The issue was one of fiscal federalism. The ANC, in the past, had opposed provincial preeminence in terms of income generation, preferring the block grant mechanism to share revenue. In the future, it would be difficult to ignore provincial structural issues that would be part of an effort to redistribute resources from rich urban provinces to poorer rural areas. Some form of fiscal federalism would be necessary to reduce dependence on the center and to ensure that different areas could develop at different speeds.

New legislation was prepared in 1998 that would prevent provinces from overspending and ensure they could not operate with budget deficits in order to fund their operational costs. Finance Minister Manuel said in a 1998 debate on intergovernmental finances in the National Council of Provinces, "There is no spare money left with financial government; the greater rights and entitlement given to national, provincial and municipal governments impose more responsibility on them to manage within their own budgets… There cannot be any bail-outs"(as quoted in Loxton 1998). One newspaper report noted that government officials "expressed grave concern at the state of financial administration in the provinces which often misspent the large transfers made by central government" (Ensor 1998b, p. 5).

One of the most important new proposals, the Treasury Control Bill, which was required by the constitution, enabled the government to introduce state of the art mechanisms for more effective financial management. In addition to the Treasury Control Bill, a number of other pieces of legislation required by the constitution were also tabled in 1998, namely, the Financial and Fiscal Commission Bill to regulate the commission's functions; a Budget Process Bill, to facilitate the budgeting process and establish statutory bodies to facilitate consultation with the provinces and organized local government; and the Equitable Division of Revenue Bill. Manuel had said a bill was also required to regulate the taxation powers of the provinces, and this was referred to yet another government commission. These proposals were all passed into law by the South African legislature by the end of the Mandela administration. In 1999, several provinces were in fiscal crisis. Many could not pay salaries of teachers or health workers and lacked the finances to fund provincial level development activities.

There was also an urban bias in terms of fiscal capacity. When the fiscal commission did its research, there were visits to several of the small and middle-sized towns in Gauteng and the Western Cape, but no visit to Louis Trichardt and only six visits to all of Northern Province. By comparison, there were nine visits to Gauteng and nineteen visits to Western Cape (Financial and Fiscal Commission 1996). In the end, rural provinces were treated like the homelands that preceded them. At the end of the GNU, it was clear that most of the financial problems arising from amalgamation of the former homelands and independent states had not been resolved. This seriously undermined the effectiveness of provincial departments responsible for undertaking their functional responsibilities.

One strategy to strengthen provincial fiscal systems, advocated by many in the opposition, allowed for greater financial autonomy at the provincial level and would give increased taxing rights to provinces in order to give them greater authority and control over their revenues. The key to institutional capacity at the provincial level lay in addressing the fiscal realities and constraints leftover from the homelands system. According to a close observer, “We need to develop a revenue management system. In terms of revenue collection, much is lost. Overall, the issue is money. There is not enough of it. We spend most of our resources on institutions not programs" (Interview with FitzGerald, 2001).

In 1999, the overall state of provincial finances was precarious and, as the 1999 elections approached, the future of South Africa’s provinces was unclear since, after the elections, provincial premiers would be appointed by the national structures (Pottie 1999). The national leadership spoke of a more cooperative type of federalism, labeled “cooperative governance”, which intimated a more centralized mode of rule than the interim constitution (Daniel et al. 2005). Opposition parties accused the ANC in 1999 of wanting to control every province in South Africa. The issue for many was one of democracy versus efficiency.

There was also excessive expenditure on the bureaucracy, especially in the formerly independent TBVC areas and the self-governing states. In 1994, the Western Cape spent only 14.5 percent of its expected norm on the bureaucracy (in relationship to programs administered) while the Northwest province spent 250.5 percent of its expected norm, the Eastern Cape, 129 percent, and Northern Province, 177.68 percent. The result was uneven capacity at the provincial level to administer and deliver services. The provinces with the most efficient service delivery were those without significant homeland bureaucracies, Gauteng, Western Cape, and Northern Cape (Lodge 1999b).

The new provinces inherited a myriad of problems from the homelands. Government books had not been closed in certain homelands, in some cases for as long as ten years. There was a total absence of personnel, financial, and leave records and a critical shortage of competent managers (Ncholo 1997).The rural provinces inherited the bulk of the fiscal problems of the homelands. Given these problems, one experienced observer cautioned against a post-apartheid dividend (through rationalizing and the savings that would result) because the bulk of homeland civil servants, working in education, health, and social welfare, would be retained (Mokgoro n.d.).

At the provincial level, services promised and the reforms needed were postponed, and the political elites were increasingly frustrated by the inefficiency of their departments and of provincial government more generally. In 1995, the Public Service Commission’s annual report noted the difficulties of provincial administrations (*Annual Report* 1995). Many in the ANC, however, took the position that the provinces’ problems were not the making of the GNU.

Those provinces which were least effective inherited administratively weak structures from the homeland governments. Six provincial governments were made up mostly of bureaucrats from the former homelands and were known to be extremely inefficient. In the Eastern Cape, for example, more than 160,000 militant civil servants demanded promotions, while there were deteriorating facilities, delayed payment of pensions, and declining services and welfare grants. Discontent with services was acute, especially in the former Bantustan areas (Lodge 1999a).

In April 1997, the government acknowledged that in certain provinces the public service was on the verge of disintegration. According to a 1997 report, "Government finances still look bad. Despite a pledge to cut the budget deficit to 4 percent of GDP in 1997-98, fears about overspending in the nine provinces - which were knitted together in 1994 from the old apartheid provinces and 'bantustans' - are mounting" (“The End” 1997, p. 17).

Yet, the provincial administration by the beginning of the Mbeki administration represented by far the largest component of the public service (Daniel et al. 2005). Despite this, government capacity at provincial level remained weak at the beginning of the Mbeki administration, particularly in the rural provinces. In 2001, for example, the Northern Province legislature suspended its Secretary for inefficiency and the lack of management skills (Gama 2001).

The Premier of Mpumalanga complained publicly that there was a severe lack of trained managers at provincial level. This affected the provincial government’s ability to implement government initiatives. For three years running (1999-2001) provincial governments could not spend the amounts allocated to them by the central government in the housing sector.

Ultimately, the problem with provinces was the lack of professional and technical capacity. Provinces are racially and ethnically distinct and retain elements of the ethnic divisions of the homelands that preceded them and had a negative impact on the provinces ability to collect revenue. The South African Fiscal and Financial Commission has played a major role in advising on the division of revenue, the fiscal stability of provinces, skills development, and on special development needs at provincial levels.

At the end of the GNU, "the extent of…maladministration prevented the Auditor-General from expressing an unqualified opinion to the fairness and completeness of [many of the] provinces’ accounts" (“Mpumalanga Slammed” 1998, p. 3). Government criticized record of the provincial administrations arguing that the provinces received, and in many cases wasted, huge amounts of money (Rantao 1998). Overall, there was a lack of proper financial management at provincial level which had a negative impact upon the provision of services (Ensor 1998b). John Seiler (1997b, p. 87) put it this way:

Add to this the national government's belated but remarkably candid acknowledgment that the nine provincial governments -- responsible for implementation of programs set in the framework of national policy -- in education, health, welfare, housing -- are unlikely to meet their constitutional obligation for effective service delivery soon, if at all.

Despite the importance of provincial government, the newly created provinces were ineffective and inefficient after 1994. This led to extreme over-centralization at the national and provincial level and deep penetration of partisan values and attitudes within the provincial civil service and between political leaders and the bureaucracy. According to the 1998 Presidential Commission on Good Governance, "the relationship between the political leadership and the administration [was] not well defined." This weakness was a symptom of weak recruitment practices, a lack of skills and experience, and very limited capacity building efforts. Many departments were "bloated structures with a large number of posts not warranted by the functions performed" (Both quotes *Towards a Culture of Good Governance* 2000. p. 25 and 31). Almost half of the new provinces did not complete the staffing of their new structures by the end of the GNU.

Above all, the provinces lacked technical capacity to deliver their services (Dickovick 2005). The fiscal and technical problems of provinces in terms of service delivery were stark. In 1998, several provinces spent almost 90 percent of their budgets for the 1998-99 fiscal year on personnel costs and personnel transfer payments, while hospitals and clinics had no medicines, roads were full of potholes, and schools had no books or equipment. Provinces had deteriorating infrastructure, shabby buildings, no capital, and no fixed investment (Loxton 1998).

Rural provinces, in particular, had severe shortages of professional skills. There were almost no auditors or even bookkeepers outside of the major cities. Many health professionals were foreigners. In the Eastern Cape, there was a skills deficit in 1997 of 22,000 people (Lodge 1999b). The middle class in Transkei, made up mostly of homeland government civil servants, suffered severe loss of employment with the move of the provincial government to Bisho (Lodge 1999a). In the Limpopo province, there was ethnic based intra-regional competition between bureaucrats from the former homelands, Lebowa, Venda, and Gazankulu (Lodge 1999b). Almost all senior level appointments at provincial level (going several levels deep) were political and patronage appointments. Rural provinces often had more civil servants than the urbanized areas but they were much less qualified. Limpopo had one third more administrators than Gauteng in 1998, with very low levels of capacity. A great deal of the work done at provincial level was done by consultants.

Most provinces did not have the fiscal skills to deliver the required services. Despite having significant responsibility for the management of health, education, and social welfare, “[f]or all the changes from Apartheid to ANC government, provincial spending autonomy has changed surprisingly little” (Dickovick 2005, p. 195). Equalization grants needed to be accompanied by fiscal accountability. This also was a skills issue. Only Western Cape and Gauteng had the capacity to become fiscally accountable. The problem of fiscal capacity overall was debt. Several provinces had a high degree of indebtedness and there was a need to reduce the budget deficit. The technical issues to be addressed included fiscal federalism and the limited capacity of the provinces to move money. Provincial authority was hampered by financial and human resource problems, management skills and administrative capacity, and by an inability to promote economic and social development (De Villiers 1993).

In the minds of many in South Africa, there has long been a clash between the provincial structures and their fiscus and the management of large metropolitan areas that do not fit into provincial boundaries. The greatest issue is the future of the Gauteng metropolitan area, which is both a metropolitan structure and a province. The Provincial goal in Gauteng is wall to wall metro coverage (four Metros), except for the Western area, with the whole province going metro by 2020-2025 (adding a fifth metro for the West). The objective was to bring the same level of services to the whole area. Within the metros, there will be no lower level of political authority, no subsidiarity, except in the Western area. Integration of the metro-region is administrative and inter-governmental, not political.

Despite the increasing weakness of provinces as fiscal entities during the Mbeki period, local government as a unit of sub-national fiscal authority was the one area that remained competitive and fiscally challenging during the Mbeki Presidency. In 1998, it was announced that the "ANC [was] to remove the Democratic Party and the National Party from positions on important Johannesburg council committees after the two opposition parties voted against the budgets” (Jacobson 1998). The accusation was that it was members of a special national intelligence unit that leaked documents to Democratic Party leader Tony Leon. Leon claimed that maladministration and fraud were rife within the National Intelligence Agency as well. In response, the ANC, in 1999, branded Democratic Party’s Leon a "white racist" after comments Leon made about President Nelson Mandela's visit to Libya.(radio commentary, Picard’s Research Diary, recorded on July 16, 1999). Tony Leon’s resignation as Democratic Party/Alliance leader in 2007 raised the issue of the race of the new leader.

In 1998, after four years of provincial misspending, Finance Minister Trevor Manuel's job "was to take the knife to state spending. He said bloated bureaucracies were hampering development. Excessive increases in administration and personnel expenditure and weak financial administration characterised many local and provincial budgets" (Smith 1998d, p.4). Manuel was forced to defend government policy on provinces and rejected charges by opposition parties that government had failed to act quickly enough in order stem financial mismanagement within the provinces (Loxton 1998).

A major issue, and one which is of concern here, had to do with the provincial capacity to train its administrators (Interview with Minister Skweyiya, 1996).Problems with health and housing after 1994 illustrate the lack of capacity at the provincial level. The accelerated expansion of informal settlements raised serious questions about the capacity of local government to deal with the urban settlement crisis. As one set of observers put it in 2002, speaking of housing and urban land tenure, the crux of the problem of social development was “the question of insecurity of residential tenure coupled, often, with poor housing conditions” (Mogale, Mabin & Klein 2001, p. 1).

**Dysfunctionalism and Corruption**

Streamlining a bloated, wasteful, and often inept state bureaucracy remained problematic (Picard 2006). Administratively, the post-apartheid bureaucracy exhibited a great deal of similarity to the public sector under apartheid (Lodge 1999b). By 2004, the South African government had shed only a few thousand unproductive jobs. There continued to be wide spread corruption and mismanagement throughout the Mbeki period. In addition, government had a heavy dependence upon consultants from the private sector (even very low estimates suggest the costs to be close to R2.0 million a year) to implement programs.

Corrupt practices included irregular property deals, inflated rents, and tender board irregularities. The corruption was, in part, related to the province’s "deep and entwined political and ethnic divisions" (Edmonds 1995b, p. 5). Corruption continued to plague the provinces and, in 2006, the Gauteng government reported that a scam used “ghost” workers especially teachers, to embezzle the provinces of millions of Rand (Cembi 2006).

Even so, half of all South Africans felt the government was doing enough to root out corruption and ensure clean government. This was according to a Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) study released in late January 2000, which said that 51 percent of people polled were confident in the government. These polls represented a 3 percent increase on the 1998 survey. Dr. Gregory Houston, research specialist at the HSRC, said one factor that could account for this positive rating was the manner in which the government had dealt with senior public officials who had been implicated in corruption (“51% Feel” 2000, p. 2). Despite this perceived progress by the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, corruption rates remained unacceptably high.

The interim constitution had guaranteed civil service jobs, including those in the homelands, though tenure was to be governed by normal labor practice. Affirmative action targets included the staff from the public services of the TBVC states, the self-governing territories, and the South African departments. This gave affirmative action goals priority over any defects in homeland bureaucracies. The capacity building challenge was particularly great in the former homelands because the homelands were very inefficient and located in a very conservative segment of society.

A key ANC official, Trevor Manuel, had cautioned, “One can accept affirmative action as a principle but it doesn't mean that it will happen quickly.” Moreover, Manuel, the future Minister of Finance, had not factored in the homelands. In reality, affirmative action needs could be met quickly, though at great cost, through the integration of homeland administrators into the new provincial system. Corruption continued to occur within a historical context in the rural areas where "bureaucrats from different departments (within the homelands) struggled to dominate the administration, and in so doing, create opportunities to accumulate wealth through bribes" (both quotes from Interview with Manuel, 1990).

Most dramatically impacted by the transition were the nine new provinces and the provincial bureaucracy (Kotze 1976). Organizational development was a continuing challenge. Efforts were needed to focus on the creation and modification of existing structures and on the values of those within organizations, in order to refocus the departments to the new tasks being defined by the ANC government. At the provincial level, employees fell under the overall control of the Commission for Administration, part of the central administration.

In May 1994, a large part of the contemporary black middle class was made up of the government's segregated black bureaucracy and was bloated by homeland civil servants and township administrators. In the Transkei, for example, this meant that 7,000 highly paid black civil servants formed the backbone of the urban society within that region. Obedience and loyalty, not education or competence, were often the qualifications for these jobs. Over 66 percent of public sector employees were employed by authorities that could be considered provincial in 1994 (Humphries & Rapoo 1993).

There was unrest in the provincial civil service from 1995 through 1997. Many of the problems were a result of rationalization schemes. The goal of the Ministry of Public Service and Administration at the provincial level was to provide jobs for under-represented groups. In order to achieve this goal, the Ministry wanted to ensure that scholarships were available for needy black students to attend a university or technikon[[2]](#footnote-2) as preparation for the public sector. Primary concern within the ministry was to ensure peaceful labor relations, limit costs and hold down the upward adjustment of salaries to the 3.4 percent given on April 1, 1994. The government had presented a three-year salary plan pegged at R2.1 billion after it came to power in May 1994. It proposed to use provincial government to fill many the 11,000 vacant posts already announced (*Annual Report* 1995; *Norms and Standards* 1995).

More than anything else, it was corruption that was killing the provinces. The Mbeki government sent out mixed signals on corruption and in particular was ambivalent on the work of the Heath Anti-Corruption Unit, which had been appointed by President Mandela to root out corrupt practices. In 1999, controversy broke out over the "approval of politician's lies" statement, an incident that appeared to defend the right of a provincial premier in Mpumalanga to cover-up of corruption practices in that troubled province (McNeil 1999, p. A6).

Fiscal issues and control reached a new level when orders from the Auditor-General in 1999 warned provinces to tighten financial controls or face delivery deterioration and sanctions from central government. Rural provinces were targeted for particularly poor performance. The management of provincial funds as well as national funds had become a grave concern (“A-G Cracks Whip” 1999, p.1). Problems of the rural areas are illustrated by the various rationalization schemes introduced by the Mandela government. Most rationalization schemes did not threaten central government employees; they threatened primarily those in the former homelands (Cooke 1995). For this reason, most Provincial Service Commissions resisted reform of the provincial civil service. Only the Gauteng Provincial Service Commission did not resist change.

The rural provinces continued to appear particularly prone to corruption. Of these, the Eastern Cape provided the most dramatic examples. In mid-2001, officials in the Eastern Cape were accused of the alleged theft of R63million from the provincial service delivery fund. Vouchers for dead people became vehicles to swindle funds in what was labeled a “ghost pensioners scam.” As a newspaper article put it at the time, the “Eastern Cape province is riddled with financial problems, which has led to the near collapse of basic services” (Ngobeni 2001, p.6). Decisions made to disband the anti-corruption group, the so-called scorpions, in the South African police meant that the ANC was to its critics morally compromised going into the post-Mbeki era.

In summary, the ineffectiveness of provincial government is illustrated by two developments. Within the provincial governments, apparently under-qualified black South Africans came to occupy senior positions. In one province, "a 25-year-old BA graduate got to be chair of one crucial commission and vice-chair of another" (Edmonds 1995a, p. 6). Also because skilled administrators were lacking within provincial government, many provincial authorities (as well as the national government) became dependent upon outside consultants. A special report on government consultants in September 1995 reported that millions of Rand were spent on consultants that year and that the political leadership in the provinces had developed a "bizarre dependence" on expert consultants (Edmonds 1995a, p. 6; Garson 1996). In May 1997, the Northern Province, despite the employment of 125,000 civil servants, set aside R700 million for consultants and special services (“Northern Province” 1997). The potential failure of some of the provinces became an issue that was of little concern either to international donors or the Thabo Mbeki administration (Interview with Cameron, 2015).

**Post-Apartheid Governance Under Thabo Mbeki**

**Liberalism**

The debate over the nature of the ANC as an organization between 1990 and 1994 had three components for liberals. The first issue was the extent to which the United Democratic Front (UDF) represented a pluralist and democratic culture that was lacking in the exile dominated leadership of the ANC. Following from this was the extent to which the dissolution of the UDF represented a defeat for democratic forces and civil society in South Africa. Finally, the question remained of to what extent did the ANC leadership support a liberal, pluralist future South Africa as opposed to hierarchical, centralized (and socialist) processes?

The debate between liberalism, civil society, and the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) remained unfinished as South Africa moved into the period after Mbeki was driven out of power. While the debate about capitalism seemed to be resolved in favor of the IMF orthodoxy, a political and social debate about liberalism, remained on the agenda. The debates about organized interests and social justice were difficult to resolve in a society which remained, outside of middle class urban enclaves, largely impoverished.

Defining a role for civil society and NGOs is part of the evolving debate about the institutional state in South Africa. As Stef Coetzee (1992, p. 139) has argued, in calling for a role for NGOs in the development effort, "Non-Governmental Organizations [should] complement the public and private sector institutions in efforts to reach the poor.” After the formation of the GNU, local level support organizations, NGOs and civil society groups shifted their focus from challenges to the state, towards planning, capacity building, and financial management efforts in order to promote economic and social development (Planact 1987). By the end of the GNU, at least some government officials assumed that it was necessary to use developmental NGOs in partnership with the state.

**The Democratic Alliance (DA) - How Liberal?**

In the early 1990s, within then Democratic Party (later renamed the Democratic Alliance[[3]](#footnote-3) (DA)), its then leader, Zach de Beer, felt that there might be a role for a moderate centrist party in the new South Africa. He was proved to be right in that the Democratic Party came to constitute the primary opposition to the ANC after 1994. The articulate opposition role played by the DA after 1994 under Tony Leon has confirmed this view. The then opposition leader, Tony Leon, came to be a sword in the side of the ANC leadership, bringing out a level of intolerance of criticism that critics would point to as illustrative of an authoritarian style of leadership.

The nature of the opposition to the ANC changed during the GNU. The dismal showing of the Democratic Party during the 1994 elections led to speculation that the party might dissolve in the post-apartheid period and that the liberals might split into two groups, one joining the ANC and the other joining a National Party/Democratic Party coalition (Interviews with De Beer, 1988, 1990, and 1991). This did not happen. The National Party lost most of its support base and the DA would become the major opposition party after 1999. There was strong support for the DA among conservative Afrikaners prior to and during the 1999 national elections. The National Party eventually split and finally would dissolve itself in 2005.

By the time Thabo Mbeki became President, some in the National Party had joined the Democratic Party, while a few of the National Party’s supporters joined the ANC. More Afrikaners supported the DA than any other party (Barrell 1999b, p. 9). Ultimately with demise of the National Party, the nature of the relationships between and among the state and civil society were determined by the interaction of liberals and the leadership of the ANC. This was a debate that had a long history and went back to the founding of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the creation of the ANC two years later, and the National Party of South Africa two years after that. In modern times, (post-World War II) the debate had shifted with the loss of power by the United Party in 1948. It is this dialectic which we examine in the rest of this chapter.

The liberalism of the DA can be seen as a “prism” though which continued white racial dominance occurred (Southall & Cobbing 1995). Tony Leon accused the ANC of practicing “racial nationalism.” The dominant faction within the ANC led by President Mbeki sought an African hegemony within the context of what was supposed to be a non-racial and multi-cultural society (Leon 2006, p. 37). Van zyl Slabbert (2006, p. 157) warned that “the most perilous moment in an emerging democracy is when the party which won the founding election is faced with defeat at a subsequent one.” There is a pattern of ANC representatives speaking of the need for the movement to control all the levers of society in order to meet the needs of the masses (Shain 2006).

After 1994, Liberals argued that with the demise of apartheid there should not be different standards by which people of different races were judged (Shubane 1995). There were two specific subsidiary criticisms made by liberals in looking at the ANC. First, the ANC was "tough, ruthless and manipulative" and authoritarian (Waldemeir 1997, p. 25). Those who opposed the authority of the movement would either be expelled or sidelined to far off ambassadorships. Secondly, the ANC more generally had collectivist views. Walter Sisulu, in a revealing comment about Inkatha leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi, suggested that it was necessary "to sacrifice Inkatha for the sake of African unity." "Buthelezi" he went on, "in his heart of hearts, must accept that there is no other way except our way" (Waldemeir 1997, pp. 175-176).

There were, according to critics, some within the ANC who did not think a Parliamentary opposition was necessary. Though the ANC admitted that there was, among some, a continued fear that the ANC as an organization was intolerant; an ANC spokesperson, Cheryl Carolus, claimed that the organization was misunderstood and that a better way would have to be found for the ANC to communicate its values (Thom 1997).

In 1999, the Democratic Party pursued an aggressive campaign which appealed to Afrikaner voters and non-white minority groups. They created an alliance party with the New National Party in 2001. Ultimately, the National Party and the Democratic Party were not able to merge. The National Party had focused on community centered notions of rights and obligations and sought to divide white, Indian and Coloured communities, while the Democratic Party for all of its conservative economic policies remained rooted in liberalism and individual rights (Lodge 2003).

Opposition parties increasingly criticized heavy handed propaganda by the new non-racial South African government which masked policy and management weaknesses. There were debates about the right to know and public access to public and private information. The press revealed in 1999 that the National Intelligence Agency had spied on overseas agencies, opposition groups, and newspapers during the GNU (Strudsholm 1999). Even a debate over the number of people registered to vote became a political issue in the run up to the 1999 elections. At the end of the GNU, many questioned the nature of the ANC as an organization and the values of its leaders. As Goodman noted, “Even…tame self-criticism [had become] increasingly rare among the new politicians” (Goodman 1999, p.195).

**The African National Congress - How Liberal?**

Concern has been expressed that the ANC long denigrated the liberal opposition to apartheid prior even prior to 1948 as being in collusion with apartheid. Following from this, in the post-apartheid period white liberal activist figures such as Helen Suzman and Donald Woods were being “airbrushed out of history” (Welsh 2006, p.8). Liberals became concerned after 2000 with increasing attacks on the independence of the judiciary in South Africa (Suzman 2006). The danger in South Africa is that eventually the nature of the political culture will suppress dissenting voices: “Neither the National Party nor the ANC – with their nationalist ideologies and race-group consciousness - had much patience with the liberal principles of constitutional democracy,” according to Tony Leon (2006, p. 38).

“After ten years as a governing party,” according to Wiliam Gumede (2007, p. 132), “the ANC bore scant resemblance to the liberation movement that had endured three decades of vilification and suppression by the apartheid regime.” There was, for many critics, an increasing lack of democratic political life in South Africa. At the same time, South Africa has become more secretive, and trying to gain access to data, even nominally public data, is a tortuous process. By 2005, “antipathy to liberalism in elite political circles [had] become pervasive” (Lodge 2003, p.173). There has been increasing evidence of heavy handed treatment of dissident groups demonstrating against government policy on such issues as land redistribution. Critics even fear the resurgence of a police state in the manner of Zimbabwe (Gordon 2006).

In the past, South Africa’s political culture had been characterized by patron-client relationships, a pattern which continued into the post-apartheid period (Lodge 1999b). There is also a strong pull towards deference to the senior leadership of the ANC. “The internal fractiousness of the ANC suggests that the organsation is rather more susceptible to various kinds of democratic pressure than the disciplined monolith depicted both in the critical evaluations of the ANC as the harbinger of an authoritarian order and in its own official prescriptions of Leninist democracy” (Lodge 2003, p. 162).

The concern for factionalism within the leadership of the ANC resulted in a hierarchical and centralized organization designed to control the diverse centers of power represented by the provincial and municipal branches of the party (Lodge 2006a). Politically, the ANC on a variety of issues had developed a clearly authoritarian stance over time. But, it is also true that the movement has moved away from authoritarian processes towards democratic debate and practice in electoral and parliamentary terms.

Political analysts, specializing in the ANC, have long been skeptical of views of the state which perceive it as “a neutral instrument, ‘perched above society’” (Lodge 2003, p. 167). For that reason, the tendency of ANC leaders to blur the boundaries between the state and the political party, for example through politicized appointments within the civil service, are of concern to independent observers. Gumede (2007), for example, makes little mention of the weakness and corruption that characterized the public service during the fifteen years after the beginning of non-racial government. At the same time, the power of the administrative class would have a near veto on policy decisions. As one observer has noted: “I am convinced that the higher echelons of the civil service exercise a definite influence on policy. ANC leaders who dare to deviate from existing policy will likely encounter stiff resistance in the civil service.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

The ANC leadership, according to Hermann Giliomee (2006), continued despite their grip on the electorate, to fear rejection by the South African voters in the next elections. In 1996, only 46 percent of South Africans expressed confidence for the government, down from 64 percent in 1994 (Lodge 1999a). A study in 2002, found that trust among South Africans was very low; 70 percent of South Africans trusted their fellow citizens less than they did in 1994 (Giliomee 2006). Despite this the ANC would continue to dominate the electoral process over the next fifteen years.

The goal of the ANC was political control of the state and all of the sectors of society according to the DA leadership (Leon 2006). “[I]n fact, in the first five years of democracy,” according to the Mayor of Cape Town, Helen Zille[[5]](#footnote-5) in 2006, “it was almost axiomatic that any white person who criticized the ANC was racist and most people, especially liberals, tried hard to avoid that label” (quoted in Schlemmer 2006, p. 97). The ANC briefly formed a coalition government in the Cape Province during the Mbeki administration but otherwise served as the principal opposition party.

In October 2006, Zille accused the ANC of “a crude power grab” in their attempt to transform the city mayoral system into a collective executive (different from all other cities in South Africa which were ANC controlled) and removing Zille’s authority as Mayor (Timberg 2006a, p. A19). According to long time ANC watcher Tom Lodge (2006b, p. 203), “In modern South Africa messianic politics has been employed to demobilize a popular insurrection in one of the world’s most unequal societies and, in such a context, the institutions of liberal democracy depend upon the protection afforded by highly authoritarian forms of charismatic authority.”

In 1990, as it reintegrated into South African life, the ANC was seen by many of its critics as a collectivist organization (Parsons 1999). Over the next fifteen years, it was never able to shake that image. In reality there were three wings to the ANC alliance, (1) populist, (2) leftist/Marxist, and (3) pragmatist/capitalist. Each of these three categories could be further divided into Africanist and non-racial divisions.

In the aftermath of the 1994 elections, Thabo Mbeki, among others, seemed to be overly concerned about the prospective results of the 1999 elections. Because of the difficulties with voter registration, the government dispatched 72,000 civil servants to register voters in late 1998. In the 1999 elections, 68 of the ANC members of the 400 seat National Assembly were Indians. However, to many in the ANC, Indian and Coloured South Africans who supported opposition parties were seen as traitors to the anti-apartheid movement (Lodge 1999a).

At issue is the extent to which liberal values can deal with a concept of identity which is built on ethnic and cultural characteristics (Shain 2006). One legacy of the homelands was the development of a multitude of regional and even local ethnically based political cultures. Many within the MDM, including Nelson Mandela, worried that the ANC had the image of being a Xhosa dominated organization (Gumede 2007). There were appeals to language loyalties, especially among Xhosa speakers in the 1999 elections. In provinces with more than one ethnic group, Limpopo, Northwest Province, and in Mpumalanga, there was increased ethnic tension and a number of violent incidents during the 1999 elections. A number of ethnically based parties gained seats in the National Assembly (Lodge 1999a). After Jacob Zuma became president, critics expressed concern over the influence of Zulu speaking South Africans.

The ANC leadership throughout the GNU had to deal with populist elements who advocated a more collectivist view of civil society. This element existed throughout the history of the ANC before and during the exile period. The legacy of populism as a dominant thread within the MDM appeared within the UDF after 1983. It is an issue that remains structurally embedded within the ANC as an organization. Critics of the MDM have argued that it operated on the basis of the utility of unified action, force, and violence. In the 1980s, this line of argument suggested that "the street committees [of] the UDF… organized in classic totalitarian fashion." They called for a "people's power" in the Marxist or collectivist sense (both quotes Raditsa 1989, pp. 63, 137). The UDF/ANC was not an organization of the people but saw itself as the people. There were many who expressed concern about the influence of the Soviet Union, Cuba and Eastern European countries during the period in exile.

There has been a long-time concern within the ANC as to whether the so-called populist wing of the ANC had the capacity to unsettle the leadership (“Smooth Transition” 1997). During the 1980s, President Mandela’s then wife was a self-styled leader of a "populist group [which] charged that the ANC was not in full control of its cadres” (“ANC Not” 1993). Even after her troubles, Winnie Mandela was still considered to be the "'the Mother of the Nation.' Winnie defied police orders under apartheid and rankled the leadership of members in her own ANC party..., yet continued to be a leader and inspiration to her grassroots followers" (Edwards 1997, p. 124).

Critics on the left of the MDM envisioned the creation of a parallel form of popular government, not based on representative systems, but on a collectivist model of people’s democracy. This populism, a legacy of the apartheid struggle, was to be located in civil society groups such as the landless and homeless movements, anti-rates payments groups, and anti-privatization movements.

The populist group within the ANC appealed to the fears and aspirations of underprivileged township dwellers. Populists such as Winnie Mandela, despite discrepancies in their personal social record, remained powerful within the ANC after 1994 (Beresford 1999). Many in the townships had responded to Winnie’s famous dictum in 1986 that, “with our boxes of matches and our necklaces we will liberate this country” (quoted in Edwards 1997, p.124). This statement "marked her out as the foremost populist radical of the struggle and cemented her bogeyman image, especially in the white community" (Kanhema & Bulger 1997). In February 1993, there were rumors of a conflict within the ANC and discussion of the existence of a secret cabal trying to overthrow the ANC by infiltrating key communities. Such discussion came from the populist group (led, it was said, by Winnie Mandela, Bantu Holomisa, and Peter Mokaba).

 Repeatedly, throughout the GNU, "Winnie Madikizela-Mandela accused the ANC… of being soft on crime, going back on its election promises and ignoring the people who elected the party to power" (Kanhema & Bulger 1997, p.8). This image of her was evidenced after her death on April 18, 2018. The left openly rejected the idea that the ANC should function as a liberal democratic organization. Left wing commentators described President Mbeki’s criminal justice program as an attempt to control some of the more extreme elements of popular leadership coming out of the anti-apartheid movement and especially those advocating for “people’s power.”

In the view of many populist leaders, the ANC leadership had mishandled a series of issues important to its township constituents. Populist concerns, according to one observer, without “exception, all [had] been handled ineffectively [by the ANC leadership], antagonizing grassroots ANC opinions and ignoring opportunities to strengthen constitutional legitimacy by resorting to provincial parliamentary mechanisms" (Seiler 1997b, p. 8).

In 1997, the then Premier of Mpumalanga, Mathews Phosa, "accused the ANC leadership of losing touch with the grassroots and of being responsible for the rise of populism within the organization" (Radebe 1997, p.3). As the 1997 Mafeking ANC conference approached, according to a newspaper report, "ANC Women's league president Winnie Madikizela-Mandela [was] growing in stature as a credible candidate for the deputy presidency of the ruling party, with elements both within and without [of the ANC] now acknowledging that she may just pull it off" (“Winnie Grows” 1997, p. 9).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was an essential component of liberalism in South Africa and reaction to it within the ANC reflected long standing differences about liberal debate in the ANC. There was widespread rejection of the TRC process since it tended to equate apartheid government atrocities with the somehow more justifiable actions of the ANC. At least one member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Mapule Ramashala, expressed the view that the death of whites such as the American Amy Biel was not regrettable since she was irresponsible in going into the townships; her death only gave the movement a bad name (Lodge 2003). In the end, the ANC attempted to halt the publication of elements of the TRC report which were critical of ANC actions.

Both those within the ANC and among its critics recognize that the ANC is a very “broad church.” This in itself reflects a degree of liberalism within the political movement (Schlemmer 2006, p. 132). The ANC governing group, as Gumede (2007) points out, often speaks “left” to the party and the public, but acts “right” when in government. In a contemporary social and economic sense, the ANC is more left of center than the Democratic Alliance, which is economically conservative. “Although the DA still retains liberal elements, it has undoubtedly become the party of the white right. Its liberalism is not that of traditional continental Europe, but rather the deep conservatism of the American Republicans.” By 2005, in effect, the ANC had become “a liberal social democratic party and a custodian of liberal values” in South Africa (quotes from Gumede 2007, pp. 249 and 240).

By 1999, the left wing in the ANC had increasingly turned to what Raymond Parsons has called, “populist, so-called solutions to the nation’s economic problems” (Parsons 1999, p. 85). The ANC leadership took populist arguments seriously. At one point, "ANC national executive committee member Kader Asmal… warned against the rejection of populism within the ANC and instead called for members to be on the alert for the rise of 'warlords creating empire'" (“Asmal Warns” 1997, p. 10). According to populists, those who have boarded the “gravy train” had lost touch with the grassroots (Goodman 1999, p.195).

Populist criticism focused both on the left and the right within the movement. Criticism even extended to the ANC Youth League. In the end, a central primary criticism leveled against the Youth League was that it only articulated its views on leadership matters within the ANC and that it did little to advance vital causes affecting South Africa’s youth. The ANC leadership was not "listening to their new masters," the rank and file of the ANC (“Corrupt Police” 1997, p. 17). Ultimately, collectivist impulses called for new economic models that could address the needs of South Africa’s urban and rural poor.

Some SACP intellectuals criticized the ANC as a technocratic neutral elite class (Bond 2005; Bond 2006; Jacobs & Calland 2002). To SACP intellectuals, the ANC was neo-liberal and its agenda conflicted with the working class and a majority of South Africans (Marais 1997). Likewise, opposition to socialism had developed within the ANC by 1996. The populist Peter Mokaba, longtime leader of the ANC youth league, argued "unabashedly for the conversion of the ANC into a party of 'free market' capitalism" (Cronin & Nzmande 1998, p.25). In October 1997, Mokaba questioned whether the SACP should continue to be allowed to stay in the ANC since it disagreed with government policy and was flirting with the idea of forming a left-wing political party (Mbhele 1997b).

During the GNU, the ANC leadership fought an "invisible struggle" against populist and intellectual leaders who showed too much independence (Venter 1997, p. 73). Among the populists, Peter Mokaba's anti-communist rhetoric stood out. According to one newspaper account, "Mokaba's view that South African Communist Party… members should be ejected from the African National Congress (an organization they have helped to build over 70 years) has excited some observers outside ANC ranks” (Cronin & Nzmande 1998, p.25). The SACP, not surprisingly, "responded sharply to a discussion paper by Deputy Environment Affairs Minister Peter Mokaba suggesting the ANC and its communist ally go their separate ways” (Mabote 1997, p.1).

Tensions were particularly high between populists and the SACP in the wake of populist criticism of the new elite and politics within the ANC (Brummer 1995). In 1997, Bantu Holomisa the "ex-military leader of a bantustan, the former African National Congress firebrand [was] dumped from a deputy ministerial post and the party.”The reason for his removal was that he had been an “irritant” to the ANC because of his “ability to bond with ordinary folk” (both quotes from Brummer 1995, p. 4).

Many South African liberals, in turn, have expressed concern about the development of an unconstrained populism in South Africa after 2000. Support for democracy in South Africa, in 2001 (the beginning of the Mbeki period) was significantly lower than in Botswana, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (Williams 2004). According to Tom Lodge (2006a), there were significant numbers of people in the townships, mostly working class people who thought it was no longer necessary to vote. This became clear in in the March 2006 municipal elections.

**A Failed Presidency?**

By the time Mbeki came to power, the populist elements of the internal ANC, including the UDF, were dead. The prison, or island, group had died or retired, and many faction leaders had been coopted or driven out to the private sector. As a result, Mbeki, by the time he came to power, was in full control of the movement (Van zyl Slabbert 2000, p. 126). To critics of the new President within the former MDM, the coming to power of Thabo Mbeki consolidated the power of the exile element of the ANC leadership, a leadership that was committed to Mbeki’s Africanist principles. Outside the core leadership were representatives of the trade unions, the SACP, and many of the white liberals and communists who had had influence under Nelson Mandela.

The new President of South Africa was, to his critics, intolerant of criticism, had little organizational ability, surrounded himself with weak people, and feared strong leaders who were politically capable and had popular standing. In one incident, a defender of ANC leadership questioned the legitimacy of a press critic. The press was seen as part of the problem, standing between the government and the people. The Mbeki defender argued “In an unprecedented and conspicuously fact-free attack on the personal integrity of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, Lizeka Mda explicitly elevates what she herself calls “urban legend,” “rumours,” and “perception” to the realm of serious political analysis” (“A Short Leap” 1998, p. 20).

At the party level and institutionally, the ANC centralized authority under Thabo Mbeki. The political culture contained elements of intolerance and collectivism and the ANC leadership showed little commitment to devolved local government and a strong civil society. Despite his professed concern for corruption, critics pointed to Mbeki’s tolerance of corrupt practices among the ANC party faithful.

Splits within the MDM were at least in part a debate about the future of liberalism in South Africa. The debate over liberalism, as we have seen, has long dominated the evolving political culture in South Africa. Liberalism as a value system has failed to grip the vast majority of South Africans who are black. Liberalism within the ANC divides Christians from libertarians, socialists and unions from capitalist state leaders, and Africanism from non-racialism. As long as the commitment to liberalism is weak, democratic governance and civil society remains weak in South Africa. Governance and democracy are weakened as long as the links of sub-national organizations and local governments to the rural areas remain weak. Most importantly, the legacy of the homelands authoritarian administration may have doomed provincial government in South Africa.

Liberalism is linked to ethnic and racial tolerance. At issue is the extent to which the leadership in the new South Africa seeks to build a nation from all who live in the Republic, irrespective of creed, color or status. Most Coloureds and Indians aligned with whites, though a significant minority of the two former groups aligned themselves with the non-racial ANC. Only a small minority of South Africans, 13.6 percent, identify themselves as simply South Africans. For much of its history, nationalism in South Africa was promoted in its more narrow, ethnic form (Guelke 1999).

Finally, liberalism is related to non-racialism and equal access before the law. The fundamental challenge in South Africa, at the end of the Mandela period, remained human resource development and institutional capacity building. Both of which were core issues within the context of non-racialism, affirmative action, and issues of greater equality of opportunity. The decline of educational opportunities and skills development meant that the majority population’s social situation within South Africa would likely decline further in the foreseeable future.

Functionally, at the end of the GNU there was a vacuum at the heart of the South African government. Ultimately, the commitment of South Africa’s leadership to economic principles of international trade and a robust private sector also related to liberal values. Here, what was striking at the end of the GNU in 1999, was the degree to which the expectations of a much brighter future, that the 1994 elections inspired, had been disappointed. Apartheid’s legacies of low economic growth and of massive inequalities of income and wealth have proved much more difficult to shake off than white minority rule (Guelke 1999).

The ANC is often accused of authoritarian or even totalitarian cultural forms. However, it is important to avoid a simplistic view of the ANC’s internal political culture and organizational processes (Lodge 2003). Generational ranking remains a major factor in the pecking order of the ANC leadership (Lodge 1999b). The ANC has been very concerned about the potential strength of the self-described liberal Democratic Alliance and, either by using the race card, cooptation, marginalization, or playing off other parties against the other, aims to marginalize it politically (Schlemmer 2006). More than anything else, the ANC leadership feared the expansion of black support for the liberal Democratic Alliance Party. The ANC did not want to have to compete for the black vote.

During the GNU and into the Mbeki administration, the ANC continued to exhibit remnants of a culture of secrecy and conspiracy. These “conspiratorial” tendencies were both linked to the exile period, and the use of violence and coercion by UDF and ANC in the townships, at least in part, through agitation and outside intervention (Seekings 1991, p. 295). One commentator compared the ANC with the National Party: "I am concerned about the premature formation of the ANC/NAT coalition. I think they are very far along in their collaboration. Both groups have organic, Jacobin tendencies within them. They also have a strong strain of thuggishness" (Interview with Godsell, August 29, 1990).

The ANC had a tripartite political culture from the exile community, the prisoners, and those who were members of a mass organization. Increasingly, after 1994, the ANC became preoccupied with unity and to its critics reflected a deep authoritarianism, a pattern of control said to be exacerbated by the exile influence within the ANC. Prior to 1994, the ANC appeared to emulate “leader worship, dogmatism, lack of broad discussion…and limits on inter-party democracy” (Shabin 1999, p. 400). After 1994, there were increasing concerns, from the cynical essayist and novelist, J. M. Coetzee (1999, p. 66), for talk about

Re-education, reformation of the character…It reminds me too much of Mao’s China. Recantation, self-criticism, public apology. I’m old-fashioned, I would prefer simply to be put against a wall and shot. Have done with it.

**Political Culture and Political Control Under Thabo Mbeki**

**Towards a South African Political Culture**

As criticism of the GNU accelerated, and in particular reports of corruption, ANC officials spoke of the need to fight a "counter-revolution" in the press and among opposition parties (Smith 1997, p. 41). Left-wing critics within the movement accused the ANC leadership of having a "petit-bourgeois pedigree" and selling out the masses to meet the needs of the corrupt new elites (McKinley 1997b, p. 31). According to its critics, during the Mandela period, there was a growing tendency towards arbitrary and authoritarian government within the ANC, the SACP, and COSATU and the ANC leadership increasingly expressed considerable impatience with its critics (Seiler 1997b). Among the ANC’s critics, there was a fear that in the future there would be “ruthless abuse of power [of] a latitude that [allows] our deeds to resemble the abuses we fought against” (Krog 1998, p. 324).

Within Thabo Mbeki’s ANC some continued to believe that "culture forged in the ‘struggle’ [was] essentially more valuable than bourgeois culture" (Cartwright 1996, p. 3). To the ANC’s critics, Nelson Mandela had an authoritarian side beyond the mythology promulgated by the international media, and this authoritarian side had been part of the transfer of authority to Thabo Mbeki. There were glimpses of the iron willed revolutionary behind a facade of gentleness of Nelson Mandela (Waldemeir 1997). As Desmond Tutu (1999, p. 40) has noted, “while Mr. Mandela’s loyalty to the party was something to admire, it was excessive and turned out to be his chief weakness.” Mbeki, to his critics, reflected an even harsher presence, without the velvet touch that had been presented by Nelson Mandela.

Tom Lodge, long time ANC watcher, has defined the South African reality. “Since 1994,” he points out, “South Africa has possessed all the institutions and mechanisms which are normally understood to constitute a fully fledged liberal democracy” (Lodge 1999b, p. 69). There is a streak of liberalism within South Africa that provides for strong tolerance of private individual behavior. Debate and discourse, though less than during the exile period, remains a part of the political culture of the ANC twelve years after coming to power in South Africa (Suttner 2003). According to Tom Lodge (1999b, p. 11) , there is a “strange resilience of liberal institutions in South Africa….” Liberalism as a value system is different than liberal structures, however. While South Africa has liberal political and constitutional structures, liberal values have not spread widely in South Africa beyond the urban intellectual elite nor have levels of political tolerance increased since 1994. Not all South Africans appear to recognize the legitimacy of constitutional and political institutions.

In the late twentieth century, liberalism rejected the postmodernism that promoted multi-culturalism and moral relativism. Post-modernists have attacked the dominance of western culture and largely denigrated human decision-making’s incremental processes. Liberalism also rejected representation of class, sex, and race, if that resulted in under-qualified individuals holding office. ANC activists saw the liberal criticisms particularly of affirmative action as inherently racist given the historical disadvantages of black South Africans.

To its critics, several factors combined with the value system within the ANC to define state-societal relationships in post-apartheid South Africa. These were the social issues that challenged the still fragile institutional state, the nature of the post-apartheid economy, and the split between the ANC in government and its critics within the SACP and the Trade Unions.

The country's opposition parties, and in particular the Democratic Party, received harsh treatment by an ANC leadership that appeared to be increasingly anti-liberal after 1994 (Daley 1997b). At question was nothing less than the extent to which South Africa was a stable, liberal democracy with a tolerance for multiparty politics. ANC leaders, including Thabo Mbeki, after 1994 targeted much of their criticism toward liberals within the Democratic Party. The ANC labeled the Democratic Party "white fat cats." As one newspaper account noted in 1996, "the liberal is the most unpopular and disillusioned individual in the new South Africa" (Schwarz 1996). Justification of Mbeki’s Black Economic Empowerment program was designed to address the racial inequities that continued to exist in South Africa in the decade after the establishment of post-apartheid governance.

Mandela called the white parties, and particularly the Democratic Party, “reactionary, dangerous and opportunist,” a view also articulated by Mbeki and his surrogates during his two terms as president (quoted in Welsh 1994a, p. 93). The ANC’s criticism of the opposition was to some threatening to the concept of a parliamentary opposition, the free press, and civil society. In 1997, as a result of ANC sensitivities:

Minority voters' sense that the governing party is immune to their influence can (and does) prompt alienation and a tendency to respond not by participating more vigorously in democratic politics, but by withdrawing from political life, eroding the democratic system (and, if they choose to exit the society, prompting a loss of skills) (“ANC Calls” 1997).

Criticism of the media, white political parties, and NGOs in 1997 and 1998, and during the run-up to the election of Thabo Mbeki as president, deepened concern about anti-liberal tendencies, as did the ANC's hostility to the United Democratic Movement of Bantu Holomisa and Roelf Meyer.[[6]](#footnote-6) Liberal newspapers and the opposition Democratic Party both lashed out at the ANC’s sometimes anti-liberal stands and outreach to Communists and trade unionists. In 1998, a correspondent discussing the ANC’s annual conference suggested that

although it does not say it verbatim, the ANC seeks to reverse [the tensions within the alliance]. The document [reporting on the conference] seeks to charm both COSATU and the SACP, which have been at the forefront of the fight for social, economic and state transformation, often in conflict with ANC policies (Mbhele 1998a, p. 12).

Many liberals feared that after the elections in 1999, the next government would function with a "Mugabe Style" authoritarianism, moving the country away from democratic governance (Desai 1998, p. 21). In order to counter this, the Democratic Party, entered into an alliance with the United Christian Democratic Party (UCDP), headed by convicted criminal and former Boputhatswana homeland leader Lucas Mangope. This was done in a bid to dilute the support of the ANC among black voters in local government elections.

The UCDP was the first party that the Democratic Party wooed since its pledge during the 1999 general election campaign that it would work towards building a stronger and more united opposition. The Democratic Party held talks with several other parties (“DP Enters” 2000). Right wing Afrikaners, especially in the rural areas, had shifted to the liberal Democratic Party after 1999 and focused their criticism on affirmative action (Barrell 1999b). Given South Africa’s economic problems, critics of the President argued that in terms of economic and trade policy, the Mbeki administration seemed mostly focused outside of South Africa’s borders (Friedman 1999). Prior to local government elections in November of 2000, the Democratic Party, also briefly merged with the New National Party to form the Democratic Alliance, an alliance that ended in late 2001.

By the end of the GNU, the main preoccupation of the ANC seemed to be “dumping on the Democratic Party…” (Beckett 2000, p. 91). Other opposition parties also received their share of criticism. In both the Eastern Cape and Northwest Province, former homeland leaders led opposition political parties. Bantu Holomisa led the MDM and Lucas Mangope led the above mentioned UCDP. Both were targets of frequent ANC attacks. Former homeland political leaders in a number of regions capitalized on the dissatisfaction within the government service over the loss of jobs and the impact of public sector restructuring on civil servants. Later, Congress of the People (COPE), small though its initial support might be (primarily within the Eastern Cape), offered its supporters a healthy dose of liberal style values not available within the ANC.

At the end of the GNU, with more than a modicum of overstatement, one strain of liberal thought portrayed white liberals as the true victims of both the apartheid state and the post-apartheid government. According to James Statman (1998, p. 11), "...white South Africa seems to construct its world in a manner that supports a fundamental misrepresentation, misunderstanding and denial of the realities of their society, their place within it and the situation of the black majority...."

It is important to keep in mind that “South Africa before 1994 remained to a meaningful degree a democracy for whites….” (Guelke 1999, p. 18). This reflected on the political culture of the country. However, it is also important to note that democratic values by the 1990s had spread widely throughout all of South Africa’s various racial and ethnic groups. At the heart of the debate over liberalism was conflict between individual and collective rights. As one government report has noted, a particular problem, in South Africa has long been “the question of group rights and individual rights" (“Affirmative Action” 1996, p. 11). This had implications on the nature of South African political culture. South Africa did not change radically after the non-racial elections of June 1994.

In the late 1990s, 46 percent of all South Africans expressed confidence in the GNU. However, this was down from 64 percent in the 1994 elections (Lodge 1999a). There was a particularly high level of satisfaction with regard to public health; 63 percent of all South Africans and nearly 80 percent of black South Africans approved of the government’s health policies. However, pockets of dissatisfaction in South Africa deepened after Thabo Mbeki became President. The social and economic impact of HIV/AIDS between 2000 and 2005, and Mbeki’s convoluted view of the origin of the virus, negated some of the socio-economic progress of the ANC administration and most likely caused the AIDS crisis to significantly worsen South Africa between 1999 and 2009.

Moreover, under President Thabo Mbeki, tensions between the state and the media increased significantly with critics accusing the government of having a low level of tolerance for media scrutiny and accusing the South African Broadcasting Company (SABC) of becoming a mouth piece of the ANC (Sparks 2003). This came amidst complaints of ANC authoritarianism, corruption, and non-meritorious processes both in terms of recruitment and promotion for reasons inherent in certain kinds of affirmative action given a lack of regulation on the potential for patronage and nepotism of a kind that became all too common particularly during the Zuma years.

Political control was to be supported by effective use of the media and patronage (Johnson 2004). By the end of the GNU, with the creation of a media trust, critics of the ANC expressed concern about the future of the principle of freedom of the press (Van zyl Slabbert 2006a). Press reports suggested that during the Mbeki years Mbeki appeared increasingly sensitive to criticism as being disloyal to the country and the government. An investigation of alleged racism in the press in 2000 by the Human Rights Commission, had a Kafkaesque feeling with its pre-hearing assumption of guilt (Sparks 2003). By 2005, there were claims of political influence in the work of the Human Sciences Research Council (Van zyl Slabbert 2006a).

Speaking of the SABC, Sparks alleged “the news bulletins [were] almost as fawning in their coverage of senior ANC leaders as the old SABC was of the apartheid ministers….” What the broadcast media needed was “a culture change, away from the power-and status-seeking impulses that characterized the old regime and sadly carried over to the new” (Sparks 2003, pp. 111 and 113 respectively). Critics suggest that the SABC has become a state agency rather than a public broadcaster. By 2007, broadcasting media bias in favor of the ANC had significantly increased.

In November of 1998, the Human Right Commission announced that it would hold a general inquiry into the role of the media in South Africa (“HRC to Investigate” 1998). Threats to examine press freedom sent "a shiver through many of South Africa's newsrooms, [as] the country's Human Rights Commission said…that it would open an investigation into racism in the press and that it would use its powers of subpoena and arrest if need be” (Daley 1998b, p. 1).

The increasingly militant Democratic Party took particular note of press criticism by the ANC leadership in 1998. According to Tony Leon, leader of the Democratic Party, "I hear sinister echoes in Mandela's lambashing of critics and apparent demands for craven media and opposition parties…" (“Sometimes Mandela” 1998, p. 9). The echoes harkened back to the dark days of apartheid. Personality, became a principal target of ANC criticism. The ANC accused the Democratic Party of being racist and reactionary, dangerous and opportunist. According to David Welsh (1994), an admitted Democratic Party supporter, the ANC never would never hesitate to claim racialism as an issue in order to discredit the opposition.

**The Mbeki Personality and the Aborted Second Term**

From the time that the final South African constitution came into place in 1996, Thabo Mbeki began to work towards escaping Nelson Mandela’s shadow. By the time that he had taken over the Presidency of the ANC in December of 1997, he had largely done so. Following from this, we define Thabo Mbeki’s South Africa as running from July of 1996 to the end of 2008, a twelve-year period. In terms of institutions and policies, Mbeki’s role will prove to be much more significant from a policy perspective than that of either his predecessor Nelson Mandela or his successor (Jacob Zuma).

As early as 1994, South Africans, as well as the world community of opinion makers, suffered from what might be called a cult of personality over Nelson Mandela. By the time he became president, it had become impossible for the man to be separated from the myth. As one diplomatic observer, has put it: “Our relationship with the new South Africa has become overly personal, substituting a reckless form of hero worship for a sober analysis of long term national interest” (quoted in Lodge 2006b, p. 201).[[7]](#footnote-7)

Thabo Mbeki suffered from a disconnect between his intellectual framework and the ANC populist elements. Mbeki’s life was dedicated to the struggle and he believed in the vanguard model of leadership which has both Christian and Communist elements in it. It was his view that “people need to be uplifted.” Mbeki was also considered a visionary and a can-do person. “Unfortunately, under Mbeki, the stiff, aloof intellectual, the ANC government has come across as uncaring and distant.” Gumede describes Mbeki as “impetuous, stubborn and quick tempered.” Mbeki, unlike Mandela, cannot delegate important tasks to others (all quotes from Gumede 2007, pp. 55, 59, and 53-54 respectively).

Throughout his Presidency, Mbeki remained a vanguardist and an intellectual elitist who increasingly saw criticism of his policies and person as part of a set of conspiracies that challenged his ascendency within the ANC. Under Mbeki, the ANC was governed by a power-broking technocratic elite. There was a new hegemony within the organization that had captured the reins of government and was defensive of, rather than challenging, the political establishment. The problem from the left was that the government was being run by a small clique that functioned outside of the ANC tradition of social democracy.

Under Mbeki, the ANC tried to assert control over the state through an approach which it learned from the democratic centralism of Marxist-Leninist vanguardism through politicization of the bureaucracy, the use of patronage, and the appointment of all regional and local figures from the center. These combined with Mbeki’s twin policies of aggressive affirmative action and black economic empowerment. Competition for access to salaries, as well as patronage and corruption, all defined the South African state system during the Mbeki administration.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Mbeki, according to Tom Lodge, did not value highly liberal principles. He was particularly suspicious of federal principles and pluralist debates (Lodge 1999b, p. 115). Much of the criticism of Mbeki’s corporate style neo-liberalism came from the left wing of the ANC, COSATU, and the SACP. Mbeki himself denied that he was a neo-liberal and criticized World Bank and IMF policies, arguing for a more socially responsible approach to international trade and development (Mbeki 2004, p. A17). Thabo Mbeki was predisposed to view even criticism from the left as “the expression of conspiracies by the ‘enemies of transformation.” He called for South Africa to put behind the notions of democracy and individualism, which are particularly western, in favor of a concept of community, which is African.

Mbeki reserved his passion for redressing the historical racial divide caused by colonialism and apartheid and called for a discussion of what he called the “national question” of South Africa’s extreme racial imbalances (Timberg 2005c; Timberg 2007b). Mbeki’s priorities included land reform and continued affirmative action, both Africanist priorities. Mbeki was able to play the Africanist card when he found it useful, just as he could appeal to those who advocated a non-racial future when needed. Gumede (2007) claims that sometimes Mbeki used Africanist rhetoric as a camouflage for unpleasant news or policies.

President Mbeki, like most heads of states, was said to be surrounded with a “warren of gate keepers” who isolated him from both party activists and the general public (Van zyl Slabbert 2006a). According to Allister Sparks, Mbeki kept “…stumbling and then struggle[d] to steady himself, often seeming stubborn and recalcitrant in the process [acquiring] a manipulative style of operating.” The former President, according to Sparks, would choose his closest aides and ministers for their proven loyalty to him. They were often seen as “submissive flunkeys” (Sparks 2003, pp. 253 and 259 respectively).

One black critic, Patricia de Lille, leader of the then Independent Democrats and a former member of the Pan-Africanist Congress, called Thabo Mbeki a “dictator in the making,” surrounded by “toadies” who were out of touch with the realities of South Africa (Wines 2004, p. 3). Despite the rationality of Mbeki’s policies, the policy process often appeared to be characterized by confusion and paralysis. He appeared more controlling, less visible, and a centralizing figure. Gumede (2007) labeled the followers of Thabo Mbeki, “Mbeki-ites.” They include both former communists, Africanists, and pro-capitalist Nationalists.

Gumede (2007, p. 44) describes Mbeki’s policy style as “mandatism” and has argued that policies were developed in secret, without input either from the legislature or civil society and publicly announced. This was the case with the GEAR policy. A significant number of South Africans, according to the Washington Post, saw Thabo Mbeki and the ANC as “a threat to democratic principles as its leaders erase the boundaries between party and state….” (Morin 2004, p. A17). Thabo Mbeki was a “firm subscriber to the ANC’s traditional etiquette of “collective leadership….” (Lodge 2003, p. 242). Mbeki’s three “C’s” were coordination, control, and centralization (Gumede 2007, p. 129).

“Mbeki ran a brilliant campaign in 2004- clever, humble and positive, admitting that the ANC had failed in crucial areas, and promising to do better.” Thabo Mbeki admitted “on the hustings that the party had failed its grassroots supporters, but [promised] anew that the elusive dream would finally come true during his second term in office” (Gumede 2007, pp. 249 and p. 78 respectively). Despite the many criticisms of Thabo Mbeki on April 14, 2004, South Africans, in the third non-racial elections, gave Mbeki a second term as President and gave the ANC over two-thirds of the votes cast.

Tom Lodge (2003) complains of the conferment of an almost canonical authority on Mbeki’s writing as promoting more than a bit of a personality cult, he argues are part of an African tradition that are difficult to reconcile with the tenets of democracy. Mbeki, Lodge goes on, had a side of his personality which, according to one ANC stalwart, reflected both terrible conceit and an anxiety that bordered on paranoia. The debate about HIV/AIDS, the challenges of crime, or the discussions about what to do about Zimbabwe, all illustrated the increasing reluctance of ANC political elites to take any opinion which challenged the views of President Mbeki. (Lodge 2003). Mbeki, according to Robert Mattes (2002), frittered away a considerable amount of his symbolic authority as president by questioning the causal linkages between HIV and AIDS.

South Africans of all political persuasions were both puzzled and embarrassed by Mbeki’s rejection of links between the virus and the disease and his refusal to support government financing of anti-retroviral virus drugs. His refusal to criticize Zimbabwe’s Robert Mugabe, and Mugabe’s reckless land transfer schemes were also troubling. Both represented, to Mbeki’s critics, a fundamental illiberalism and irrationalism that were out of touch with the international community at the beginning of the twenty first century. They also suggested there was irrationality to the Mbeki administration more generally that was troubling. During his period in office, Mbeki appeared surprised by the strong public reaction to his comments.

However, he HIV/AIDS issue became a symbol of Thabo Mbeki’s stubbornness and the authoritarian tendencies within the ANC (Lodge 2004). He, and his Minister of Health, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang (a subject of ridicule who claimed that roots and herbs could cure AIDS)[[9]](#footnote-9) (Timberg 2007c) steadfastly denied that the HIV virus caused AIDS, arguing that it was a disease of poverty. His support for revisionist theories of AIDS led him to reject the use of the anti-retroviral drug, AZT. Because of this, for some time the South African government refused to fund anti-retroviral drugs for use by AIDS victims (Sparks 2003). The HIV/AIDS controversy both highlighted the failure of South Africa to deal with sexual violence (the disease is often spread through rape in South Africa) and accusing whites of having racial motives for criticizing his views on the disease (LaFraniere 2004a).

Mbeki’s feud with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a Nobel prize winning anti-apartheid activist, is illustrative of the personalist nature of Presidential rule during the Mbeki presidency. Mbeki is said to have called Tutu both liar and a charlatan according to press reports because Tutu called the Mbeki Presidency undemocratic and sub-imperial, and called Mbeki ignorant and with a Machiavellian leadership style. Tutu stated that the government was not doing enough to reduce poverty or address the issues of crime and corruption (“ANC Seeks” 2004). Mbeki’s refusal to recognize that South Africa suffered from a crime epidemic and suggestion that white complaints about crime were racist, reflected a similar lack of empathy for South African’s citizens.

By 2007, South Africa’s position on international affairs had come under question, with President Mbeki’s resistance to putting pressure on the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe and the country’s vote against censure of Burma’s hard line military junta, failure to support human rights concerns in China, and South Africa’s vote against the use of sanctions against Iran and North Korea. Critics saw the Mbeki administration’s abandonment of human rights principles as incongruous in view of the use made by the anti-apartheid movement of human rights concerns at the United Nations and other international forums between 1960 and 1994 (Lynch 2007; Wines 2007b).

According to William Gumede (2007, p. 309), Thabo Mbeki saw as his legacy in South Africa as “a competitive economy, creation of a large black business class, and repositioning South Africa as the champion of poor nations and the driving force behind continental renewal- his African Renaissance.” Given this, many speculated that one of the ANC millionaires, Cyril Ramaphosa, Mathews Phosa, or Tokyo Sexwale would get the nod for president of the ANC and then the country. Most observers concluded that for the image of the party as a national organization, the next President would not be Xhosa speaking.

Opposition to the Mbeki leadership within the ANC was largely instrumental and based on a counter-elite challenge rather than differences in ideology. Even critics within the ANC, such as Patrick “Terror” Lekota, criticized Mandela’s authoritarianism and efforts to control actions and opinions within the ANC (Lodge 2006b). The ANC felt that prominent black leaders, such as the increasingly critical Archbishop Desmond Tutu (who publicly criticized the ANC and President Mbeki for failure to address problems of poverty, HIV/AIDS, and the crisis in Zimbabwe) created the impression of division within the movement (Lodge 2003).

After 1994, criticism of the South African government or the ANC was considered by the political elites in the movement to be illegitimate and often racist (Lodge 2006b). Increasingly, under President Thabo Mbeki the political culture of the UDF was eclipsed, replaced by a commandist style shorn of ideology. After 1999, there was a further trend towards centralism in inter-governmental relationships and there were increasing concerns with the costs, both financial and provincial of “creeping provincialism” (Lodge 1999b p. 24).

Mbeki recentralized power into the Office of the President after 1999 and this included the ability of the state president to select the ANC candidates who would run for office at the provincial level, including the provincial premiers. The goal appeared to be to reduce provincial government to a Prefectoral style administrative system. By 2000, Mbeki had garnered the power to appoint all Director-Generals in government departments, all ANC provincial premiers, and the majors of all major cities dominated by the ANC (Johnson 2004).

Of significant concern was the attack upon anti-corruption agencies and the judiciary by the senior leadership of the ANC, calling them racist (Lodge 2003). “Mbeki’s Achilles heel has been his uncompromising ‘you are with us, or against us’ attitude. He sees all criticism of government policy as a personal attack, and those who dare express views that contradict his own are categorized as secretly hating him, or worse, wanting to topple him” (Gumede 2007, p. 167).

Under the Mbeki administration, the ANC President (and South African President) came to see that it was the President’s right, in a one-party dominant, and highly centralized party system, to view provincial leaders of the ANC as his subordinates (Dickovick 2005). Since 1994, internal democracy within the ANC has been effectively snuffed out according to Gumede. “Mbeki and the ANC leadership,” he goes on, “have gained unprecedented control of both the party and the government, concentrating enormous powers of patronage in the needs of the party bosses” (Gumede 2007, p. 148). The South African trade union movement complained about what they called the “unilateralism” of the ANC leadership in its decision-making (Lodge 1999b, p.3).

**Conclusion**

The South African story is one of many contradictions; the Thabo Mbeki story is one of them. After 2000, his story had turned increasingly negative. Transparency International in 2001 branded South Africa as very corrupt with an index score of 4.8 out of 10, defining a serious level of corruption, but still very low for an emerging economy. Critics suggested that the national and provincial ANC leadership remained impervious to the issue of corruption, both denying and exhibiting a defensive mode with regard to the extent of bribery and other corrupt behavior identified by the press and investigative units (Van der Merwe 2001).

Problems in the provinces were so deep by 2002 that it took more than three years to even begin to remedy them. The situation was the worst in provinces that contained one or more former homelands and was particularly bad in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo Provinces. In the latter, a government commission called for the purge of all senior administrators of the province. After 2002, there were increasing concerns within the ANC for imposing strong party discipline on the ANC membership. According to Mattes (2002, p. 26), there has been an “increasing tendency of ANC central party bosses to stifle open debate and dissent….” James Myburgh labeled the ANC under Thabo Mbeki as both command and centralizing and social democratic (Myburgh 2003). President Mbeki’s transformational goal, according to John Battersby (2003), was to create a social compact between government, labour, and business in order to avoid social disruption and ensure strong economic growth. These social goals have tended to confuse international observers.

The situation in South Africa under Thabo Mbeki was not all bleak, however. In 2004, despite the problems that South Africa faced, healthy majorities of South Africans looked back with pride on a decade of historic. South Africans were broadly optimistic about the future of their country and its democracy (Morin 2004). As South Africa approached the year 2002, new adjustments to the machinery of government were able to improve the coordination and implementation of policy. Focus in South Africa was on cooperation between levels and among departments of government. The overall thrust of macro-economic policy had become market-friendly. The ideological debate within the ANC was brought under control because of the negotiating skills of Mandela and Mbeki.

By 2006, after 14 years of incumbency the ANC was able to create “a national organization with a structured and disciplined…following in every significant population center, and in the cities” (Lodge 2006a, p. 162). The ANC had never been able to do that before. At the same time, democracy had been overcome by one-party governance in South Africa and by limited governmental accountability (Mattes 2002). Tom Lodge describes a trend towards centralization and what he calls a “dirigiste” model of both service definition and delivery” (2003, p. 105)

In 2007, Thabo Mbeki and the ANC presided over a robust, growing capitalist democracy though facing growing human resource capacity issues and increasing levels of inequity. Under Mbeki there developed a growing black middle class and even a small number of Rand millionaires. According to the New York Times in 2007, Mbeki built a strong record of fiscal and economic stability and some reconciliation between the races (Timberg 2007b).

Twelve years after the transition South Africa still had a record of an energetic press, social libertarianism, clean democratic elections, an independent judiciary, and freedom of expression. South Africa under Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki went “some way towards the ‘provision of a better life for all….’” (Lodge 1999b, p. 122). Most importantly, under Mbeki, the South African government continued to function, with all of its problems, as an emerging market country. Government capacity and levels of corruption were about to change dramatically, however, as we will see in the next chapter.

In 2010, South Africans expected to elect a new President and Parliament in competitive multiparty elections which, as we have noted, were expected to confer on South Africa all of the elements of a fully evolved liberal democracy (Lodge 1999b). However, it was not meant to last. We turn to that story, the tragic collapse of governance under Jacob Zuma, in the next chapter of this book.

1. Northern Transvaal, Western Cape, Gauteng, and the Free State faced only a very limited integration problem as they inherited no or only fragments of homeland structures. Kwa Zulu-Natal (though complicated politically), Mpumalanga, and Northwest provinces inherited only one homeland and in each case the homeland structure could expand to include the entire province. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. South African parlance for higher institute of technology (university level). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. After the merger with the new National Party in the late 1990s, the Democratic Party became the Democratic Alliance (DA). Though the alliance was short lived, the new name took. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A well placed academic in discussions with the author, as recorded in the author’s (Picard) research diary. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. She would later serve as Premier of the Western Cape (2009-Present) and leader of the DA (2007-2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Holomisa, former military leader of the Transkei, and Meyer, chief negotiator for the National party at the constitutional negotiations (in an odd couple relationship) formed the MDM together. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. USAID official Paul Neifert, testifying before a Congressional committee. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The last two paragraphs draw heavily on two major biographies of Mbeki, by Gumede 2007 and Gevisser 2009, both titled *Thabo Mbeki.* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. She resigned for reasons of health on February 27, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)