

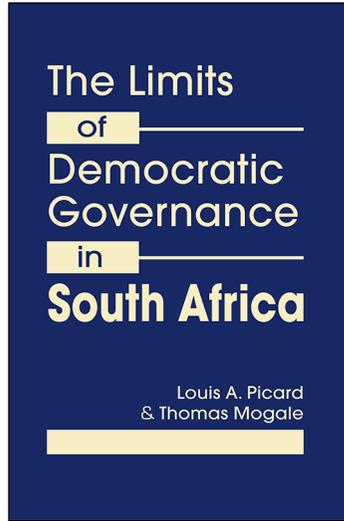
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The Limits of  
Democratic Governance  
in South Africa

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and Thomas Mogale

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# 1

## Political Development in South Africa

*I had always wanted to possess a country of my own. I did not want a large country that would be bound to get me in trouble . . . but one quite small, and preferably round.<sup>1</sup>*

*Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human.<sup>2</sup>*

This book focuses on South Africa: its politicians and bureaucrats, the people they are supposed to serve, and especially the long-suffering residents of the urban slums and the rural villages who still have not benefited from the promises of development made since 1994 and the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the country's president. The book is also about an often-elusive concept called "decentralization"—a political and administrative response by national political leaders designed to ensure that government serves the people effectively.

South Africa's transition to majority rule and nonracial government is well known. After years of sanctions and internal and external violence, the African National Congress and other antiapartheid organizations were unbanned on February 2, 1990. Nelson Mandela and other antiapartheid leaders went from the jail cell to the negotiation table. After majority rule elections April 26–28, 1994, Nelson Mandela was sworn in as president of South Africa on May 10, 1994.

Like France and a number of Asian and African democracies, South Africa has a mixed presidential and parliamentary system. The legislature consists of a National Assembly and a National Council of Provinces. The president is selected by the parliament by majority vote, and though he does

not sit as a member, the president has the right to attend parliamentary proceedings. The president selects the deputy president and his own cabinet, subject to parliamentary investigation and review, and can be removed from office by parliament. There are three levels of government: national, intermediate, and local, as well as an independent and active judiciary.

The country has nine provinces. At the local level there are eight metropolitan municipalities, forty-four district municipalities, and 226 local municipalities, though these numbers are likely to change with several new metropolitan municipalities in the offing. There are numerous traditional authorities throughout South Africa except in the Western Cape, the only province controlled by the national opposition party, the Democratic Alliance.

Rather than focusing on these structures in this book, we examine the human dynamics of governance: the legacy urban apartheid townships and rural homelands (or Bantustans) have on local governance, intergovernmental relationships, and civil society. Our concern is with the state-centric manner in which the apartheid regime controlled black South Africans and the implications of this control for postapartheid South Africa.

We deliberately take a historical approach, using history as a methodological tool to measure change—or the lack thereof. Several interrelated sets of themes run throughout the book. First, there is a historical legacy of both participation and hierarchy that continue to define political debates in South Africa. This historical legacy became entrenched and embedded within the colonial model of prefectoralism and its opposite, the “liberatory” model of the African National Congress (ANC), which demanded political change through centralized structures.

At the subnational government level we can see two trends: (1) a promise of—or at least the demand for—local participatory governance and (2) local political elites trying to impose political structures and processes on society. This book examines the clash between those two historical trends.

What is clear is that there are common elements that, alone or in combination, create significant bottlenecks from a social and economic development perspective and distort patterns of governance in South Africa. Further, we recognize that the failure of the local state has been more profound in Africa than in any other part of the world and that state failure has been the cause of grief, terror, economic stagnation, and—in some countries—war, starvation, and death. There is a concern here that South Africans may one day share the fate of many in the rest of Africa, particularly those who reside in its urban slums and in its rural areas.

We also know that in Africa, government responses are often influenced by the priorities and demands of the international donor community through assistance programs and policy reform mandates. These donors often operate without knowledge of the local patterns of governance and

their relationship to social and economic development. Our argument here is that to understand governance in South Africa today, one must look at the long, mostly tortured history of governance over the past 400 years. A number of themes stand out from the long-term perspective. First, there is a pattern of grassroots and participatory values that begin with the Western Cape hunter-gatherers, include Afrikaner nationalist demands, and resemble the township and mobilization models of the ANC and other African nationalist movements of the twentieth century.

## **Local Governance and Central Control**

Although we attempt to contribute to an understanding of the theories and practices of local governance, we focus our attention on the people who make up government, the people who are affected by the government, and the social fabric that ideally binds societies together. Throughout we raise two questions: Why do so many policies fail to deliver when implemented? What is it about the nature of center-periphery relations that has prevented the establishment of local government structures responsible for delivering the goods at the local level? We have not been able to discover a single, fundamental answer to either question, nor do we think there is one. However, this study tries to understand the difficulties inherent in effective local governance.

### *The Local State*

The storyline here is what some South African writers have called the local state—that is, how the state system functions at the local level. We accept the premise that in 1990 (and perhaps in 2012) the crisis of local government formed an important part of the national crisis in South Africa.<sup>3</sup> This analysis reflects a variation on a theme that is valid for most of sub-Saharan Africa. Ultimately, democratic governance and liberalism are defined, at least in part, by local institutions of devolved governance and by the assumption that the goals of democratic governance would be best achieved by enhancing the links between government and society and by building local institutions that balance central power.

We have two concerns in our discussion of the local state. First, it is important to understand the historical impact of the state's local-level apparatus on South African society today. Second, given that bureaucratic and control structures are often more durable than personalities and political movements, an analysis of the local state may identify the extent to which patterns of local administration and control have survived into the post-apartheid, majority-rule state.

In South Africa, an examination of the local state provides the context for state transformation and continuity at the national level. We argue here that the local state is not synonymous with local government. The local state delineates the state's impact upon society and involves the many forms of political and bureaucratic control that we identify as prefectoralism. We believe that South Africa shares inherited patterns of dyarchy (two parallel forms of government operating separately but simultaneously)<sup>4</sup> with the other postcolonial societies of Africa. Elements of the local government and local state coexist within the same political space. These overlapping jurisdictions may have harmed the evolution toward a democratic developmental state.

All forms of local, intermediate, and national administration, including traditional administration and bureaucratic control, the existing state apparatus, parastatal organizations, and public corporations are included in the local-state concept. In South Africa, the nonracial government<sup>5</sup> inherited a seventy-year pattern of top-down policymaking, which culminated in a decade of state security management through P. W. Botha's Total Strategy of the 1980s. That pattern of top-down policymaking continued into the twenty-first century under President Thabo Mbeki (1999–2008) and President Jacob Zuma (2009–).<sup>6</sup>

The nature of the segregationist and apartheid states in South Africa meant that the implementation of control processes often played out at the local level, where the state has a direct impact upon society. Despite the nonracial elections of April 26–28, 1994, the legacy of the local state system and the political and criminal violence spawned out of it still threaten to damage the social fabric of postapartheid society in both urban and rural South Africa. As we will see, the role of local government entities in South Africa remains ambiguous after twenty years of nonracial government.

The devolution of authority is a key factor in the movement away from authoritarian, centralized decisionmaking.<sup>7</sup> Africa's experience suggests that decentralization, as a value system, is not embedded in development planning and management. Donors tend to work with, and strengthen, central structures. Academics often look at the central government as the key to development efforts, and some of the literature on development administration has stressed the need for a centralized developmental state. The centralized state should provide wide latitude for autonomy, be constitutionally guaranteed, be large enough to govern and support significant development efforts, and be accountable to a locally based electorate.<sup>8</sup> For some academics, decentralized government is difficult because it is seen as a threat to national elites. Rather than devolving power, central state managers prefer to deconcentrate power to loyal field agents at the grassroots level.

Deconcentrated officials in less-developed states often fail as modernizers because they remain detached from local social forces and civil society groups. Many African countries have been unable to raise sufficient revenue, unable to recruit skilled personnel, and unable to maintain grassroots faith in government. South Africa's future depends on generating revenue and recruiting skilled professionals for urban and rural local governments.

The alternative to the centralized nondevelopmental state is local self-governance, where the state's primary role is to provide a framework of rules that empower and facilitate a development environment at the grassroots level.<sup>9</sup> Economic and social development requires local initiative. Mobilization and consciousness-raising must start with the individual and small groups of neighbors, not with the hierarchical commands of the authoritarian political movement.

Political space can best be measured at the local level. Are people free to make choices about their own future and their own development priorities? Can local government deliver the social services (health, water, and education) that are the prerequisites for development?<sup>10</sup>

We argue that for poor, vulnerable, and powerless people and communities, sustainable development also involves the struggle for rights and participation in processes that lead to local-level governance and "people-centered" development.<sup>11</sup> For them, development is not about creating new civil service jobs for the middle class, raising the salaries of the urban labor elite, or perpetuating high levels of consumerism among political elites. Indeed, while civil servants, a labor elite, and business oligarchs are likely to be linked to a hegemonic state, the poor and powerless need democratic self-governance at the local level. The argument here is that local-level self-governance is key to the establishment of a developmental state.

This chapter provides a contextual and historical background in which to understand the nature of the local institutional state in South Africa. We examine the legacy of colonial and apartheid institutions and the social and political values that they generated. These values affected organizational arrangements during the colonial period and during the period of Union (1910–1948) and Nationalist (1948–1994) governments that followed. Rather than being a departure from an earlier policy of racial domination, separate development (apartheid) reflects a continuity of domestic colonial relationships that goes back to the early nineteenth century and the interaction between Dutch settlements and British rule during that period.

### *The Current Book*

We begin with an overview of the problem of the local state in South Africa. This chapter and the next put issues of local governance in a com-

parative context within Africa to generate lessons that may be of some relevance for the nonracial South Africa.

The rest of this chapter examines an interrelated set of themes that provide a basis for understanding the history of local governance in South Africa. In the next section we briefly examine the nature and assumptions of South Africans, discuss decentralization as a concept, and detail the intersection of governance and control in colonial Africa, focusing on what we call prefectoralism as both a set of structures and a mindset. We ask how does one understand the movement from an indigenous society in fourteenth-century South Africa to the dynamic, but flawed industrial state that is South Africa today? The key is to understand the dynamics of local governance at the base of the state system.

Following this, we examine patterns of local governance in Anglophone Africa, beginning with a look at traditional values, and then go on to look at the movement toward indirect rule in Africa in the interwar period and patterns of local government in the late colonial period. We then provide an overview of postcolonial local government, discuss the reasons for the failure of local government in Africa, and look at center-periphery tensions in contemporary Africa.

Next we examine what we call the prefectoral mentality, the set of structures and mindset that has evolved in South Africa for the past 400 years. We provide an overview of local governance in South Africa during the imperial period. Following this, we focus on the institutional inheritance of South Africa in the Union period and the control mechanisms that came with it.

The last four chapters of the book look at local government during the transition to a postapartheid South Africa, beginning with an examination of the local state in South Africa in the 1980s and the way that negotiations to end apartheid impacted local government and local government policy during the Government of National Unity. We go on to look at rural local government and the continued debates on traditional authorities in postapartheid South Africa. The last chapter of the book examines developments in local government during the presidencies of Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma and draws some conclusions about subnational governance and civil society in South Africa.

## **The South African State: An Overview**

### *The Contemporary State*

The South African state can be defined by its robust industrial and mineral-based economy and its tortured racial history. The contemporary South

African state began in June 1994 with the first nonracial elections in the country's history. This followed 200 years of racially defined economic development and white minority regimes propped up first by colonialism, later by authoritarianism, and ultimately by the quasi-military structure known as apartheid.

South Africa has a population of nearly 53 million people. It is a very large country with 1.2 million square kilometers, roughly twice the size of Texas or France. South Africa is divided both racially and linguistically. There are four major racial groups in the country, and most individuals speak at least one of nine major African languages. The largest group, 79 percent of the population, is African. The next largest group, classified as white or European, constitutes 9.1 percent of the population, with a so-called mixed race group (people of mixed European, Asian, and African heritage) accounting for a further 9 percent. Non-Africans speak either English or Afrikaans as a first language (though some South African Asians also speak an Indian language). Just under 3 percent of the population is of Indian or Asian heritage, including people from China and Japan.<sup>12</sup> Combined, non-Africans constitute 21 percent of the population as of 2010.

South Africa is one of the most urbanized and highly industrialized countries in Africa. Over 61 percent of South Africa's population is urban, and the country continues to rapidly urbanize. However, rural South Africans, who total just over 20 million people, are overwhelmingly poor. Though it has high levels of educational development and health-care capacity, it has one of the most unequal distributions of income in the world.<sup>13</sup> This gap has strong implications for South Africa's municipal administration, which is most highly developed in South Africa's urban and peri-urban areas.

The 39 percent of South Africans who live in small towns and farms live and work on the 12 percent of the land that is arable. Large areas of the country are desert or semi-desert. The country has vast amounts of industrial minerals that support its urban base, industrial production, and export trade.

### *Core Values and the Local State*

Ruling elites have encouraged the notion of multiple South Africas. This image goes back to the nineteenth century at least. Anthony Sampson puts it this way: "South Africa seemed not so much a real country as a map of the mind in which anyone could find his own place."<sup>14</sup> In essence, this mindset amounted to a denial that South Africa existed as an actual place with physical space.

If the Dutch and the British brought competing ideologies of colonialism, nationalism, and liberalism to South Africa in the nineteenth century,

these “isms” were met and challenged by traditional African values. Liberalism as a formal ideology predominated at the end of the Government of National Unity among South African elites, both among black Africans (if uneasily) as well as among Afrikaners and Anglophones. This liberalism reflected a democratic tendency that has penetrated every political forum in South Africa. The dominant values are what one observer calls the “Anglo centric educational background” of educated elites.<sup>15</sup> Some critics express concern that beneath the liberal façade of South Africa lies a tendency toward authoritarianism.

Historically, Dutch and British values (as well as those of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent) clashed with indigenous Khoi and San social norms and with the value system of the majority of Bantu-language speakers who inhabited the subcontinent. Khoisian values largely died out or have been integrated into the values of the mixed race (“coloured”) population in the Western Cape. As “the land of the indigenous nomadic herdsmen, the khoikhoi (Hottentots), was progressively expropriated and eventually they, together with Malay slaves from the Dutch East Indies and the offspring of mixed race marriages, became the Cape Coloured People.”<sup>16</sup>

Traditional Bantu values have evolved and remain powerful, particularly in the rural areas of the country. The role that traditional values will play in a future South Africa still remains uncertain, even though millions of South Africans continue to live within traditional value systems. Both the South African government and the ANC have expressed a renewed interest in traditional governance.

Ideas play an important role in making history in South Africa, as well as in current policies. Idealists have sometimes exaggerated the power of ideas, but historical materialists have never effectively debunked that argument.<sup>17</sup> In South Africa, the writing of history has both suffered from a limited historiographical tradition and contributed to the mythologies of racial separation.<sup>18</sup> Three historical schools have dominated South African historiography: liberalism, Afrocentrism, and Marxism. According to T. R. H. Davenport, “The study of South African history, so dependent in the early part of this century on the work of George McCall Theal [with his focus on missionary values], has undergone two significant changes in the twentieth century and is now involved in the beginnings of a third.”<sup>19</sup>

The liberal approach is also known as the Macmillan school, after W. M. Macmillan, who questioned “the validity of the received version, above all in its presumption in favour of the ‘colonial’ as against the ‘missionary’ point of view in the inter-racial controversies of the early nineteenth century.”<sup>20</sup> Second, the Africanist approach takes an Afrocentric rather than a Eurocentric view. In the post–World War II period, the emphasis has been on the indigenous peoples of Africa and on decolonizing the history of

Africa. Finally, there is the Marxist approach, with its critique of liberals for ignoring the influence of rival power groups or class conflict. The debate among these three schools concerned which fundamental values would predominate in a postapartheid South Africa.

The approach used here, while recognizing the importance of materialism as a motivating force, takes the position that values are based upon a multiplicity of concerns. It is essential to understand the core values that make up South African society, including traditionalism, communalism, liberalism, trusteeship, and modernization, as well as a number of variations on class analysis. European and African values, plus ideas such as nonviolence generated by immigrants from Asia, combine with indigenous values to make up the rich mosaic of South African intellectual life.

There are two views on society in postapartheid South Africa. The traditional view suggests that South Africa remains divided along racial, ethnic, and class lines and that these contending civil societies need to learn to interact with each other.<sup>21</sup> At issue is the extent to which South African nationalism was substantially different from the emerging nationalisms in the rest of Africa because of its permanent multiracial minority of close to 21 percent. The other view is that South Africa is moving toward a common set of values.

The division between black and white, “the division that runs through the psyche of the nation,” runs deep in South African culture.<sup>22</sup> Despite this divide, however, South Africans share common values perched on top of the social, economic, and political divisions of the country. Many people of varying backgrounds have knowledge of more than one language and are culturally fluid.

During the 1970s and 1980s, there were “cultural borrowings that to some extent crossed racial boundaries.”<sup>23</sup> The assumption of many watching South Africa was that “most South Africans [were] working to form a single nation—the rainbow nation.”<sup>24</sup> It is certainly true that some South Africans, both black and white, have begun to broaden their self-identity to groups that were formerly “others.”<sup>25</sup> Increasingly, there are people in South Africa who feel connected through deeper values, despite their diversity and cultural differences.<sup>26</sup> As the late Nadine Gordimer notes, increasingly South Africans now accept each other “as a common relative in the human family.”<sup>27</sup>

However, some observers suggest that this acceptance is a myth. For these critics, South Africa has not become the rainbow nation that Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu hoped for, but rather remains a deeply divided country. And there is still concern among scholars that the divisions in this society, including ethnic language, racial, socioeconomic, and class divisions, will not survive continued violence, including criminal violence, in a new open democracy with a majority government.<sup>28</sup> Some critics of the

one-nation idea point out that only 13 percent of South Africans identify themselves as such, without reference to race, ethnicity, or culture.

It was not that long ago that Afrikaners and blacks were both at the bottom of the class scale. But today, “blacks and Boers [farmers] have a great deal in common, and are often able to bridge the apartheid divide more easily than English speaking South Africans.”<sup>29</sup> As Denis Beckett puts it, “There can be few white men on the planet who have closer physical contact with black men than the working class Boer.”<sup>30</sup>

The rainbow nation sentiment dominated the ANC-Lusaka meetings with white South Africans in the late 1980s.<sup>31</sup> Such a vision assumed that a future South African political culture would emerge from a common, distinctively South African, synthesis.<sup>32</sup> The intimate relationship between African and Afrikaner, particularly in the rural areas of South Africa, defines this synthesis. For Charles van Onselen, “When an authentic South African identity eventually emerges from the troubled country it will, in large part, have come from painful shared experiences on the highveld.”<sup>33</sup>

There is some evidence of common values grounded in terms of a South African political culture. At question is whether a peaceful and adaptable society that recognizes and respects the rule of law can be achieved in South Africa.<sup>34</sup> For many—but not all—South Africans, race is no longer the central organizing force of society.<sup>35</sup> This view suggests that there is a South African bond that, at least at an elite level, can cross ethnic and racial differences. It is a bond of “mutual attachment to the same country despite racial and political differences.”<sup>36</sup> Institutions of local governance are central to getting the rules of the political game right. Nationalism in South Africa, if it is to provide for political stability, should and will not be ethnically based but rather derived from shared social, economic, and political concerns and a common history.<sup>37</sup> “What is unique for the RSA [Republic of South Africa],” according to Jan-Erik Lane and Murray Faure, “is the strong emphasis upon constitutional mechanisms, i.e., for getting the constitutional rules right and the setting up of institutions for the implementation of a large variety of constitutional provisions.”<sup>38</sup> From this, one could conclude that South Africans share a common patriotism, values, spirituality, and humanity.

Over the past 200 years, African, Asian, and European values have circulated and blended in South Africa.<sup>39</sup> The most important of these values is popular democracy through democratic governance and based upon Afrikaner civil religion (an ideology of ethnically defined values) since World War II, despite its distortion by racism.<sup>40</sup> This populist democratic value system is the hope for the future.

The synthesis, however, is not yet entirely apparent. During the 1994 elections, political movements and opposition groups claimed specific

swaths of territory and excluded other groups from these spaces (including most townships, parts of Natal and the Transkei). Voting patterns from 1994, 1999, 2004, and 2009 and the 1995–1996, 2000, 2006, and 2011 local government elections suggest that ethnic cleavages define voting (the election results mirrored ethnic demographics), and, for all intents and purposes, South Africa is a one-party state.

The negotiated agreement leading to the 1994 elections provided the opportunity to define a common set of values, such as an inclusive nation-building nationalism, a liberal democratic constitution, and a strategy of economic growth driven by a competitive market economy. It also provided for intergovernmental relations among the three levels of government, which were constitutionally entrenched. However, also coming out of the negotiated agreement is a continued advocacy by some of ethnic exclusivism, or by others of nonracial nation building, which can be seen as either “Jacobin intolerance”<sup>41</sup> or the continued protection of privilege. These competing perspectives are central to issues of local governance in South Africa.

## Local Governance and State Institutions

### *The Centralized State and Society*

In England, at the beginning of the twentieth century, democratic local government led to great programs of gas and water linkages, housing projects, slum clearance, the establishment of art galleries, parks, public baths, and sewage and sanitation projects. Local government reform proved to be the political remedy to poverty and despotism in Europe, and similar results have occurred in other parts of the world. Local governance has its historical origins in the extension of voting rights to local governments in Europe, which were granted wide powers of administration, financed by taxes. Local government became an instrument of reform, and public servants generally carried out their duties with honesty. Local government careers attracted some of most-talented members of the middle class.<sup>42</sup> The English definition of local governance is at once localized and at the same time accepted throughout Britain and the old Dominions. It did not export well throughout much of the non-white British Empire, however.

The patterns of segregation and apartheid that characterized twentieth-century South Africa had their origins in the nineteenth century and came out of British colonial rule and the frontier experience of Dutch-speaking settlers interacting with the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa. Territorial and political segregation policies imposed by European settlers

reduced the black numerical majority into a de facto minority that had little power in the South African state.<sup>43</sup>

Historically, as we will see, Africans could only gain experience in public management in segregated, corrupt subnational governments infused with an administrative culture of prefectoralism. As recently as 1994, blacks made up only 10 percent of the Public Service Association, the elite civil service advocacy organization. Efforts at affirmative action have depended upon recruitment from outside the civil service for senior government positions, short-term bridge training, and a long-term educational program to develop the skill pool needed to ensure effective and efficient public sector management after the transition. Following the five-year constitutional transition period (1994–1999), in 2000, the results were not promising. At the end of the Mbeki presidency, the situation within the local level civil service appeared to get worse, and under Jacob Zuma South African subnational governments continued to face significant capacity shortages, unfunded mandates, and budgetary deficits as well as increased detachment of local government officials from the concerns of good governance.<sup>44</sup>

The South African centralized state, as a colonial inheritance, functioned in relationship to civil society in a way that was racially based and ethnically defined. For black South Africans living outside of white-majority areas, the local state<sup>45</sup> remained colonial and authoritarian. Thus, democratic participatory culture depended largely on the degree of pluralism embedded in a wider network of state and social institutions. This must include local-level political structures. Stable democracies require social strength to maintain a civil society and a bureaucracy that sees themselves as part of an institution, as having interests that go beyond their own organizational or class interests.<sup>46</sup> Thus “institution building” should take precedence over “nation building” in a multiethnic country.<sup>47</sup>

Democratically based civil society requires an institutionalized democratic process where there are consensually but firmly defined values and institutional rules for policy debate. In South Africa, civil society needs to be made up of multiracial, cross-sectional political parties that promote consensus rather than cleavage, a public service sector defined by a democratic culture, and an independent elite led by mass-based organizations, private entrepreneurial bodies, and popular social movements that can drive the political system and act as a watchdog over the state.<sup>48</sup> These are tall orders for a racially and ethnically splintered society.

A major assumption of this book is that ethnicity and culture are important, but the relative importance of ethnicity, as a factor, is contextual to the social, economic, and political environment of the time. There is no mystifying cultural essence to any of the social groupings in South Africa. However, the diverse racial and ethnic groups in the country have all had group-

defined interests and actions. At the same time, there is, and has been for some time, a single social system that spans all South Africa.<sup>49</sup>

Between 1990 and 1994, rules in South Africa were largely defined via the negotiated transition. These rules provided the country with a limited, formalized political democracy at the national and subnational levels. However, in the aftermath of the 1994 elections, the rules were often undefined and open-ended, and the future of local governance and civil society remained uncertain.

Democratic governance is more than elections and transparency at the national level. A civil society requires local government structures and processes that are pluralist and participatory. For good government to occur, participatory processes need to evolve at the level where public institutions and policies most impact society. It is at this grassroots or primary level where dialogue occurs between the state and its citizens and where interest-based organizations and community-based groups both compete with each other and form partnerships with accountable, representative local authorities.

### *The Developmental State*

In the 1980s and 1990s, ideas about local governance and civil society reflected the ongoing uncertainties about the nature of the state in a development context. In the past thirty years, debate among both practitioners and academics has swung between autonomy and centralism as appropriate strategies of development. The developmental state, as it evolved in the 1950s, was state-centric and took the Indian Five-Year Plan, established under the British Raj, as its model. The state would define and manage development efforts. Planning was hierarchical and top-down.

By the late 1960s, ideas of development had become more localized with concern for appropriate technologies and grassroots efforts. By the end of the 1970s, observers despaired about the appropriate form of (national or local) government involvement in socioeconomic change. Privatization and policy reform became code words for reduced management, private sector development, and strict limits on state authority. By the end of the 1980s, it became clear that early optimism about the long-term impact of policy reform was unwarranted. By the first decade of the twenty-first century it was obvious that developing societies are complex and require a robust, yet limited, government and a strong private sector embedded in civil society values. A combination of democratic governance and civil society is the real key to economic transformation.

Advocates of civil society have been disenchanted with both state-centric models of change and naïve arguments about unfettered private enterprise development. Democratic governance involves a pluralist form

of decisionmaking, a role for voluntary associations and community-based organizations, a strong and diversified private sector, and decentralized forms of political participation. In the 1990s and into the 2000s, patterns of governance, specifically decentralized government, again became central to thinking about social and economic development around the world.

### *Decentralization as a Concept*

Decentralization is an elusive concept often used by practitioners and scholars to understand the role of local government in the development process. The term means different things to different people. According to Rondinelli and Cheema, decentralization is “the transfer of planning, decision making, or administrative authority from the central government to its field organizations, local administrative units, semi-autonomous and parastatal organizations, local governments, or non-governmental organizations.”<sup>50</sup>

Decentralization of authority usually includes the ability to raise taxes, spend, access capital markets, and make policy within their own jurisdictions.<sup>51</sup> Other aspects of decentralization involve the ability to control and select personnel and judicial autonomy. What is often missing from technical discussions of decentralization is the devolution of political power; that is, granting local officials autonomy of action. The key characteristics of decentralization are the extent to which fiscal powers are decentralized, local government borrowing is permitted, and intergovernmental grants are used to flatten out inequity.

Decentralization is an umbrella term that incorporates four types of transfer of authority from the national state to subnational organizations. First, political decentralization or devolution of power refers to the transfer of political authority from one level of government and one level of political elites to another lower level. The constitutional entrenchment of this division of authority is usually referred to as federalism.

Second, administrative decentralization or deconcentration of power refers to the transfer of fiscal, personnel, or program policy from the central bureaucracy to a geographically or functionally separate field administration. The location of political authority remains largely unchanged—at the center. Decentralization to locally based bureaucrats is often referred to as the creation of a local state.

Third, delegation of power refers to the transfer of authority from a government structure to an autonomous or semiautonomous organization, a special authority, a parastatal, or a public corporation.

Fourth, privatization refers to the transfer of economic authority from the central government to a nongovernmental, not-for-profit, or profit-making organization.

While analytically we can separate these four functions, in reality they are often intertwined both in the bureaucratic sense and at the policy level. Thus, we focus largely on the first two forms of decentralization: devolution of power and deconcentration of authority from central to local government. Decentralization, as we use the term, has both political and administrative dimensions and, at the heart of the strategy, is an effort to reorient power-sharing relationships and increase participation.

In its purest form, political decentralization is the devolution of power to local-level political elites, individuals with a constituency separate from that of the national leadership. In Africa, we most often see a variant of administrative decentralization (or deconcentration), where limited authority is delegated to officials who represent the state at the local level. Because of the way decentralization has occurred, patterns of local governance in the 1990s in practice came to mean local administration by representatives of the central government. In many parts of Africa local authorities are dependent on the center for financial and physical resources, their autonomy is limited, and local participation is weak to nonexistent.

Deconcentration entails the dispersion or redistribution of administrative responsibilities from central government ministries or departments to field offices. There is no transfer of political power to the periphery. The main variations in deconcentration include: field administration, where some decisionmaking discretion is transferred to field staff; local administration, where subordinate levels of government become agents of the central authority; and functional administration, where deconcentration occurs within specific sectors such as health, education, and agriculture. Within a geographical unit there are two types of local administration—what Smith categorizes as integrated and unintegrated “prefectoral systems.”<sup>52</sup> “Prefectoralism” is a conceptual term that defines appointed central authorities at the subnational level. In the early days, white magistrates served as prefects in South Africa. Later “native” or “Bantu” commissioners functioned as prefects in the parts of South Africa reserved for blacks.

Integrated systems are forms of deconcentration in which the field staff of central departments work within a local jurisdiction under the direction and coordination of a chief executive—a prefect—appointed by and responsible to the central government. In unintegrated systems, local field staff operate independently of each other and report directly to their central parent departments in the capital city. The field administrator or prefect is responsible for law and order and residual administration functions that are not sectorally divided.

Devolution involves the transfer of both responsibilities and political power to the local governments. The assumption is that devolution devolves power in a series of different locations so that a space is created in which minority interests can be more influential.<sup>53</sup> The subsidiary levels of

government are autonomous, independent, and widely recognized as distinct political entities within a geographical area. They have a corporate status and the power to secure resources to perform their functions. Rondinelli and Cheema perhaps offer the most complete definition of devolution as an arrangement in which there are reciprocal, mutually beneficial, and coordinated relationships between central and local governments. The local government, thus, has the ability to interact reciprocally with other government units. The concept of devolution is nonhierarchical in that governments coordinate with one another on an independent, reciprocating basis.

Most often governments in developing countries have adopted mixed or dual local government systems, with characteristics lying somewhere between deconcentration and devolution. In eastern and southern Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Kenya are recognized as having dual systems, and they have experienced a variety of problems ranging from conflict over resources and responsibilities to regional or ethnic political rivalries.<sup>54</sup> The possible variations existing within this continuum of deconcentration through devolution explains the high frequency of administrative reforms in many African countries.

In practice, decentralization is a matter of degree, and thus countries or organizations cannot be fitted neatly into the various categories of decentralization. Moreover, within one country we could identify a variety of types and degrees of decentralization, depending on the type of organization examined. Even more interesting is the gap between the rhetoric and the practice of decentralization among both politicians and administrators.

### *Prefectoralism as a Structure and a Mindset*

The office of the prefect, a territorial governor appointed by a central authority, has its origins in the absolutist period in Europe, when the prefect was the territorial representative of the monarch. European imperialists transferred the office to many areas of Africa and Asia.<sup>55</sup> The judicial and administrative role of the South African prefect, later styled “native commissioner” in the rural reserves of South Africa (and magistrate and commissioner later in the Bantustan homelands), was the counterpart of the district officer, commandant, district commissioner, and collector in other parts of imperial Africa and Asia.

The French prefectoral system, coming out of Napoleonic France, is usually cited as the ideal integrated prefectoral system. The term “integrated” refers to a dual relationship between the prefect and other central government field officers and between the prefect and local government.<sup>56</sup> In the classic integrated prefectoral system, the field administrator is the responsible authority outside the capital, carries what in Francophone Africa is called the *tutelle*,<sup>57</sup> and has authority over other government offi-

cial within his jurisdiction. The integrated prefectural system increases interaction between the local population and field staff, as well as among the various government field offices. This system can lead to a better-motivated public and optimal utilization of local resources. Popular participation in decisionmaking can also lead to improved political and administrative participation in rural areas, which implies greater support for government policies, greater political stability, and greater equity in the distribution of the benefits of development.<sup>58</sup>

Until the late twentieth century, prefectoralism was the dominant mechanism of state control outside of the United States and its formal territories, the British home islands, and parts of Latin America. Throughout the world, prefects continue to function as mechanisms of social and political control in the twenty-first century. Prefectoralism, however, both as a structure and a mindset, is a worldview based on centralized authority. As a mindset, prefectoralism will continue until economic development and technological complexity advance to a level that requires specialized administration and organized pluralist interests demand access to the specialized state.

In Western Europe, as a result of advanced economic development, the role of the prefect has been in decline. This is also the case in South Africa where prefectural structures have largely—though not completely—disappeared. Yet prefectoralism as a formula for political control remains an important factor in elite decisionmaking.

## **Conclusion**

To understand governance in South Africa today, one must look at the region's long, mostly tortured history of governance over the past 400 years. A number of themes stand out. First, there is a pattern of grassroots and participatory values that begins with the Western Cape hunter-gatherers, including Afrikaner nationalist demands, and the township and mobilization models of the ANC and the other African nationalist movements of the twentieth century.

However, an opposition trend, patriarchal authoritarianism, also moves through South Africa from hierarchical traditional authority, through the colonialism of the prefect as “the tutor” to locals, to the authoritarianism of the apartheid regime. The apartheid regime created a system of dependent appendages as intermediate governance mechanisms that have as yet to be fully integrated into the political system. This hierarchical model remains firmly in place through the continuing ideological lenses of some in the ANC and the South African Communist Party as well as the fragment of collectivism that South African leaders have come to call cooperative government.

This is the dialectic to be addressed in this book. The backdrop is the richness of debate, the drama of conflict, and the routinization of hierarchy that is South African local governance at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. It is also important to note that South Africa is an African state, and though many South Africans do not like to hear it, there are lessons, both good and bad, that South Africans can learn from their neighbors on the continent. Chapter 2 provides a framework for understanding local governance debates in South Africa.

## Notes

1. Aubrey Menen, *The Prevalence of Witches* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 1. Picard notes that the late Hugh Charles Hooks drew his attention to this classic many years ago.

2. Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), p. 31.

3. Jeremy Grest, "The Crisis of Local Government in South Africa," in *State, Resistance, and Change in South Africa*, ed. Phillip Frankel, Noam Pines, and Mark Swilling (London: Croom Helm, 1988), p. 110.

4. The term is most often used to describe the system instituted in India and its nine provinces under the 1919 Constitution, which divided functions between the British governor general and largely self-governing provincial administrations.

5. We use the term "nonracial" with hesitance since South Africa still bears the cross of racial segregation and apartheid. The term respects the aspirations of many if not most South Africans and is common terminology there. For that reason we use the term to define the post-1994 period.

6. This point is made in the special pullout section of the *Economist* (June 5, 2010). See especially the article, "Your Friendly Monolith: The ANC Remains All Powerful," pp. 4–5.

7. Vino Naidoo, "The State of the Public Service," in *State of the Nation: South Africa 2003–2004*, ed. John Daniel, Adam Habib, and Roger Southall (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council Press, 2003), p. 126.

8. Dele Olowu, "The Failure of Decentralization Programs in Africa," in *The Failure of the Centralized State: Institutions and Self-Governance in Africa*, ed. James Wunsch and Dele Olowu (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 85–86.

9. James S. Wunsch and Dele Olowu, "The Failure of the Centralized African State," in *The Failure of the Centralized State*, p. 14.

10. For a discussion of this see United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report, 1994* (New York: UNDP, 1994).

11. See Guy Gran, *Development by People: Citizen Construction of a Just World* (New York: Praeger, 1983).

12. *South African Surveys: The Millennium Edition 2000/2001* (Pretoria: South African Institute of Race Relations, 2001).

13. See the end of apartheid debates in Robert Schrire, *Wealth or Poverty? Critical Choices for South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1992).

14. Anthony Sampson, *Black and Gold: Tycoons, Revolutionaries, and Apartheid* (London: Coronet Books, 1987), p. 21.

15. Justin Cartwright, *Not Yet Home: A South African Journey* (London: Fourth Estate, 1996), p. 22.
16. Peter Hain, *Sing the Beloved Country: The Struggle for the New South Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 1996), p. 5.
17. Leonard Thompson, *The Political Mythology of Apartheid* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 241.
18. "Problems of Southern African Historiography" (unpublished essay, February 7, 1977).
19. T. R. H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1997), p. xiii.
20. Ibid.
21. Pierre du Toit, *State Building and Democracy in Southern Africa: Botswana, Zimbabwe, and South Africa* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1995), p. 231.
22. Allister Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), p. xvii.
23. William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 176.
24. James Barber, *South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (London: Blackwell, 1999).
25. J. J. van Tonder, "The Salient Features of the Interim Constitution," in *South Africa: Designing New Political Institutions*, ed. Murray Faure and Jan-Erik Lane (London: Sage Publications, 1996), pp. 11–33.
26. F. Van Zyl Slabbert, *Tough Choices: Reflections of an Afrikaner African* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2000), p. 82.
27. Nadine Gordimer, "Five Years into Freedom," *New York Times Magazine* (June 27, 1999): 19.
28. van Tonder, "The Salient Features of the Interim Constitution," p. 27.
29. David Goodman, *Faultlines: Journeys into the New South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 7.
30. Denis Beckett, *Madibaland* (Cape Town: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 69.
31. Patti Waldemeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle: The End of Apartheid and the Birth of the New South Africa* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), p. 64.
32. For a discussion and critique of this view, see George M. Fredrickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 284–286.
33. Charles van Onselen, *The Seed Is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894–1985* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), p. 270 and p. vi, respectively.
34. Frank Welsh, *South Africa: A Narrative History* (New York: Kodansha International, 1999), p. xxv.
35. Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa* (New York: Random House Digital, 2007), p. 270.
36. Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow Is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Road to Change* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), p. 82.
37. Fredrickson, *Black Liberation*, p. 285.
38. Jan-Erik Lane and Murray Faure, "Introduction" in *South Africa: Designing New Political Institutions*, ed. Murray Faure and Jan-Erik Lane (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), p. 1.
39. Ivan Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 196.

40. Ronald Christenson, "The Civil Religion of Apartheid: Afrikanerdom's Covenant," *The Midwest Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (Winter 1979): 138.

41. From the French Revolution, defining a populist, radical view of social change.

42. Rayne Kruger, *Goodbye Dolly Gray: The Story of the Boer War* (London: Cassell, 1959), p. 3.

43. Fredrickson, *Black Liberation*, p. 6.

44. A situation confirmed a year into the presidency of Jacob Zuma. See Celia W. Dugger, "A President Stirs Hope, But Has Yet to Deliver," *New York Times*, June 8, 2010, A4, A8.

45. Golding notes the "hidden details" of the internal state strategies with respect to its employees under the apartheid system and uses the term "local state." See Marcel Golding, "Workers in the State Sector: The Case of the Civil Administration," *South African Labour Bulletin* 10, no. 5 (April 1985): 40–56.

46. See Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); du Toit, *State Building and Democracy*, p. 269.

47. Heribert Adam, Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, and Kogila Moodley, *Comrades in Business: Post-Liberation Politics in South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1997), p. 103.

48. Philip Schmitter discussed these points in a "Workshop on the Transition from Apartheid to Democracy in South Africa" (Johannesburg, June 25–26, 1990), Picard's research diary.

49. William F. Lye and Colin Murry, *Transformations on the Highveld: The Tswana and Southern Sotho* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1980), p. 20.

50. G. S. Cheema, "Introduction," in *Decentralization and Development: Policy Implementation in Developing Countries*, ed. G. S. Cheema and D. A. Rondinelli (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1983), p. 19.

51. J. Tyler Dickovick, "The Measure and Mismeasure of Decentralisation: Subnational Autonomy in Senegal and South Africa," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 43, no. 2 (2005): 183–207.

52. See Brian Smith, *Field Administration* (London: Kegan and Paul, 1967).

53. Raymond Parsons, *The Mbeki Inheritance: South Africa's Economy, 1990–2004* (Johannesburg: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), p. 7.

54. Philip Mawhood, "Decentralization: The Concept and the Practice," in *Local Government for Development: The Experience of Tropical Africa*, ed. Philip Mawhood (Chichester, UK: John Wiley and Sons, 1983), pp. 13–14.

55. A prefect is a geographically or territorially based governor, appointed by the central government. The term was originally French. The French prefectural government is seen as representative of a highly centralized territorial administration. Though Britain does not have a prefectural form of local administration within the UK, it created prefectural administrations in most parts of its second colonial empire. See Ferrel Heady, *Public Administration: A Comparative Perspective* (New York: Marcel Dekker, 1991), pp. 176–182. On prefectoralism, see Brian C. Smith, *Decentralization: The Territorial Dimension of the State* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985). Two illustrative case studies on the evolution of prefectural government are Louis A. Picard, "Decentralization, 'Recentralization' and 'Steering Mechanisms': Paradoxes of Local Government in Denmark," *Polity* 15, no. 4 (Summer 1983): 536–554; and Louis A. Picard, "Socialism and the Field Administrator: Decentralization in Tanzania," *Comparative Politics* 12, no. 4 (July 1980): 439–457.

56. W. J. O. Jeppe, *Bophuthatswana: Land Tenure and Development* (Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch, 1980), p. 85–90.

57. The word suggests the tutor in an academic sense. See Louis A. Picard and Ezzedine Moudoud, “The 2008 Guinea Conakry Coup: Neither Inevitable nor Inexorable,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 28, no. 1 (January 2010): 51–69.

58. Dennis A. Rondinelli, “Administrative Decentralization and Economic Development: The Sudanese Experiment with Devolution,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 19, no. 4 (1981): 597. See also D. A. Kotze, “Trends in Field Administration” (Pretoria: unpublished manuscript, 1983), p. 10.

But the real contribution of the book is the authors' argument that the current paradigm of South African local government (democratic elections notwithstanding) retains the most important themes of previous epochs. Locked into a partnership of "cooperative governance" with central government, the ultimate purpose of local government is to achieve national priorities as defined by central government, rather than to provide a site of autonomous, democratic self-government at the local level. Local government works today as it has for decades, and even centuries, as a deconcentrated form of nation. The Institute for Democratic Alternatives in South Africa (IDASA) later known as the Institute for Democracy in South Africa was a South African-based think-tank organisation that was formed in 1986 by Frederik van Zyl Slabbert and Alex Boraine. Its initial focus from 1987 was creating an environment for white South Africans to talk to the banned liberation movement in-exile, the African National Congress (ANC) prior to its unbanning in 1990 by the President F. W. de Klerk. After the South African EXCERPTED FROM. The Limits of Democratic Governance in South Africa Louis A. Picard and Thomas Mogale. Copyright 2015 ISBNs: 978-1-62637-087-6 hc. 1800 30th Street, Suite 314. Our argument here. is that to understand governance in South Africa today, one must look at the long, mostly tortured history of governance over the past 400 years. A number of themes stand out from the long-term perspective. First, there is a pattern of grassroots and participatory values that begin with the Western Cape hunter-gatherers, include Afrikaner nationalist demands, and resemble the township and mobilization models of the ANC and other African nationalist movements of the twentieth century.