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Certain Destiny: The Presentist Obsession with "Apartheid" in South African History

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The historiographical influence in recent years of Quentin Skinner and his followers is difficult to overstate. Their contributions to the field of historical analysis, and in particular textual analysis, have been varied and important.[1] Skinner's message is in many ways a simple one: he reminds us that the history of ideas is, in the end, not about historians and their rarefied theories, but about historical agents and what they actually *meant* to say, in the context in which they said it. As Skinner puts it:

> The understanding of texts … presupposes the grasp both of what they were intended to mean, and how this meaning was meant to be taken … The essential question which we therefore confront, in studying any given text, is what its author, in writing at the time he did write for the audience he intended to address, could in practice have been intending to communicate [2]

For Skinner, therefore, an obsession merely with "context", or alternatively with the text in itself, is wholly insufficient. Not only the agent's *milieu* must be known, but so must his intentions. Although Skinner uses his method mainly to uncover the proper historical meaning of texts, it is clear that his arguments can be, and should be, applied to other areas of historical study. Understanding the intentions and mentality of a historical agent is always important, and likewise, understanding the collective mentality of a group or of a society as a whole is critical to interpreting the dynamics of history itself.

Not surprisingly, given Skinner's interest in faithfully reconstructing the intentions and mentality of historical agents, the problem of anachronism or presentism in historical research has interested him considerably.[3] Thinking "backwards" about history, or in other words, analysing events and personalities with the benefit of hindsight, is, of course, in some ways an inevitability for the historian. When he or she indulges too freely in a presentist bias, however, the true character of historical agents and processes can be lost. History is, as a result, artificially divided into an

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1 Skinner's views, and their importance in historiographical terms, are ably summarized in J Tully (ed), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1988)

2 Q Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding", *in* J Tully (ed), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1988), p 63

3 As Skinner writes himself, "The perpetual danger, in our attempts to enlarge our historical understanding, is that our *expectations* [emphasis added] about what someone must be saying or doing will themselves determine that we understand the agent to be doing something which he would not – or even could not – himself have accepted " See Q Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding", *in* J Tully (ed), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1988), pp 31-36

"official", favoured narrative, which accords with presentist or dogmatic assumptions, and a subversive, or even worse, *uninteresting* narrative, that catches all the remaining bits of history that are not "intelligible" in the same, predictable way. Many historical processes and agents have clearly fallen through the cracks, in historiographical terms, because they cannot be placed in the context of a flowing narrative, conceived to explain how history "got to a certain place". Skinner wishes us, therefore, to reconfigure our methodology so that we look at a given agent *as s/he really thought and acted at the time*. Otherwise, the essential character of the agent, and of the historical period which the agent helped to define, will be missed, and a mythology of the past will replace careful, accurate historical analysis.

The historiography of apartheid, and more generally of South Africa in the twentieth century, is an excellent example of an instance where historians, enthralled by the appeal and relevance of a narrative of racist oppression (or, even more simply, of "good" Africans versus "bad" Afrikaners), have neglected in many cases to afford sufficient attention to historical episodes, processes and personalities which have a problematic relationship to the official narrative. Apartheid, in other words, and the repressive and racist policies which this policy involved, have preoccupied the minds of historians so much that historical themes which lie outside the narrative of whites versus blacks, or outside the forty year period of Nationalist rule, have been slighted, and sometimes altogether ignored.[4] This is not to suggest, of course, that the study of apartheid and of racism in South Africa is mistaken. Far from it. What I mean to suggest instead is that apartheid, which for most historians *defines* South African history in the twentieth century, did not necessarily do the same thing for the historical agents who lived through these events. Certainly, apartheid did not define the course of South African history *before* 1948, although, to read many accounts of twentieth century South African history, one might get the impression that it did. The point, in short, is that South African history has not yet been captured in all its complexity and detail, because the presentist obsession with apartheid (and with its origins and consequences) has subsumed almost all South African historiography, and it has prevented many histories of South Africa which lie outside (or perhaps, alongside) the apartheid narrative from ever being written.[5]

To an extent, this point can be proven empirically: one only has to visit any decent academic library to be confronted with obvious evidence that many more books have been written about the apartheid period than about any other period or theme in South African history.[6] Because of the present-day relevance of the issue of apartheid, this is not especially surprising. A side-effect of this obsession with apartheid, however, has been that many other important themes and periods in South African history have received scant attention, or sometimes no attention at all. In particular, I have found this to be the case for the period of 1945-1948. My own dissertation research, which involved a comparison of British and South African parliamentary attitudes to race in these early post-war years, naturally could have

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4 William Beinart comments incisively on the problematic historiographical obsession with apartheid in W Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994), p 138

5 There is, of course, the additional problem that "apartheid" has meant different things to different people, and its meaning has also evolved over time See D Posel, "The Meaning of Apartheid Before 1948: Conflicting Interests and Forces within the Afrikaner Nationalist Alliance", *in* W Beinart and S Dubow (eds), *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Routledge, New York, 1995), pp 206-230

6 Interestingly, in an American academic library, this bias is even more pronounced

benefited from a rich historiographical treatment of this period. I was disappointed, therefore, when I discovered that virtually no close attention to the period had been paid by historians, at least not since the 1960s, when apparently historians were distracted by the pressure of current events to "contemporize" their research.[7]

And yet, in my view, the 1945-1948 period holds considerable interest, not just for its obvious impact on later developments, but also for its own sake. In the wake of the election of 1943, in which the United Party (UP) of General Jan Christian Smuts soundly defeated the Nationalists of Dr Daniel Malan, the war issue in particular seemed to have solidified support for Smuts's generally reformist and internationalist brand of politics.[8] During the Second World War, as South African industry expanded rapidly, hundreds of thousands of blacks streamed into the cities. Smuts and his ministers not only accepted this migration as an economic necessity, but also argued that blacks had to be permanently integrated into the economy and urban culture of the formerly "white" cities. The old "Stallardist" policy, which viewed urban blacks as guest workers (at best), was increasingly condemned as outmoded. Meanwhile, the overarching "segregation" policy of the government, which aimed to control interactions between the races, and to keep as many blacks as possible in the native reserves and rural areas, was definitely being challenged. Smuts's efforts to provide basic housing, better wages and social insurance programmes to urban blacks, all pointed in the direction of a more integrated and cosmopolitan future for South Africa. Smuts even contemplated increasing the political power of the partly-elected Natives Representative Council, which had in the past played only an advisory role in the creation of native policy. In addition, South Africa's highly successful co-belligerence with Great Britain during the Second World War seemed to indicate that the Anglo-South African relationship, although controversial among many Afrikaners, would continue to be close.

The official opposition party after 1943 was, of course, the Purified Nationalist Party, led by Dr Daniel Malan, who had become leader of the Nationalist Party (NP) after he refused to support Fusion between Smuts's South African Party and General J.B.M. Hertzog's Nationalist Party in 1934. The most die-hard and uncompromising Nationalists had followed Malan into the Purified Nationalist Party at this time, and these men formed the core of the movement. Malan had, in the ensuing years, pursued a stubbornly independent and, to Smuts's way of thinking, reactionary course, which emphasized the dangers of racial integration of any kind, and also the need for an Afrikaner-led republic to replace South Africa's dominion status within the British Empire. Throughout the 1943-1948 period, Malan pressed forward with his campaign to win over the majority of Afrikaners, giving increased emphasis to the colour issue. The new slogan of "apartheid" drew attention to the NP's proposal for more or less total separation between the races. Importantly, this consistent focus on the colour issue, and Malan's decision to de-emphasize the republican issue (although

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7 No doubt the change in focus of South African historiography beginning in the late 1960s owes itself in part to the growing influence of the "radical" school of historians, influenced partly by Marxist theory to condemn in a broad sense the impact of white oppression and economic exploitation of non-whites The nature of this "radical" school is ably explored in K Smith, *The Changing Past* (Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, 1988), pp 155-221 See also G Verbeeck, "A New Past for a New Nation? Historiography and Politics in South Africa – A Comparative Approach", *Historia*, 45, 2, November 2000, pp 387-410

8 The United Party Coalition (which included the smaller Dominion and Labour Parties) received 107 seats, compared to only 43 for the Nationalists

without giving up the republican goal), served to increase the NP's appeal among English-speaking whites.[9] The vast majority of English-speakers continued to support General Smuts, but they too, like their Afrikaner neighbours, were unsettled by the urbanization and growing radicalism of the black majority. Malan was hopeful that this groundswell of white concern over the co-mingling of the races in the cities, coupled with his shrewd election alliance with the moderate Afrikaner Party led by N.C. Havenga (the political heir to the deceased General Hertzog), would provide a recipe for victory in the general election of 1948. This was judged by most observers to be a major task, however, and even the leaders of the NP did not genuinely believe that victory was probable. The most likely scenario appeared to be that General Smuts would be returned to office with a reduced majority, and that his gradualist reforms of racial policy, and his fondness for the British Empire, would remain the foundations of government policy, at least for the foreseeable future.

Of course, none of the above would come as a surprise to any well-read historian of South African history in the twentieth century. What is astounding, though, is that as interesting and dynamic as the politics of the 1945-1948 period certainly were, historians (at least since the 1960s) have apparently found the apartheid period far more captivating. Over the last thirty years the period of the post-war Smuts administration seemed a very unlikely focus for a book or articles.[10] When one contrasts this lack of scholarly attention paid to the pre-1948 period to the obsessive interest displayed in anything and everything which occurred *after* 1948, it seems that a charge of historiographical neglect could reasonably be laid. My first criticism of the historiography of twentieth century South African history, therefore, is that it is slanted in an overwhelming way towards coverage of the apartheid era. Even within this era, in point of fact, it has paid attention almost exclusively to historical processes, events and personalities which can be fitted into a grand narrative of noble Africans versus white oppressors. Very little attention has been paid to historical dynamics lying outside this official version of events.[11]

From the perspective of my own research interests, however, a second manifestation of the presentist, ahistorical biases of South African historiography was even more relevant, and even more damaging. Although probably the majority of historians of South Africa have studied apartheid, in one way or another, nevertheless, many histories of South Africa *before* 1948, and therefore before apartheid, have also been written. What is most interesting about the bulk of these studies, however, is that, even though they analyse periods in South African history when "apartheid" was for the most part not even known as a concept, nevertheless, the looming presence, or sometimes even the "inevitability", of apartheid still dominates their thinking. The vast majority of historical treatments of the pre-1948 period, for example, seem to set as their primary task to explain how apartheid came about later on. Dunbar Moodie's *The Rise of Afrikanerdom* is an excellent example of this phenomenon.[12] Where

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9 It is interesting to note that from 1945 to 1947 the Nationalists for the first time published an English-language newspaper, called *New Era*, in the Johannesburg area

10 One exception is J P Brits, *Op die Vooraand van Apartheid: die Rassevraagstuk en die Blanke Politiek in Suid-Afrika, 1939-1948* (Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, Pretoria, 1994)

11 The relatively recent explosion of interest in gender relations in Southern Africa is a welcome exception to this rule As a matter of fact, the pages of *Historia* themselves regularly bear witness to the fact that apartheid myopia hardly affects *every* historian of South Africa

12 While there is certainly very little wrong with Moodie's study, it does perpetuate the historiographical conceit that the pre-1948 period ought to be viewed more or less exclusively as a weighstation on the

apartheid came from is a fair question, of course, but in tracing the "roots" of apartheid, very often these pre-1948 histories ignore important historical phenomena and personalities which lie outside the grand apartheid narrative of Nationalist-supporting whites versus African National Congress-supporting blacks. In other words, the assumption that the essential motive force of South African history is not just racial conflict, but racial conflict of a very particular stripe, can blind historians to the unfolding of other, equally "real" historical processes.

One of the key symptoms of this exaggerated focus on apartheid in South African historiography is the attitude many historians take to the general election of 1948. To them, 1948 has loomed not only as a "turning point" in South African history, but as a veritable Year One of South Africa's "real" history of unalloyed racism and oppression. The pre-1948 period, more often than not, is viewed as a "preparation phase" for apartheid, during which Nationalist whites girded themselves for national leadership, while other whites (rather uninterestingly) conducted a futile rearguard action to preserve their influence against a rising tide of Nationalist Afrikaner self-assertion. As a matter of fact, even the *presence* of whites opposed to the apartheid ideology and political programme before 1948 is often ignored by historians, who after all are conditioned to think of South African politics in post-1948 terms, when it seemed that the Nationalists were the only force that mattered. All this has produced a clear bias in South African historiography. The pre-1948 period is viewed as an incubation phase for the ideas and aspirations of conservative Afrikaners, while the actions of the ruling party in South Africa, the UP is seen as having little relevance to the eventual outcome of South African history. The general election of 1948 itself, moreover, is seen as revolving around "a single theme: racial purity and continued White dominance".[13] The NP victory, therefore, is seen as producing a revolutionary transformation of the ideology and policy of the State, all with the express approval of "white South Africa". This seems to be the very definition of a "turning point".

Meanwhile, many historians portray the post-1948 period as one in which the South African political opposition simply ceased to have any relevance or importance, and all of white South Africa moved in lockstep to the "promised land" of racial separation, as well as towards the long-held Nationalist goal of a white republic. Leonard Thompson, for instance, dismisses the UP as a political force in South Africa just one page after he discusses the results of the election of 1948. Thompson is so eager to discuss the highpoints of apartheid, moreover, that one page after that, he launches into a biography of H.F. Verwoerd, leaving poor J.G. Strijdom out of his account entirely![14] As one might expect, for Thompson and for others, the difficulties that the Nationalists encountered after 1948 in actually *achieving* their vision of apartheid, and the long delays before many aspects of the apartheid programme were instituted, are frequently overlooked. Likewise, the difficulties the Nationalists experienced in achieving their goal of a republic are often glossed over, as if the republican triumph of 1960-1961 was, after the election victory of 1948, merely a matter of time. Not surprisingly, moreover, given the historiographical obsession with apartheid, the majority of post-1948 studies of South African history have given

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path to apartheid See D Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975) Newell Stultz casts his net much wider See N Stultz, *Afrikaner Politics in South Africa, 1934-1948* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974)

13 R B Beck, *The History of South Africa* (Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 2000), p 124

14 L Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000), pp 186-189

primacy to the interaction between the white state, on the one hand, and its black subjects, on the other. Tensions within white South Africa, or within black South Africa, for that matter, have been largely discounted.[15] At the same time, and this point cannot be emphasized enough, *the essential continuities between the pre- and post-1948 periods are frequently overlooked*. In particular, the ideological factors which created segregation in South Africa in the first place, and led to its intensification even *before* 1948, are sidelined, while the political acts of the apartheid state after 1948 are interpreted as the very substance of white racism, and therefore, of South African history as a whole.

Incidentally, it should not surprise one that this over-simplified image of South African history as built around the "turning point" of 1948 is most strongly represented in histories written not by academics, but by current and former political leaders with a direct stake in historical interpretation. Nelson Mandela, for instance, has recalled the general election of 1948 as one focused on "the *swart gevaar*" (the black danger).[16] He even famously claimed that "[The Nationalists] fought the election on the twin slogans of *Die kaffir op sy plek* (The nigger in his place) and *Die koelies uit die land* (The coolies out of the country)", even though there does not appear to be any historical evidence to support such a claim.[17] Mandela also claimed that the victory of the NP came as a "shock", but that almost immediately, "we knew that our land would henceforth be a place of tension and strife".[18] Mandela also discussed how, after 1948, "race became the sine qua non of South African society".[19] Needless to say, this is a viewpoint entirely consistent with the thesis that 1948 was a crucial "turning point" in South African history. Similar views were expressed during the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).[20] As Richard A. Wilson has suggested, one purpose of the TRC-hearings was to create an historical narrative that could be harnessed in the task of "nation-building".[21] In the process, "being authentically South African [came] to mean sharing the [memory of the] traumas of apartheid".[22] In the case of the TRC, however, 1948 does not figure as highly, because the TRC was limited to investigating "gross violations of human rights" that took place between March 1960 and May 1994.[23] From this vantage point, Sharpeville appears to be the "turning point" in twentieth century South African history that produced a meticulously oppressive apartheid state. On the other hand, the TRC-report also perpetuated the myth that 1948 produced a racial order that was fundamentally different from what had come before: "Building on an inherited social practice, apartheid imposed a legal form of oppression with devastating effects on the

15 To his credit, Dan O'Meara was among the first to give serious consideration to the disputes and disagreements within the Nationalist Party See D O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years* (Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, 1996)

16 N Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Little, Brown, Boston, 1994), p 96

17 N Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Little, Brown, Boston, 1994), p 96; Mandela's assertion is specifically refuted in H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, 2003), p 481

18 N Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Little, Brown, Boston, 1994), pp 97-98

19 N Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Little, Brown, Boston, 1994), p 106

20 See in particular D Posel and G Simpson (eds), *Commissioning the Past: Understanding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 2002)

21 R Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001), p 14

22 R Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001), p 14

23 R Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001), p 34

majority of South Africans."[24] Of course, pre-1948 Stallardist "segregation" was not a mere "social practice" – it was, among other things, an intricate set of laws and policies designed to ensure white supremacy. It is hardly surprising, however, that the TRC would wish to emphasize the uniqueness of the "apartheid system" that began in 1948 and that ended (in some respects) in 1994.

There are, however, major problems with any interpretation of twentieth century South African history which views 1948 as a "turning point", or a "parting of the ways",[25] with piecemeal segregation beforehand, and uncompromising apartheid (and republicanism) afterwards. One of the assumptions of this "turning point" interpretation has been that essentially all of the most interesting and important indicators in the pre-1948 period pointed in the direction of a future South Africa that was Nationalist-led and uncompromisingly racist. This ahistorical notion, however, is easy to disprove. Leading up to the election of 1948, almost all observers expected the UP of General Smuts to retain control of the South African House of Assembly, and thus, of the government.[26] Smuts himself rudely dismissed all suggestions that his days in power were numbered, and he pointed repeatedly to the results of the election of 1943 to indicate that the Nationalists had clearly lost touch with the electorate.[27] The need for liberal reform of South Africa's racial policies was, in Smuts's view, simply too self-evident to concede that the NP could ever win control of the government with its flimsy promise of "apartheid", whatever that meant! The Nationalists, for their part, were also doubtful that they could win the election of 1948. They had high hopes that they would dramatically increase their share of seats in the House of Assembly, and that their alliance with the small Afrikaner Party would prove to be an electoral success, but winning over the approximately thirty seats that were needed to establish an NP-Afrikaner Party majority and a Malan premiership seemed unlikely, to say the least.[28] Most Nationalists had their eye on the election of 1953, when they hoped that the gains of 1948 could be consolidated and the promise of a Nationalist, apartheid government could finally be fulfilled. In Britain and throughout the West, moreover, just as in South Africa, most observers discounted the chances of a Nationalist victory.[29] The large majority of opinion leaders in Britain simply felt that the ultra-conservative Nationalists were too personally and ideologically repugnant ever to win an election in a civilized country. The *Manchester Guardian*, for example, remarked that apartheid was really a

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24 *Report of the TRC*, quoted in W Esterhuyse, "Truth as a Trigger for Transformation" *in* C Villa-Vincencio and W Verwoerd (eds), *Looking Back, Reaching Forward: Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa* (Zed Books, London, 2000), p 147

25 L Thompson, *The Political Mythology of Apartheid* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1985), p 191

26 See K Heard, *General Elections in South Africa, 1943-1970* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1974), p 32

27 W K Hancock writes about Smuts's "assurance of victory" before the 1948 elections See W K Hancock, *Smuts, Fields of Force* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1968), p 496

28 Arthur Barlow, a United Party MP, reported a conversation he had with Malan, in which the future Prime Minister seemed to suggest that the most the NP could hope for in 1948 was a gain of around twenty seats See A Paton, *Hofmeyr* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1971), p 373 Stultz confirms this general impression See N Stultz, *Afrikaner Politics in South Africa, 1934-1948* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974), p 131

29 See *Round Table*, XXXVIII, December 1947-September 1948, pp 506-510, 719-722 The worst case scenario in the 1948-election, as far as *Round Table* was concerned, was that "General Smuts might be forced into a coalition or to form a minority Government " An outright NP victory was judged to be "a gigantic task"

"neurotic fantasy", and therefore a Nationalist victory was highly unlikely.[30] The point is that, before 1948, the idea of a Nationalist victory was widely considered improbable, or even absurd. To analyse the pre-1948 period as a "preparation phase" for apartheid, therefore, or as a time when only the actions and beliefs of Afrikaner Nationalists were relevant or important, is breathtakingly anachronistic. It is simply an historiographical mistake.

Of course, in the end the Nationalists did win the election, and this produced shock and amazement in many quarters. The Nationalist Party and the Afrikaner Party gained together no less than thirty-one seats in the House of Assembly, resulting in a nine seat majority over the new opposition of the United and Labour Parties.[31] The Nationalists were of course overjoyed[32]; Dr Malan called the 1948 election results a "miracle of God", and he was quick to thank English-speakers and moderate Afrikaners for the support they had given the NP at the polls, which undoubtedly had been the decisive factor in the election.[33] The Nationalists's strategy of "muting" their reactionary image and emphasizing the colour issue over the Republican issue seemed to have been vindicated.[34] And yet, as Hermann Giliomee has argued, there is ample reason to deny "the orthodoxy that the appeal to apartheid made it possible for the National Party to capture power in 1948."[35] Clearly, many other factors were at work. Issues as diverse as rationing, crime, immigration, farm policy, anti-communism and language rights all played a key role in the NP triumph of 1948.

The United Party, on the other hand, was predictably dejected after the results became known.[36] General Smuts briefly considered retiring from politics, especially considering that he had lost his own seat at Standerton, but eventually he decided to carry on the fight and lead the UP in opposition.[37] Immediately after 1948, in any case, the latter party began a frenzied campaign to discredit apartheid as impractical and unjust, even before any portion of the policy became law. Some UP-supporters

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30 The *Guardian* further declared that a Nationalist victory "would be a disaster" See *Manchester Guardian*, 26 May 1948, p 4

31 In 1948, the Nationalists won 70 seats and the Afrikaner Party 9 The UP won 65 seats and the Labour Party 5 The UP lost the election despite winning a majority of the votes cast This was largely because the UP won with large majorities in many of the urban and coastal constituencies, while the NP won with relatively smaller majorities in many rural and working-class areas See N Stultz, *Afrikaner Politics in South Africa, 1934-1948* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974), pp 102-105, for details on the electoral alliance between the NP and the Afrikaner Party Interestingly, N C "Klaas" Havenga, the leader of the Afrikaner Party, had proposed an electoral alliance with the UP, but Smuts "frisked aside with contempt" this offer, according to Arthur Barlow

32 See N Stultz, *Afrikaner Politics in South Africa, 1934-1948* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974), p 144

33 One measure of the increased support that the NP received from English-speaking whites in 1948 was the fact that the NP vote in Natal increased 12 percentage points from 1943 to 1948 See N Stultz, *Afrikaner Politics in South Africa, 1934-1948* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974), p 144 Also see E H Brookes, "South African Swing-Over", *Foreign Affairs*, 27, 1, October 1948, p 148; *Times*, 26 May 1948, p 5; *Times*, 5 June 1948, p 4; D W Krüger, *The Making of a Nation* (Macmillan, London, 1969), p 227

34 Malan was softening his stance on the Republic as early as September 1946 See N Stultz, *Afrikaner Politics in South Africa, 1934-1948* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974), p 111

35 H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, 2003), p xvii, 480-481

36 See *Cape Times*, 28 May 1948, p 8 The *Cape Times* proclaimed the day on which the election results became known to be a "day of grief"

37 Major P V G van der Byl, the Minister of Native Affairs, was also ejected from Parliament *Cape Times*, 28 May 1948, p 8 See also *Times*, 31 May 1948, p 4, and 2 June 1948, p 3, for information on Smuts's flirtation with the idea of retirement

even girded for a long struggle with the NP, which might or might not be confined to non-violent avenues of protest.

Likewise, in Britain and in the West, there was almost universal disappointment at the outcome of the election of 1948 in South Africa.[38] The British press expressed amazement that voters in South Africa would make such a choice, and they prominently declared their sympathies for Smuts. The *Daily Telegraph*, for instance, announced its "deep regret at the defeat of General Smuts".[39] The British expressed strong fears that the election of a nationalist, Republican government in South Africa would lead to the withdrawal of the Union from the Commonwealth, to economic dislocation, or even to the persecution of the non-whites or of the English-speaking white minority.[40]

Most historians, of course, have tended to agree with liberal commentators at the time that the election of 1948 represented a watershed in South African history and in the country's relationship with the outside world.[41] J.D. Omer-Cooper, for example, has stated that, once a Nationalist government was elected in 1948, "The choice for apartheid had been made."[42] Roger Beck claims: "The bitter-enders had won [after 1948], and apartheid became the law of the land."[43] G.H.L. le May calls Smuts's defeat in 1948 a "humiliation", and he claims that the change in governments in South Africa "initiated a constitutional revolution".[44] Likewise, Dan O'Meara has stated that, "The election of 1948 set South Africa on a course very different from the one it would have taken had the Smuts government clung to power."[45] W.K. Hancock seemingly echoes O'Meara. He states that the election of 1948 marked "the end of an epoch", and that Smuts and his contemporaries realised almost immediately that this was so. Similar sentiments were also voiced by Alan Paton and D.W. Krüger.[46] In

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38 *Round Table*, Vol XXXVIII, December 1947-September 1948, p 814

39 *Manchester Guardian*, 29 May 1948, p 4 *Daily Telegraph*, 29 May 1948, p 2

40 *Daily Telegraph*, 29 May 1948, p 2 In fact, the 1948-results were widely interpreted as an essentially *ethnic* victory of Afrikaners over English-speaking whites, rather than as a "turning point" in racial policy

41 E H Brookes claimed that the election of 1948 represented a simple choice between "tolerance and good will" on the one hand and "a reactionary color policy" on the other See E H Brookes, "South African Swing-Over", *Foreign Affairs*, 27, 1, October 1948, p 143

42 J D Omer-Cooper, *History of Southern Africa* (J Currey, London, 1994), p 192 See also R Hyam and P Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok: Britain and South Africa since the Boer War* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003), p 33

43 R B Beck, *The History of South Africa* (Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 2000), p 124

44 G H L le May, *The Afrikaners: An Historical Interpretation* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1995), p 203

45 O'Meara also speculates on what might have happened in South Africa had Smuts been able to win a narrow victory in 1948 He believes that a strong economy would have made a future Nationalist victory "less likely", and that the "logic" of the UP's acceptance of black urbanization would have propelled racial policy in a decidedly liberal direction Thus, 1948 really *was* a turning point See D O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years* (Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, 1996), p 37 Needless to say, O'Meara's speculations are easy to dispute, especially when one considers the impact of the long-term ideological changes in the white electorate on which the success of apartheid was built O'Meara's views, in any case, seem to be shared by William Beinart, who proposes that, had the Nationalists failed to capture control of the Government in 1948, internal tensions could have destroyed the party and guaranteed continued UP dominance See W Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994), p 133 Again, my sense is that a reckoning between the white government and the black majority was probably inevitable, regardless of which party was in power

46 See W K Hancock, *Smuts, Fields of Force* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1968), p 507; D W Krüger, *The Making of a Nation*, p 237; and A Paton, *Hofmeyr* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1971), p 377 Jan Hofmeyr, on the other hand, seemed to be of two minds Privately, he admitted that the public's rejection of the UP's more liberal racial policies had been a key factor in the election

sum, it would appear that many historians have willingly joined the chorus of voices that have declared 1948 to be, in effect, the fateful year when South African history for the second half of the twentieth century was decided. In particular, these commentators have supported the view that 1948 was the definite beginning of the "apartheid era". My view, however, is that 1948 was not, in itself, decisive of anything.

This point is made clearer by what followed after the dust had settled from the election of 1948. First of all, it is important to note that this election did not immediately change the structure of party politics in South Africa in any major way. True, the Nationalists gained control of the government, and the UP lost it, but both parties retained more or less the same principles and policy positions after 1948 as before. Before the election campaign, the NP moderated its image and concentrated on the need for more rigorous measures of racial separation rather than pressing for immediate secession from the Commonwealth as it had in the past. After 1948, the Malan government and the NP held fast to this same approach. Before the election of 1948, the UP voiced its support for the old policy of "segregation", for the continued presence of coloureds on the common voters' roll, and for modest concessions to the Africans in the form of new social programmes, economic rights, and political opportunities in the Natives Representative Council. The UP also campaigned against the concept of territorial apartheid and in favour of continuing the process of black urbanization in a controlled fashion. In other words, before 1948 the UP voiced its commitment to a policy of gradualist and moderate reform of racial policy, coupled with a vigorous internationalism. Even after the debacle of 1948, the UP did not change its approach in any dramatic way.[47]

On the face of it, it may seem surprising that the UP had suffered such an ignominious defeat in 1948, and yet the party still refused to alter its position and move to the right on racial issues. Indeed, the party remained so steadfastly committed to the more timid "segregationist" approach to racial policy, that it even opposed one of the first major initiatives of the Malan government – the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, and the extension of the Immorality Act, which forbade sexual relations between 'whites' and 'non-whites'. Additionally, the UP added to its political mistakes by strongly opposing the Suppression of Communism Bill. Although the UP took this stand because of reasonable fears that the Bill would infringe on the constitutional and democratic rights of the South African people, the effect of this decision was nevertheless to tie the UP in many voters' minds with communism. *In retrospect*, we know that the result of this strategic blunder, and of the many blunders that followed, was that the UP continued to lose support among the South African electorate. Why, one may ask, did the UP and General Smuts choose to embark on such a suicidal course after the election of 1948?

Publicly, however, he declared that the "irritation vote", made up of voters simply wanting a change in leadership after the hardships of wartime, was more important than any other factor The latter line of argument would hardly suggest that Hofmeyr understood that "an age" had come to a close, and that further progress towards a more liberal racial policy was foreclosed See A Paton, *Hofmeyr* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1971), p 382

47 For details on the UP's continuing devotion to the political rights of the coloured community and its ongoing opposition to apartheid after 1948, see D W Krüger, *South African Parties and Policies* (Human and Rousseau, Cape Town, 1960), pp 337-353, 408-409, 430-434 For more, see M Horrell, *Non-European Policies in the Union and the Measure of Their Success* (South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 1954), pp 57-58, 63-64, 69

The answer is simple: to the UP, the results of the 1948-election did not seem nearly as decisive as they do to many historians today. First of all, the United Party took comfort in the fact that the Nationalist majority in the House of Assembly was very small in 1948. The NP-Afrikaner Party majority over the UP-Labour coalition was nine seats, but when one counted the three native representatives as members of the opposition (which, in a period of Nationalist rule, they certainly were), the NP majority shrank to just six seats.[48] Many in the UP doubted that the Nationalists could govern effectively with such a small majority.[49] In addition, the UP was comforted by the fact that it retained a large majority in the South African Senate.[50] Many South African and British commentators doubted that Dr Malan would be able to establish a working Nationalist majority in the Senate, even if he called for new elections for that body in 1949.[51] Lastly, and most significantly, the UP was inclined to dismiss the results of the election of 1948 as a fluke.[52] There was a widespread belief that the NP had won in 1948 only because an extraordinary constellation of factors had come together to assist the Nationalists, and that by 1953, South African politics would have returned to normal and the UP would be returned to power with a safe majority.[53] Additionally, many UP-leaders believed that the Nationalists would fall flat on their faces once the absurdity of their apartheid proposals was understood by the voters.[54] Many observers clearly expected the UP to return to power in 1953, or perhaps even before then if Malan's government collapsed, or if by-elections eliminated the government's working majority.[55] Interestingly, the Nationalists themselves seem to have been impressed by some of these arguments about the fragility of their government. It was partly the NP's fear of a UP recovery that convinced Malan and Strijdom to pursue the segregation of coloured voters in the Cape from the common voters' roll as vigorously as they did. The Nationalists were, in short, afraid that increasing numbers of qualified coloured voters could throw future elections to the UP![56]

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48 Stultz puts this slender victory in even sharper perspective In 3 constituencies, an aggregate shift of just 91 votes would have thrown the election to Smuts! See N Stultz, *Afrikaner Politics in South Africa, 1934-1948* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974), p 145 Also see: K Heard, *General Elections in South Africa, 1943-1970* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1974), pp 38, 46-49

49 See *Cape Times*, 28 May 1948, p 8; Jan Hofmeyr, Smuts's Deputy Prime Minister, expected new elections "within a year's time, if not sooner" A Paton, *Hofmeyr* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1971), p 382 Smuts, while he admitted that the UP's post-election situation was "damnably difficult", did not view it as hopeless by any means N Stultz, *Afrikaner Politics in South Africa, 1934-1948* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974), p 160

50 See E H Brookes, "South African Swing-Over", *Foreign Affairs*, 27, 1, October 1948, pp 143-144

51 For an account of how Malan was able to add six new MPs for South-West Africa and four new Senators, see A Barlow, *Almost in Confidence* (Juta, Cape Town, 1952), pp 325-326

52 See D O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years* (Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, 1996), p 60

53 Arthur Barlow did not share this sense of optimism, nor did Sir DeVilliers Graaff, the future leader of the UP Among the doubters was also Kalie Rood, UP member for Vereeniging in the Transvaal Rood suggested, as a concession to conservative white opinion, the removal of the native representatives from the House of Assembly, and he was chased out of the UP-caucus by General Smuts for doing so See A Barlow, *Almost in Confidence* (Juta, Cape Town, 1952), pp 322-323

54 See *Daily Telegraph*, 29 May 1948, p 2; N Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1995), p 94 Also see: H Giliomee and L Schlemmer, *From Apartheid to Nation-Building* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1990), p 107

55 E H Brookes, "South African Swing-Over", *Foreign Affairs*, 27, 1, October 1948, p 144 Also see: G H L le May, *The Afrikaners: An Historical Interpretation* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1995), pp 209-210

56 H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, 2003), pp 500-502

Many international observers seem to have agreed at the time with the UP that the results of the election of 1948 were not in fact the end of the world.[57] Since South Africa's most important bilateral relationship was with Britain, it seems reasonable to ask how the latter in particular reacted to news of the election of 1948. If this event really was the "turning point" as has been alleged, then one would expect Anglo-South African relations to have been radically and lastingly transformed by the election of a Nationalist government, but were they? First of all, the British press did express strong disappointment about the results, but it also voiced confidence that the UP would bounce back and retake control of the government in short order. The "shadow of fear and jealousy and small-mindedness will pass", declared the *Manchester Guardian*.[58] In addition, although the British press initially had expressed concern that a man like Malan had risen to lead a Commonwealth country, on reflection it also acknowledged that Malan was a man who in the past had always respected constitutional and democratic norms.[59] There was little chance of South Africa becoming a dictatorship or an Afrikaner oligarchy under his watch. His appointments to South Africa's new cabinet were also seen as "conciliatory".[60] All in all, the British press did not sound the alarm that the election of 1948 marked a crucial breaking point either in South African history or in the history of Anglo-South African relations. British investors seem ultimately to have agreed.[61] Perhaps most tellingly, no one in the British House of Commons felt that the South African election of 1948 was important enough even to be *mentioned*, and no one thereafter expressed the opinion that Anglo-South African relations had been decisively changed.[62]

Indeed, an objective reading of Anglo-South African relations from 1948 to 1961 bears out the interpretation that the election of a Nationalist government did not, *in itself*, damage the relationship between the two countries in any lasting way.[63] For one thing, despite their bluster on the republican issue, the Nationalists did not immediately press for withdrawal from the Commonwealth. Indeed, at Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conferences, Malan became a respected, if not a beloved figure, who sought to reassure the British that Anglo-South African relations

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57 The *Times* headlined part of its coverage of the NP victory in the election, saying "Drastic Changes Unlikely" See *Times*, 29 May 1948, p 4

58 See *Manchester Guardian*, 29 May 1948, p 4 The *Guardian* expressed confidence that apartheid would end up to be the "rope that hangs the Nationalists" The *Times* noted that "There was unquestionably something unreal about this election", and that in the end things might "turn out for the best" because the United Party would lose its complacency See *Times*, 14 June 1948, p 5

59 The *Daily Telegraph* thought that Malan would become "friendlier to Commonwealth relations" once he took office See *Daily Telegraph*, 29 May 1948, p 2 Also see: *Times*, 29 May 1948, p 4 More reassurance came from the South Africans themselves See J H Viljoen, MP, "South Africa", a Private Discussion Meeting held at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 27 October 1948 Also see: *Round Table*, XXXVIII, December 1947-September 1948, pp 817-818

60 *Manchester Guardian*, 14 June 1948, p 6

61 E H Brookes, "South African Swing-Over", *Foreign Affairs*, 27, 1, October 1948, p 152

62 See: Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates*

63 See D Geldenhuys, "The Head of Government and South Africa's Foreign Relations," *in* Robert Schrire (ed), *Malan to De Klerk: Leadership in the Apartheid State* (St Martin's Press, New York, 1994), p 245 Prof Geldenhuys speaks of "remarkable continuities" in the foreign policies of General Smuts and Dr Malan See: D J Murray and S R Ashton (eds), *British Documents on the End of Empire, Series A: 1945-1951,* I (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1992), pp lxiv-lxvii, for examples of how the British reacted to Nationalist rule in South Africa Also, Le May notes that it was mainly the "purely sentimental" links between South Africa and the British Empire which were weakened by the election of a Nationalist government G H L le May, *The Afrikaners: An Historical Interpretation* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1995), p 204

would remain substantially the same.[64] Also, in recognition of the importance of South Africa's economic, political, diplomatic and even emotional ties to Britain, the Nationalists repeatedly reaffirmed that South Africa would not declare itself a republic or withdraw from the Commonwealth until a clear demonstration of support for this idea was forthcoming from the South African people. Most observers took this to mean that the Nationalists would not push for a republic until they had received support from a majority of the electorate for exactly this purpose, which seemed unlikely to happen anytime soon after 1948.

The British, for their part, also inclined to the view that Anglo-South African relations should remain positive and close-knit, despite the disappointing results of the election of 1948.[65] In 1950 the Labour Cabinet was advised by Patrick Gordon Walker that good relations with the South Africans were necessary both for economic and for strategic reasons.[66] Clement Attlee seems to have concurred.[67] Indeed, economic cooperation between Britain and the Union continued without interruption after 1948,[68] and military cooperation arguably increased. The Nationalists demonstrated keen interest in the notion of an anti-Communist military alliance between South Africa and the European colonial powers in Africa, but in the end this idea went nowhere because of the Malan government's insistence that only whites should be armed.[69] In 1954, however, the British and the South Africans reached the historic Simon's Town Agreement, which continued the British naval presence at the Cape, but recognized South African sovereignty over the Simon's Town naval base.[70] The South Africans also continued to rely on the British as their major source of sophisticated weaponry and advanced military training.

In 1954, Dr Malan retired and J.G. Strijdom became Prime Minister of South Africa. To a degree, friction grew between Britain and South Africa during Strijdom's premiership, mainly because the "Lion of the North" disapproved so strongly of Britain's decision to grant independence to the Gold Coast and, in time, to her other African possessions. Strijdom criticized this move, but he still worked to maintain friendly relations with Britain. Despite Strijdom's own fierce commitment to the goal of a South African Republic, he did not take any meaningful steps to achieve this goal

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64 Malan also appointed Charles te Water as a "roving ambassador" to maintain South Africa's friendly ties with Britain and other foreign countries D Geldenhuys, "The Head of Government and South Africa's Foreign Relations," *in* Robert Schrire (ed), *Malan to De Klerk: Leadership in the Apartheid State* (St Martin's Press, New York, 1994), p 249 See also p 251, for the value Malan placed on South Africa's Commonwealth membership; and *Times*, 5 June 1948, p 4, for coverage of one of Malan's first attempts to reassure Britain that the Anglo-South African friendship would continue

65 "Co-operation with the Union of South Africa: CO Memorandum for the Cabinet Africa Committee", CAB 134/1, A(49)2, 5 July 1949, in *British Documents*, volume IV

66 D Geldenhuys, *Diplomacy of Isolation* (Macmillan South Africa, Johannesburg, 1984), p 47; "Visit by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations to the Union of South Africa : Cabinet memorandum by Mr Gordon Walker", CAB 129/45, CP (51)109, 16 April 1951, in *British Documents*, volume IV

67 See: H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, 2003), p 495

68 See G R Berridge, *Economic Power in Anglo-South African Diplomacy: Simonstown, Sharpeville and After* (Macmillan, London, 1981), p 164 Berridge believes that economic considerations were the primary factor that maintained a cordial relationship between Britain and South Africa from 1948 to 1961, and arguably beyond

69 See especially G R Berridge, *South Africa, the Colonial Powers and "African Defence": the Rise and Fall of the White Entente, 1948-1960* (St Martin's Press, New York, 1992)

70 G R Berridge, *South Africa, the Colonial Powers and "African Defence": the Rise and Fall of the White Entente, 1948-1960* (St Martin's Press, New York, 1992), pp 110-132

during his premiership. Once again, since the NP won the elections of 1953 and 1958 with less than fifty per cent of the vote (and in fact, with fewer votes than the UP), it seemed that the dream of a republic would be deferred for some time.[71] Relations between South Africa and Britain were also unquestionably given a lift during this period by the fact that Britain's Labour government had been replaced by a Conservative government in 1951. Prime Ministers Churchill, Eden and Macmillan were all much more to the South Africans' liking than the socialist Clement Attlee had been. Perhaps this was due in part to the more favourable attitudes towards African Imperialism evinced by Conservatives in Britain; the lobby of white "settlers" was an important influence on the Conservative Party, after all. Perhaps it was also due to the commitment to anti-communism that united Nationalist Afrikaners and old-guard Tories alike in the 1950s. The peril felt by many Westerners at the spread of communism (known as the "red menace" or "*rooi gevaar*" in South Africa), and its aggressive expansionism in places like China and Korea, was a much stronger theme in international relations before 1960 than disagreements over racial policy. It would be years, in other words, before the British right would discover that the peculiar racialisation of anti-communism in South Africa made the South African government a less-than-ideal partner in the struggle against the Soviets.[72] Even after Malan's retirement, in short, and throughout the 1950s, there is little indication that Nationalist rule in South Africa produced a "turning point" in South Africa's relations with Britain, even though these relations were (of course) always in flux.

What exactly does all this prove? It proves that the conventional interpretation of 1948 as a "turning point" in South African history, politics and international relations, and as the beginning of the "age of apartheid", is overstated – to say the least. Before 1948, no one in his right mind would have admitted that s/he was living through a "preparation phase" for apartheid. On the contrary, to most South Africans, and to most observers outside South Africa, the Nationalist Party was an anachronism, a reactionary cabal which had a slim chance (if it had any chance at all) of ever taking the reins of national leadership. Apartheid, moreover, was seen by many not as the wave of the future, but as a cynical and empty-headed election ploy, which, if ever implemented as policy, would fizzle out due to its own internal contradictions and absurdities. What many historians forget is that this highly negative pre-1948 appraisal of apartheid was held not only by educated opinion-leaders, but also, seemingly, by the majority of the white electorate! The Nationalists, although they won the election of 1948 in terms of seats in the House of Assembly, received far fewer votes than the UP candidates did. The latter party remained, in fact, the majority party in South African politics, in terms of votes and public support, for at least another ten years *after* 1948. From a "Skinnerian" perspective, one can hardly

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71 Sometimes, in this regard, even outright inaccuracies can creep into analyses of South African history Nigel Worden refers to how, circa 1958, apartheid "genuinely appealed to an increasing majority of the white electorate " Clearly, however, in 1958, a "majority" of the white electorate had voted *against* the party of apartheid, not *for* it This is an important distinction See N Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1995), pp 98-99 See K Heard, *General Elections in South Africa, 1943-1970* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1974), pp 43-46, for more electoral details

72 I have argued elsewhere that anti-communism, both before and after 1948, was not always a unifying force in Anglo-South African relations The unique origins of anti-communism in South Africa, especially among Afrikaner Nationalists, and the obsessive way in which the South African government labeled many essentially liberal dissidents as "communists", clearly set the British and the South Africans at odds in many cases See N L Waddy, "The Growing Divide: British and South African Parliamentary Attitudes to Enforcing Public Order Among the Africans, 1945-1948", Unpublished Paper

ignore this fact. This is because, from the point of view of the historical agents who actually lived around the time of the election of 1948 (and long thereafter!), its significance was clearly different from that which historians have assigned it in retrospect.[73] In short, most white South Africans simply did not support "apartheid" as it was proposed in 1948, nor did they support it afterwards, at least until the 1960s. This was, needless to say, hardly an auspicious way for the "age of apartheid" to begin.

As one would expect, given the Nationalists' narrow and indecisive victory in the election of 1948, after 1948, the NP moved very gradually to impose its vision of apartheid on South African society and on the state.[74] Indeed, according to Rodney Davenport and Christopher Saunders, even the Department of Native Affairs was not wholeheartedly committed to "apartheid" before the appointment of H.F. Verwoerd as minister in 1950.[75] And as late as 1960, according to Giliomee and Schlemmer, apartheid policy was "hesitant and contradictory" in many areas.[76] Still, some of the key elements of the apartheid programme, especially residential and social segregation in the form of the Group Areas Act and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, were enacted into legislation relatively early. Other key elements of the apartheid programme, like the Suppression of Communism Act and the Bantu Education Act, were also enacted soon after the Nationalists had secured their grip on power. In addition, the removal of the coloureds from the common voters' roll in the Cape under the premiership of J.G. Strijdom was also, legally and constitutionally, a momentous step, as was Prime Minister Verwoerd's announcement in early 1959 that the eventual independence of South Africa's "Bantustans" would have to be contemplated by the government. In all these ways, it could fairly be said that "apartheid marked a real divide from what had gone before", in the words of Nancy Clark and William Worger.[77] But despite these significant strides forward, as the Nationalists must have seen it, the full effects of South Africa's transformation into an "apartheid state" continued to unfold over several decades.[78] Indeed, the very

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73 In many ways, at the time, the results of the election of 1948 were not seen as a referendum on apartheid at all, but as evidence either of Smuts's ineptitude, of war weariness, or of a general restlessness among the electorate See N Stultz, *Afrikaner Politics in South Africa, 1934-1948* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974), p 152 Interestingly, Stultz also provides evidence that most of the Nationalists' gains in public support after the 1943-election occurred *before* the apartheid slogan was even invented See N Stultz, *Afrikaner Politics in South Africa, 1934-1948* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974), p 154 Stultz also argues that, for 1948 to have been a "turning point" election that validated the apartheid programme, some sense of "crisis" would have had to exist In fact, voter interest and participation in 1948 seems to have been less than normal N Stultz, *Afrikaner Politics in South Africa, 1934-1948* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974), p 156

74 Not surprisingly, the first phase of "apartheid" rule is often called the "*baasskap*" or "classical" phase, underlining its continuity with Stallardist segregation See Beck, p 126

75 T R H Davenport and C Saunders, *South Africa: A Modern History* (St Martin's Press, New York, 2000), p 388

76 H Giliomee and L Schlemmer, *From Apartheid to Nation-Building* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1990), p 64

77 N Clark and W Worger, *South Africa: the Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Longman, New York, 2004), p 4

78 Bill Freund agrees that apartheid developed "in a piecemeal manner particularly before 1960" See: W Freund, *The Making of Contemporary Africa* (Rienner, Boulder, Colorado, 1998), pp 222-223 W K Hancock also states that initially "the new government [made] no irreversible changes of public policy", focusing on "*klein apartheid*" (or "petty apartheid") instead See W K Hancock, *Smuts, Fields of Force* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1968), pp 512-513 See T R H Davenport and C Saunders, *South Africa: A Modern History* (St Martin's Press, New York, 2000), p 388 Importantly, Malan was restrained by his alliance with N C Havenga's Afrikaner Party, which would not tolerate radical or unconstitutional measures

meaning of the word "apartheid" took some time to unfold![79] It would be years, for example, before the Nationalists began their apartheid policy of "forced removals" to the native reserves, or homelands. Indeed, in the short term after 1948, the Nationalists accepted that black urbanization, and thus, migration away from the reserves, would continue, and that stopping it would be economically infeasible. Likewise, the NP did not move to ban the ANC and fully repress the African resistance to white rule until after the violence associated with Sharpeville in 1960. Many other elements of the apartheid programme, such as the wholesale manipulation of the education system, and the restriction of constitutional liberties, including the right to free speech and freedom of worship, were not fully employed until years after 1948. The Nationalist government also did not pursue its goal of a republic until 1960, largely because it doubted that it could win majority support among the whites for a split with the British.[80] In many ways, in fact, 1960-1961 might be a more accurate starting point for the "age of apartheid" than 1948. After the Nationalists had survived the challenges of the mass protests and violence which followed in the wake of Sharpeville, and after they had triumphed (arguably against the odds) to obtain passage of a referendum on the republic, the dominance of the NP in South African politics, and of the apartheid ideology in South African values, was truly beyond question. Before 1960-1961, however, the South African opposition, the UP, still had definite hopes of recapturing power, and the enemies of apartheid likewise were optimistic that the reform process could be restarted. After 1960, however, the opposition's hopes dimmed substantially. At that point, one could argue, a new political "age" really had begun.[81]

Rather than fall back on a presentist periodization of South African history in the twentieth century, however, my own view is that an historical interpretation which emphasizes the continuities across artificially-constructed time periods is probably more instructive and accurate. Skinnerian historical analysis, of course, emphasizes the rhetoric, ideology and psychology of historical agents. In effect, Skinner emphasizes the importance of ideology as a decisive force in shaping social change.[82] Ideology, however, does not turn on a dime. It usually evolves slowly, and its progress is often non-linear. One of Skinner's great contributions is in his analysis of speech, especially political speech, as an *act*, as an attempt to subtly recast received ideologies and propel history in a new direction.[83] From this perspective, historical

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79 N Clark and W Worger, *South Africa: the Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Longman, New York, 2004), pp 43-44

80 The Afrikaner Party insisted that a majority of the electorate must support Republican status before a strong effort was made to achieve it See G H L le May, *The Afrikaners: An Historical Interpretation* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1995), p 205

81 G H L le May argues that it was from 1954 to 1966 that apartheid accelerated into a "period of extraordinarily rapid social and political change" – but not in 1948! See G H L le May, *The Afrikaners: An Historical Interpretation* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1995), p 212 Even after 1960, it must be said, the meaning of "apartheid" remained ambiguous See H Giliomee and L Schlemmer, *From Apartheid to Nation-Building* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1990), p vi

82 For Skinner's views on the importance of ideological and intellectual history, see Q Skinner, "Analysis of Political Thought and Action", *in* J Tully (ed), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1988), p 99

83 Skinner refers repeatedly to "speech-acts" According to Skinner, speech or writing in a political context involves the appropriation of a conventional vocabulary, and its subtle recasting to achieve the aims of the speaker See: Q Skinner, "Motives, Intentions and Interpretation", *in* J Tully (ed), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1988), pp 108 & 77 Thomas Kuhn would call this conventional vocabulary, and its associated ideas, a "paradigm" See in particular T Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 1996),

events, like elections, for example, take a backseat to shifts in ideologies or "paradigms", as Thomas Kuhn would have it, which are accomplished not in discrete time frames, but over months, years, and sometimes generations.

My own research into parliamentary rhetoric in South Africa during the years 1945-1948 has helped to illuminate just such an ideological shift. My research looks not only at the Nationalists during these years, who as we all know were espousing increasingly radical proposals for racial separation, but also at politicians in the UP, who were processing this new rhetoric and reacting to it in very interesting ways. My research helps to show how the transformation of white South African *ideology* was, in itself, the most decisive force in helping the Nationalists to victory in 1948 and to political supremacy during the next forty years. More importantly, however, my research views the period of 1945-1948 *on its own terms* – not as a bridge, or as a "transition phase". This period was, properly speaking, a time of UP dominance, and a time when the Nationalists were scrambling to inch themselves closer to respectability, let alone political power. It was also a time when the ideology of the South African political elite, and its rhetoric, were in flux, and the "apartheid mentality", as it were, was being slowly formed, both among the Nationalists themselves, among future Nationalists, and even (in inverted form) among the Nationalists' most implacable enemies. The historical fact of the Nationalist election victory in May 1948, however, and the change in governments which it involved, did not advance or retard this long-term process of ideological change in any easily discernible way.

This leads us to the conclusion that the election results of 1948 were not, in themselves, of *decisive* significance in twentieth century South African history. For, as Kenneth Ingham has observed, "Smuts's criticism of apartheid does not mean that his own native policy would necessarily have led to any different outcome."[84] Indeed, it is possible that, even had the Nationalist Party imploded in the aftermath of a hypothetical defeat in 1948, the UP might still have been compelled by ideological pressures, and more specifically by the changing views of the electorate, to reconsider its own, more liberal stance.[85] In this sense, which party gained political power in 1948 might have been largely irrelevant to the likelihood that, eventually, the *idea* of apartheid, or at least, the idea of stricter racial segregation and repression, would carry the day.[86] Most studies of twentieth century South African history, of course, suggest otherwise. They suggest, either explicitly or implicitly, that it was the agency of the NP that truly mattered in deciding the outcome of South African racial policy, and thus, of South African history. This is, however, highly debatable.

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pp 10-22 The agent then must reconfigure this "paradigm" in order to "contribute in a particular way to the treatment of some particular theme" The role of speech in social-political change is explored more thoroughly in: Q Skinner, "Language and Social Change", *in* J Tully (ed), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1988), pp 119-132

84 K Ingham, *Jan Christian Smuts* (St Martin's Press, New York, 1986), p 249

85 It may even be something of an historiographical "myth" that UP rule was significantly more liberal or "mild" than NP rule See H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, 2003), p 448

86 It is instructive in this regard that Smuts, despite his allegedly liberal racial sentiments, brutally crushed the Black Mineworkers' Strike of 1946, and he also consented to highly restrictive legislation aimed at the Indian minority in Natal Is it so inconceivable that, had he stayed in power after 1948, he would have been forced even further to the right?

The historiographical misappraisal of 1948, as I have said, is symptomatic of a much larger problem in South African history as a whole. The temptation to periodize historical study, and to do so on an essentially presentist basis, is often overpowering. Throughout the historiography of South Africa in the twentieth century, there has been an overwhelming concentration on the phenomenon of apartheid, and on the historical agents who either perpetrated it or suffered under it directly. Other processes in South African history which proceeded alongside the unfolding of apartheid, and sometimes contradicted it, have been neglected as a result.[87] As a consequence of this neglect, even apartheid itself has been misunderstood, because it has come to be viewed as an abstract, as an "endstate" or final product of racial conflict in South Africa, which all other aspects of South African history simply *must* help to "explain". Aspects of South African history which do not contribute to this mainstream narrative, or which contribute to it in complex or indirect ways, have been sidelined, and sometimes forgotten. As Thomas Kuhn has pointed out, though, it is often the inconsistencies and even the seeming absurdities in a narrative, or in a historical agent's thought, which most help to define and explain it.[88] That these inconsistencies and seeming eccentricities in South African history are so often ignored, is a very damning criticism indeed of the historiography as it presently stands. It is appropriate, therefore, to criticize the current literature on twentieth century South African history for its inaccuracies and exaggerations. It is even more important, however, to draw attention to the literature which *does not* exist, because no one has bothered to write it. It is these sins of omission committed by historians of twentieth century South Africa that arguably have been most damaging.

The key to incorporating this realisation more fully into the historiography of South Africa in the twentieth century lies in reformulating the approach historians take to South African history in a radical, but remarkably simple, way. Instead of interpreting each period in South African history from the perspective of what happened later, historians should examine each time period, and each set of historical agents, independently, aiming to understand every point in time in its full richness and complexity. Instead of viewing history as a fast-flowing stream, moving purposefully downhill to its inevitable destination, historians should look beneath the surface to uncover the swirling currents and countercurrents which make the course of history so *interesting.* Above all, it should be remembered that history is, first and foremost, the continual evolution of the human mind in new directions, and as such, it is by definition a frustratingly complex and multifaceted story. Any attempt to compress it into "turning points" and "ages", although understandable, is ultimately dangerous, because it can prevent the rest of the story from ever being told.

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87 For instance, the virtually complete neglect of the role of the UP in South African history after 1948 is a scandalous historiographical omission

88 See T Kuhn, *The Essential Tension* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 1977), p xii

Abstract

There is a tendency among historians, perhaps not surprisingly, to interpret all of twentieth century South African history in the light of apartheid and its terrible consequences. In the process, most historians have turned their attention to the period of Nationalist rule, and if they analysed other periods, they have done so all too often from an apartheid perspective, explaining apartheid's "roots". The problem, however, is that the world that most South Africans lived in before 1948, and even as late as 1960 for many, was not dominated by "apartheid". It was a complex world, whose intricacies many South African historians have yet to appreciate.

Opsomming

Gewisse Voorland: Die Presentistiese Obsessie met "Apartheid" in Suid Afrikaanse Geskiedskrywing

Daar is 'n verstaanbare neiging onder historici om alle twintigste eeuse Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis in die lig van apartheid en die geweldige gevolge daarvan te interpreteer. In die proses het die meeste historici hulle aandag op die Nasionalistiese regeringstydperk toegespits. Wanneer hulle ander tydperke geanaliseer het, is dit veels te gereeld vanuit 'n apartheidsperspektief gedoen, ten einde apartheid se "wortels" te probeer verklaar. Die probleem hiermee is dat die wêreld waarin die meeste Suid-Afrikaners voor 1948 geleef het, en vir baie selfs tot so laat as 1960, nie deur "apartheid" gedomineer is nie. Dit was 'n veel meer komplekse wêreld en talle Suid-Afrikaanse historici moet nog die verwikkeldheid daarvan leer waardeer.

Key Words

South African historiography, apartheid, segregation, Quentin Skinner, Nationalist Party, United Party, 1948, Afrikaners, English-speaking whites, elections.

Sleutelwoorde

Suid-Afrikaanse historiografie, apartheid, segregasie, Quenin Skinner, Nasionale Party, Verenigde Party, 1948, Afrikaners, Engelssprekende wittes, verkiesings.