

# Miracle or Model? South Africa's Transition to Democracy

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Fifteen years have passed since Nelson Mandela was released from a South African prison in February 1990 and about a decade has passed since that country's first multiracial election in April 1994. The transition bracketed by those two events, i.e., the transition from an apartheid dictatorship to a multi-racial democracy, is routinely described as a "miracle," something the *American Heritage Dictionary* defines as an "event that appears unexplainable by the laws of nature and so is held to be supernatural in origin or an act of God." Patti Waldmeir's depiction of South Africa's transition, for example, is entitled *The Anatomy of a Miracle*; Adrian Guelke has written about "the Misunderstood Miracle," and Allister Sparks has titled his recent overview of the first decade of multiracial democracy *Beyond the Miracle*.<sup>1</sup> While those books concentrate largely on changes in the country's politics, others describe the changes in its economic policies as a miracle. Pamela Cox, former head of the World Bank's South Africa Division, has argued that the post-1994 African National Congress [ANC] government "inherited an economy that was in severe distress, and what they have done to put the economy on the right footing is...almost miraculous."<sup>2</sup>

Yet others are troubled by this conception of South Africa's transition. Princeton Lyman, the American ambassador to Pretoria for much of that time, has written that the "problem with painting South Africa so often as a 'miracle' is that it leads to seeing it as an aberration, a special case with limited relevance to other conflicts."<sup>3</sup> This study considers this issue; can South Africa's transition be explained by the "laws" of conflict resolution and democracy promotion and, as a result, be relevant for other cases, or should it be considered unique and as something coming from God?

## South Africa as Miracle

There are several ways that the outcome in South Africa might be considered a miracle: that it occurred at all and ended the way it did, that leading figures in the transition process behaved in unexpected ways, and that it included a number of fortuitous events, any one of which might be described as "miraculous."

## An Unexpected Transition

Many inside and outside the country were surprised at the outcome. Margaret Thatcher uttered the most memorable false prediction, arguing in 1987 that "anyone who thinks the ANC is going to run the government in South Africa is living in cloud-cuckoo land."<sup>4</sup> Scholars, too, had reason to be skeptical. Historically, relatively few internal

conflicts—generally estimated at between one-quarter and one-third—ended with negotiated settlements, much less democracy. Roy Licklider has concluded, in addition, that 50% of negotiated settlements ending civil wars were followed by a return to violence. Thus in Africa, there have been failed conflict resolution efforts in Angola, Liberia, Rwanda, the Congo, and elsewhere. There are many reasons why internal wars are more difficult to resolve politically: the asymmetrical nature of the conflict, the difficulty of compromise with foes against whom one has been fighting and with whom one must live when the war is finished, the self interest of some in prolonging the conflict, and the high stakes of such conflicts—typically control of the government and the consequent control of the resources that that provides.<sup>5</sup> In the South African case, specifically, there was a "legacy of political polarization—rooted in deep socioeconomic inequalities, reinforced by a state founded on racial discrimination, and inflamed by a history of political violence," conditions that "could hardly have provided a less promising foundation for a stable democracy."<sup>6</sup> The outbreak of genocidal violence in Rwanda in the same month as South Africa's election provided evidence of the need to resolve domestic conflicts peacefully but also of the difficulty of doing so.

Not unexpectedly, many informed observers in South Africa, itself, did not expect a successful transition. Georg Meiring, head of the country's National Defense Force, concluded in November 1993 that "it is probably unrealistic to expect internal stability to be achieved within the next decade." Eugene Nyati, a black risk analyst, identified some of the reasons for pessimism: "Public disillusionment and the lack of improvement in the quality of life will galvanize resistance.... Civil and labor unrest will resume and render the country ungovernable once again." Ordinary people shared this pessimism. Only 15% of whites polled in a late 1991 survey believed they would be better off in the "new" South Africa. Africans, too, were skeptical. For example, one ANC "comrade" told Waldmeir that "I don't think we're ready for a new South Africa. There's a war coming."<sup>7</sup> Given the pessimism about future stability, it is not surprising that many doubted that democracy would emerge. That pessimism was reinforced by the state of democracy elsewhere on the continent: the 1994 Freedom House survey identified only eight "free" countries in sub-Saharan Africa, 20 that were "partly free," and 17 that were "not free."<sup>8</sup>

More than unexpected, there are also ways that South Africa's transition was unprecedented. William Zartman has argued that, "neither history nor analysis could have predicted a negotiated outcome to the internal conflict in South

Africa,” because “there is no precedent anywhere for successful negotiations allowing a poor majority to take over from or even share power with a rich majority when majority and minority identify and are identified ascriptively. That only happens by revolution or by post-colonial replacement.” Similarly, Seymour Martin Lipset believes that in societies like South Africa, where the state is a primary source of power, status, and income, “for a person or governing body to be willing to give up control because of an election outcome,” is “astonishing behavior, not normal...” Or, as Pik Botha, then South Africa’s foreign minister, argued in 1978: “A political system of one-man one- vote within one political entity means our destruction.... I am not aware of any nation in the history of the world having knowingly committed that sort of suicide.”<sup>9</sup> Yet that is precisely what white South Africans did.

## Unexpected Behaviors

That leading participants behaved in ways that previous experience would not have predicted is a second way to consider the country’s transition miraculous. Three participants were crucial: P.W. Botha, F.W. de Klerk, and Nelson Mandela. De Klerk and Mandela are better known and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993, but Botha, too, played an important role. Defense Minister from 1966–80 and prime minister/president (the title of the country’s chief executive changed in the 1983 constitution) from 1978–89, Botha had helped to develop the “total onslaught” idea, i.e., that virtually all components of South African society were under attack, and that Pretoria needed a “total strategy” to defend itself. While this did lead to some socioeconomic reforms, e.g., the right of Africans to unionize, increased school enrollments, and abolition of the Immorality Act, it refused to contemplate meaningful political reform, e.g., establishing a common citizenship or eliminating the pass laws. Moreover, Botha combined these modest reforms with repression of apartheid’s opponents. These hardly seem like the policies of someone committed to major reforms. Nonetheless, it was Botha who authorized the first secret talks between the government and Mandela, talks that continued for the remainder of his presidency. Botha, himself, met with Mandela in July 1989. Reflecting on that meeting, Mandela illustrated both Botha’s reputation and his changed approach: “I thought I was going to meet this finger-wagging man I had seen on television, and I didn’t know how I might react. But when I entered the room he came in from the opposite side and walked toward me with his hand outstretched. That was the way the whole thing went. He was charming and the whole conversation was very warm.”<sup>10</sup>

De Klerk, Botha’s successor as President, played a more visible but equally unforeseen role in the transition. A “model nationalist whose family history was interwoven with that of the Afrikaner nationalist movement,” de Klerk’s family included persons who had been imprisoned by the British during the Boer War, participated in the founding of the conservative Reformed (“Dopper”) Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> cen-

tury, and played a role in the founding of both the National Party and Purified National Party in the 20<sup>th</sup>. The future president’s father had served as a cabinet minister under three different prime ministers and his uncle, Hans Strijdom, had been a prime minister.<sup>11</sup> De Klerk’s views, moreover, seemed to make him an unlikely reformer. He had long considered apartheid to be morally and politically sound, arguing that in addition to trying to protect white interests, it also protected and nurtured African cultures and prevented the sort of struggle for supremacy that might lead to a race war. As National Party leader in the Transvaal, de Klerk had opposed Botha’s modest reforms. Given this history, few predicted de Klerk would be a reformer, his own brother arguing that “he is too strongly convinced that racial grouping is the only truth, way of life. He is too dismissive of a more radical style.”<sup>12</sup>

What is surprising about Nelson Mandela, the third important participant in the transition, is not that his political views changed but that they did not, despite the privations he experienced. Mandela and the African National Congress had long advocated non-violent resistance and compromise between whites and blacks. He argued at his 1964 trial that the ANC had engaged in violence only after all other means of political activity were barred. He maintained those views throughout his prison years, telling an interviewer in January 1986 that the ANC would end its armed struggle if the government “would legalize us, treat us like a political party and negotiate with us.” In a March 1989 letter to Botha, Mandela emphasized the need for compromise, arguing that “reconciliation will be achieved only if both parties are willing to compromise.”<sup>13</sup> These were not words uttered merely to please his jailers. After his release, Mandela persisted in such arguments, telling a July 1991 ANC meeting that negotiations were “a continuation of the struggle leading to our central objective: the transfer of power to the people,” and working to reorient the organization from armed struggle to peaceful negotiations.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps more important was Mandela’s lack of bitterness, despite having served more than a quarter century in prison. He remarked soon after his release that “bitterness would be in conflict with the whole policy to which I have dedicated my life.”<sup>15</sup> The role played by Mandela after his release is well-known and applauded. What is not so well known is that he was lucky to have had the opportunity to play that role. One of his lawyers at the 1964 trial believed that Mandela, having admitted the facts of the state’s case, had a 50-50 chance of being sentenced to death.<sup>16</sup>

## Fortuitous Happenings

A final way to view South Africa’s transition as miraculous is to identify the fortuitous elements that occurred throughout. Consider the timing. Its beginning could be dated in 1985, with the first secret contacts between Mandela and the government. Those talks did not lead to much movement on either side. That would not come until later in the 1980s, after the demise of the Soviet Union and commu-

nism, something de Klerk described as a “God-sent opportunity” to change South Africa.<sup>17</sup> Those events altered the calculations of both the government and the ANC, and talks began to move forward. Had contacts between Mandela and the government begun before 1985, they may have died out in mutual frustration by the late 1980s; had they begun later, de Klerk, seeing what happened to Mikhail Gorbachev and his reform effort in the Soviet Union, may have concluded that he could not control the reform process and decided to abandon it.

Mandela's first talks with a government official were with Kobie Coetsee, the Justice Minister. Coetsee's interest in Mandela was, at least in part, a consequence of his friendship with Piet de Waal, with whom he had gone to college. De Waal later became a lawyer in Brandfort, the small town to which Winnie Mandela had been banned in 1977. Forced by circumstances to serve as her lawyer, de Waal and his wife became friends with the ANC radical. De Waal soon began to urge his old friend Coetsee, now Justice Minister, to ease Winnie's banning order and to consider releasing Nelson Mandela. Coetsee later admitted that these appeals from an old friend, had an impact on his thinking. He met Mandela in November 1985, but only after a chance encounter with Winnie. Traveling to Cape Town to be with Nelson during surgery, Winnie happened to be on the same plane as Coetsee. Their conversation convinced Coetsee that he should meet with the prisoner.<sup>18</sup>

There were also fortuitous meetings and events during the negotiations. A significant one occurred less than two weeks before the April 1994 election. Mangosuthu Buthelezi, head of the Zulu-dominated Inkatha Freedom Party and a crucial hold-out, had demanded international mediation of his differences with the primary negotiators. Wanting to make the elections as inclusive as possible, Mandela and de Klerk agreed, but the mediation failed, an outcome that heralded a troubled election. Then, at nearly the last minute, Washington Okumu, a Kenyan participant in the mediation, persuaded Buthelezi to participate in the election. Okumu had known Buthelezi for twenty years and shared his Christian faith, something he appealed to by forcing the IFP leader to consider the costs of civil war. Yet the Okumu-Buthelezi meeting almost did not occur. When the Kenyan did not arrive for their scheduled airport meeting, Buthelezi decided to leave. Only after his plane had engine trouble and had to return to the airport did he meet Okumu. “It was,” Buthelezi later remarked, “as if God had prevented me from leaving and I was there like Jonah brought back.”<sup>19</sup>

Another obstacle to an inclusive election was the white right. This was a diverse group, consisting of a variety of Afrikaner political and cultural groups with a variety of views. Some, such as the Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB), were fascists opposed to any sort of change in the prevailing order. Another important group, the Afrikaner *Volksfront*, was a political organization that had been formed by Constand Viljoen and other former generals in May 1993 and sought merely the establishment of an Afrikaner homeland. The AWB and *Volksfront* maintained a tenuous alli-

ance with Buthelezi's IFP and leaders of several apartheid-era African homelands. That alliance was only broken up following the “Battle of Bop” in early March 1994. This “battle” was between Lucas Mangope, black leader of the Bophuthatswana homeland and opponent of the elections, the people of Bophuthatswana who wanted to take part in the election, and the homeland's civil servants who feared for their pensions. When the people rose up against Mangope, Viljoen decided to come to his aid. The AWB rushed in, too, and its participation turned the intervention into a fiasco. Racist and ill-disciplined, AWB men traveled throughout the homeland's capital city shouting abuse and killing and wounding some of its residents before deciding to depart. The last vehicle of its convoy was fired on, the driver shot, and the passengers begged for medical help. Instead, in front of television cameras, they were shot by angry Bophuthatswana military men. South Africans were horrified and any threatened military option disappeared. Thus, the AWB's intervention, unwanted by either Mangope and Viljoen, might be considered fortuitous. Equally miraculous was the timing. The Battle of Bop culminated on March 11, 1994, the last day to register candidates for the election. Recognizing that the military option was gone, Viljoen immediately decided to register his party's candidates, doing so only ten minutes before the deadline. As Anthony Sampson has written, “Ironically, it was the thugs of the AWB who saved the day, by discrediting the whole expedition and Mangope's regime, along with the system that created it.”<sup>20</sup>

## South Africa as Model

Although there were elements of the miraculous in South Africa's transition, much of it might also be explained by contemporary theories on conflict resolution and democracy promotion. The success in South Africa might, consequently, serve to reinforce theory and practice in other cases. Anticipating such an outcome, Archbishop Desmond Tutu remarked in late 1993, “once we have got it right, South Africa will be the paradigm for the rest of the world.”<sup>21</sup> The relevance of theory can be demonstrated in three facets of the transition: its setting and outcome, the transition process, and the design of the new government.

## The Setting and Outcome of the Transition

With respect to the setting for South Africa's transition, there is increasing evidence—contrary to earlier skepticism about political settlements for civil war—that these can be ended through negotiations, in part because the nature of civil wars is changing. They are becoming more identity based (as in South Africa) than ideologically based, meaning that neither side will be able to convert the other to its way of thinking. In such circumstances, the most likely alternatives are repression, perhaps even genocide, or a political settlement. In South Africa, whites and blacks even-

tually “realized that they had been cast together by forces of history that could not be undone and that in the final analysis that they were dependent on one another to a degree where they could either live together or perish together, and who then followed the painful and difficult logic of that recognition.”<sup>22</sup> Other factors inducing political settlements in contemporary conflicts include the growing disinterest of the world’s leading powers and the growing emphasis on economic success as a source of political legitimacy.<sup>23</sup>

At the onset of its transition, South Africa may well have been in what William Zartman describes as a “ripe moment,” one characterized by a “mutually hurting stalemate” between the parties, i.e., a “gradual long-term realization by both sides that the current course was a dead end.”<sup>24</sup> While not inevitable, the existence of a mutual hurting stalemate increases the chances the parties will pursue a negotiated settlement. In South Africa, both the South African government and the African National Congress had realized by the mid-1980s that they could not defeat the other.

From this perspective, it is the self-interest of the parties that brings them together to resolve their differences. That is, the motivations and incentives of leaders involved in the transition process are crucial to its outcome. Here, too, there is theory that helps explain the emergence of democracy in South Africa. Consider Noah Feldman’s discussion of America’s nation-building efforts in Iraq.<sup>25</sup> He argues that democracy is possible, though perhaps not probable, there because all leading parties recognize that they cannot rule alone. Thus, even if democracy is not their first preference, it might emerge as the least worst option. South Africa is very different than Iraq, of course, but there, too, the various parties came to recognize that they needed each other, that it was in their interests to resolve the conflict, and that compromise and democratic guarantees were the best ways to deal with lingering mistrust.

The government saw many problems. A fundamental one was that there were more and more Africans in the country relative to whites: the African majority had been 6,242,000 when the National Party came to power in 1948, but by 1991 it was 23,238,000 and growing because of higher African birth rates.<sup>26</sup> The government had tried a variety of military and political strategies to deal with this and preserve white power but none of these were completely successful, in part because opposition was far larger and better organized in the mid-1980s than it had been at the time of the earlier Sharpeville and Soweto crises. There were also economic problems. Apartheid’s restrictions on labor mobility limited economic efficiency, and the government’s high spending on the military (17.7% of the budget by 1989) fueled inflation. Internationally, Pretoria was increasingly isolated, with black-led governments on its borders and growing calls for international sanctions. Even the United States and Britain had begun to consider sanctions after a state of emergency was declared in 1986.<sup>27</sup> A senior member of the government’s National Intelligence Service later described the government’s predicament: “Nowhere was the situation out of hand, but it was clear that politically and

morally we were losing our grip.... The political system had become obsolete, and a long bloody struggle lay ahead. It had become clear that the sooner we negotiated a new system the better.” Leading voices in white society had reached a similar conclusion. White business leaders began meeting with the ANC as early as 1985. Even the leader of the *Broederbond*, the bastion of official Afrikanerdom, had concluded by the mid-1980s that the “exclusion of effective black participation in the political process is a threat to white survival...”<sup>28</sup>

Yet all was not well for the regime’s opponents, either, and they may also have been motivated by self-interest to pursue a compromise solution. The ANC’s military efforts had had little direct effect on the South African state, but they had had the adverse effect of alienating the white population it hoped to negotiate with. It remained an exiled organization, although one with some degree of domestic support. With the coming to power of Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, world revolution grew increasingly discredited and the Soviet-bloc’s provision of arms slowed. There were divisions within the organization, between those in the country and those outside, between those committed to a revolutionary overthrow of the government and those contemplating negotiations. These differences, largely academic in the 1960s and 1970s, became more important as the prospect of negotiations increased.<sup>29</sup>

Having made the decision to act, the South African parties were fortunate that many of the barriers to successful conflict resolution were not present. Consider the list of factors complicating the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements identified by Stephen John Stedman: three or more major contending parties, absence of a peace agreement signed by all, the likelihood of spoilers, a collapsed state, large numbers of soldiers on both sides, access of one or both parties to disposable natural resources, a regional environment hostile to a settlement, and a conflict based on ethnic secession. One could make a case that none of these were present in the South African case. Similarly, many of the institutional attributes of war-torn societies identified by Nicole Ball, including weak political institutions, limited legitimacy of political leaders, and a lack of agreement on the country’s future direction, seem not to be present in this case. Ball does identify several socioeconomic and security characteristics that can describe South Africa, e.g., damage to the country’s infrastructure, contraction of the legal economy and expansion of the illegal economy, and a history of human rights abuses perpetrated by security forces. While one should not minimize these conditions, they were likely not as common in South Africa as in other conflict-ridden societies.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to rendering the resolution of South Africa’s conflict comprehensible, contemporary theory also helps to explain the emergence of democracy there. Democracy has emerged in a variety of countries and there appears to be no magic factor that fuels democratic transitions, but South Africa did possess a number of attributes often cited as contributing to democracy.<sup>31</sup> Economically, the country was rela-

tively wealthy and had grown dramatically after 1948. While growth had slowed in the early 1980s, it resumed by the middle of the decade. By 1994, the country's economy was in the world's top thirty. While still severely disadvantaged, Africans had seen improvement in their economic and educational status. Black disposable income increased almost twice as fast as white disposable income between 1960–80. While only 122,000 Africans had been enrolled in secondary schools in 1970, nearly ten times that number were enrolled in 1985. The economy had also become more modern, with the growth of the manufacturing and service sectors relative to traditional strengths in mining and agriculture.<sup>32</sup>

The country's social structure was becoming increasingly variegated and pluralistic, another facilitator of democracy. There had long been individual whites who opposed apartheid, but their number began to increase after the 1960s. The once monolithic Afrikaner community had begun to fragment by the 1970s and 1980s. Business groups began to reach out to the ANC in the 1980s. The non-white political opposition, too, became more diverse, more assertive, and more skilled over time, especially after the emergence of the United Democratic Front in 1983.<sup>33</sup> That organization, in addition to mobilizing apartheid's opponents, "helped to build an unprecedented organizational structure from the local to the national levels" and "nurtured a political culture that emphasized democratic rights and claims indivisible by race."<sup>34</sup>

The hybrid nature of the apartheid state, one that practiced elements of democracy for whites while suppressing Africans, was also relevant for the emergence of democracy. While one should not exaggerate the democratic credentials of white South Africa, there were periodic elections, a modest political opposition, a press that had some degree of freedom, and elements of the rule of law. As a result, many in the country had experience with democratic procedures and the country's political institutions needed merely to be transformed rather than created from the ground up. This eased the transition to democracy. The ANC, too, had some experience with compromise and tolerance, if not democracy, since it had long been a multi-racial group. It included a number of different viewpoints, periodically consulted the people—the writing of the Freedom Charter being the best example—and engaged in widespread internal discussions before making decisions, e.g., regarding the decision to resort to violence in the early 1960s.<sup>35</sup>

## The Transition Process

Contemporary theory also provides an understanding of the nature of South Africa's transition process, so much so that Timothy Sisk has described it as a "model of step-by-step measures to promote a just peace in a society deeply divided during the course of a profoundly unjust history." Zartman, similarly, summarizes his review of the negotiations by noting that "what happened in South Africa was

the epitome of a negotiating process...that brought into being a new political system characterized by compromise and pluralistic participation."<sup>36</sup>

One, perhaps surprising, element of that slow, step-by-step process was the delay before holding national elections. While there is much evidence that democracy might be the only viable long-term political solution in divided societies, democratic procedures can exacerbate tensions in the short run. This not unlikely outcome occurs because democratic processes exacerbate social conflicts through, for example, election campaigns, a free press, and debates within legislatures. Societies emerging from internal conflicts have not only intense social conflicts but also non-existent or illegitimate political institutions through which such conflict could be channeled. Opportunistic elites, moreover, may deliberately exploit ethnic tensions to promote their own narrow interests.<sup>37</sup> Experience in Angola, where a contested election was followed by a return to war, and Bosnia, where election campaigns have served to harden the ethnic divide, illustrates the danger of holding elections too soon. In South Africa more than four years passed between Mandela's release from prison and the April 1994 elections; six months passed between the end of the negotiations and the elections. In this time the two leading parties had learned to trust each other, leading political forces had cooperated with each other, exiles and exiled groups had been able to return to the country and re-establish themselves, and the political education of the electorate had begun.

Contemporary theory also suggests that the conflict resolution processes must be as inclusive as possible. While moderates in the two camps may be able to conclude a deal among themselves, excluding more radical elements is a mistake. Failures of less-than-inclusive efforts demonstrate that the "only realistic solutions for settling the horrific problems of the war-torn, divided societies of Africa are inclusive arrangements," because "the alternative is nearly always a catastrophic breakdown of the state and society."<sup>38</sup> Inclusive solutions are preferable, because they establish procedures to increase confidence between former foes before and after the settlement is achieved, and they increase incentives to distribute resources throughout the country rather than to one privileged group or region, solidifying the outcome. This principle of inclusiveness applies to both the negotiations leading to the settlement and to the settlement, itself.

The South African case demonstrates that, while crucial, inclusive settlements are difficult to achieve. There, two important political players—the governing National Party and the African National Congress—were involved in negotiations from the outset, but a number of groups remained on the outside. The most significant were organized into the Freedom Front, an opportunistic alliance of such diverse groups as Buthelezi's IFP, the Afrikaner *Volksfront*, the Conservative Party, and leaders of some of the country's African homelands. That this alliance was an opportunistic one might suggest that it would do anything to derail the

negotiations and, consequently, that as many of its members as possible should be brought into the process. Particularly worrisome were the IFP and the white right.

Inkatha was important because Zulus constituted nearly twenty percent of the country's population. Buthelezi did not speak for all Zulus, but he did have widespread support among the rural population, governed the KwaZulu homeland, and had influence over the Zulu monarchy and royal structures. Buthelezi insisted that the people of KwaZulu had a right to self-determination and proposed a constitution for the province that would allow local laws to take precedence over national laws, allow the province to maintain its own army, and forbid the South African government from sending armed forces or levying taxes there without the provincial government's approval. Most other parties found these demands unacceptable, but they needed to work to bring Inkatha into the process, because Buthelezi's participation was "key... Without his participation..., the specter of civil war hovered over the country." Mandela recognized this, telling a public gathering that "I will go down on my knees to beg those who want to drag our country into bloodshed."<sup>39</sup> To minimize that prospect, de Klerk and Mandela made a series of concessions and, when those were unsuccessful, met with Buthelezi less than three weeks before the election, and agreed to international mediation of their differences. That effort, too, failed, and it now appeared that there were no options but to hold the election without the IFP's participation and to run the risk of civil war.<sup>40</sup> Only the intervention of Washington Okumu, detailed above, prevented that.

Once Buthelezi had agreed to participate in the elections, little more than a week remained before election day and both legal and practical barriers had to be overcome. Again, the other participants did all they could to insure Inkatha's participation. Millions of ballots had to be altered, with stickers identifying Buthelezi's IFP applied. In addition, the white parliament had to meet one last time, on April 25, the day before the first day of the election, to approve the IFP's late registration.<sup>41</sup>

Fewer dramatic last-minute concessions were made to the white right but, as with the IFP, the government and ANC made repeated efforts to reach out to it and insure its participation in the elections. Negotiators had good reason to fear the white right, because radical Afrikaner nationalists had a history of resorting to arms to oppose government policy, e.g., Boer War and during World War II, and they had the potential support of a large part of the Afrikaner electorate. The March 1992 whites-only referendum, in which nearly 69% endorsed the negotiating process, undermined much of the right's argument that the government was operating without popular approval. Still, the ANC sought to bring Viljoen, leader of the Afrikaner *Volksfront*, and others into the transition process. The general's eventual decision to participate in the elections was "a decisive turning point," because "[n]ot only did Viljoen's decision take the sting out of the right-wing threat to disrupt the proceedings and launch an Afrikaner war of secession," but he

"instilled into his disbelieving right-wing supporters the acceptance that the era of Afrikaner and white rule had passed forever."<sup>42</sup>

Mandela dealt directly with Viljoen, beginning secret talks in August 1993. While the ANC had no interest in the establishment of an Afrikaner *volkstaat*, it continued to hold out the possibility. By December an agreement was reached pledging the two sides to non-racial democracy and to exploring the idea of Afrikaner self-determination. However, Viljoen continued to refuse to agree to participate in the elections due to continuing objections by his Freedom Alliance partners. This led some on the white right to consider achieving their goal by force of arms, a delusion that was destroyed in the Battle of Bop identified above. That failure led Viljoen to defy a majority of the Front and to agree to participate in the elections.<sup>43</sup> Further concessions were then made to guarantee the participation of Viljoen's group. His Freedom Front negotiated an accord in April 1994 with both the governing National Party and the ANC mandating the creation of a *volkstaat* after election. This body would investigate the possibility of a *volkstaat* in the new South Africa and report back to the governing authorities.<sup>44</sup>

The country's military also had to be brought into the transition process. Fearing that it might be a barrier to the transition, leaders of the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), began secret talks in mid-1992 with the leaders of the South African Defense Force about the future structure of the country's armed forces. By November 1993 the two sides had reached agreement, with proposals to integrate their forces as well as preserve the position of senior SADF officials. Other concessions involved guarantees to the soldiers' pensions and an agreement to establish an amnesty program.<sup>45</sup>

## The Structure of the Settlement

To permanently lay down their arms, participants in any conflict resolution process must be certain that their interests will be protected in the new political system. One reason the latecomers may have been willing to join the process is that the interim constitution agreed to in November 1993 guaranteed that the first post-apartheid government would be an inclusive one. Members of the 400-seat National Assembly were chosen by a system of proportional representation, a mechanism designed to create a more representative legislature and one in which multiple parties are rewarded; there was, in addition, a very low threshold, 0.25% of the vote, required to win seats in the Assembly. The cabinet was to be chosen proportionally from among parties with more than twenty seats in the Assembly. The president would be chosen by that body, and the two vice presidents would be chosen from parties with more than eighty seats. A federal system, another way to divide power and to allow for multiple election winners was established. The upper house of the national legislature was to be chosen by the provincial legislatures on a proportional basis, providing yet another guarantee that there would be diverse voices in the

new government. Finally, the interim constitution entrenched important civil liberties and established a powerful constitutional court to safeguard them.<sup>46</sup>

The virtue of these arrangements was reflected in the outcome of the April 1994 election. Seven parties won seats in the Assembly (twelve did not). The ANC won more than 62% of the vote and 252 seats in the National Assembly, enough to form a majority government but not the two-thirds necessary to enact a new constitution alone. The National Party, winners of 20% of the vote, and the Inkatha Freedom Party, with more than 10%, would also participate in the new executive. That cabinet included 18 ANC members, six members of de Klerk's NP, and three members of Buthelezi's IFP. Regionally, the ANC won seven of the countries nine provinces, the National Party one and the IFP one.<sup>47</sup> This was, in the words of the Johannesburg *Star*, a "dream outcome." The "perfect" results led some to question whether the outcome was manipulated behind closed doors. As Guelke has written: "the suspicion of a deal among the parties lingered for good reason: the scale of reported irregularities and the extent of sheer incompetence in the running of the election were such that voting and the counting of the votes would hardly have borne scrutiny if the process had been denounced by any of the major political parties."<sup>48</sup> Whether or not they passed democratic muster, the election results were perfect from the point of view of conflict resolution as each of the major parties won something, none won a dominant position, and continued cooperation between them would be necessary in the post-conflict period.

## Conclusion

This study began by asking whether South Africa's transition to democracy should be considered as a miracle or used as a model. Perhaps the answer is that it is both. That is, the participants did much that contemporary theory directed to insure a favorable outcome but that outcome only occurred because of a number of unexpected and fortuitous events. For instance, the leading players in the transition had worked to incorporate both the Inkatha Freedom Party and the Afrikaner *Volksfront* in the elections, but neither had done so or, probably, would have done so but for the intervention of Washington Okumu with respect to the former and the "Battle of Bop" with respect to the latter. The onset of the process, similarly, might be understood using the theoretical concept of a "mutually hurting stalemate," but South Africa was fortunate that prominent political leaders recognized this reality and did so at approximately the same time. It was, moreover, a most unlikely trio of leaders—a former defense minister as President who had recently cracked down violently on opponents, followed by a President whose family had participated in the establishment of most Afrikaner institutions and who had long supported apartheid, joined in partnership by a former prisoner who emerged from a quarter century of imprisonment without bitterness and firmly committed to negotiating and sharing power with his former jailers—who came to this conclusion. Ironically,

perhaps, this combination of skill and luck makes South Africa's transition like many others and less miraculous, as virtually all political successes involve some combination of luck and skill. Where they differ is the particular combination of those elements.

What lessons does the South African case provide for theorists and practitioners of conflict resolution and democracy promotion? Just as the transition was a mix of luck and skill, scholars might find reason for hope and disappointment. Disappointment because it indicates that, however knowledgeable and skilled they are, circumstances might conspire against them. On the other hand, the likely occurrence of fortuitous events might encourage practitioners to continue their work in trying times. The knowledge that both skill and luck are likely to be needed compels practitioners to design negotiations and propose outcomes that participants can take advantage of when unexpected events do occur, i.e., they should anticipate being lucky and also try to make their own luck. Discussions between Mandela and Viljoen well before the Battle of Bop, for example, following the advice of theorists to make the transition process as inclusive as possible, may have reassured the former general that he could be confident entering the election process after the fortuitous events in Bophuthatswana. Also, the design of the interim government—with the power sharing mechanisms and guarantees of civil liberties advocated by scholars—likely eased the last minute entry of the *Volksfront* and the Inkatha Freedom Party. Scholarly efforts to document and, perhaps, to promote a mutually hurting stalemate, similarly, may eventually result in a recognition by decision makers that negotiations are their only option. Perhaps this "model"—applying best practices while also anticipating fortuitous events—will allow "miracles" to occur in other deeply divided societies.

## Endnotes

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