Africanizing Apartheid: Identity, Ideology, and State-Building in Post-Independence Africa

Jamie Miller

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Jamie Miller, Cornell University

Abstract

Between 1968 and 1975, the leaders of white South Africa reached out to independent African leaders. Scholars have alternately seen these counterintuitive campaigns as driven by a quest for regional economic hegemony, divide-and-lure realpolitik, or a desire to ingratiate the regime with the West. This article instead argues that the South African government's outreach was intended as a top-down recalibration of the ideology of Afrikaner nationalism, as the regime endeavored to detach its apartheid program from notions of colonialist racial supremacy, and instead reach across the color line and lay an equal claim to the power and protection of African nationalism. These diplomatic maneuverings, therefore, serve as a prism through which to understand important shifts in state identity, ideological renewal, and the adoption of new state-building models.

About the Author

Jamie Miller is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Mario Einaudi Center at Cornell University. He received his PhD from the University of Cambridge, was a Visiting Assistant Professor at Quinnipiac University, and has been a Fox International Fellow at Yale University. Dr. Miller specializes in the politics, state-building, and ideology of the apartheid era, with broader research interests in decolonization, anti-colonial nationalism, state violence, the Cold War in Southern Africa, the Cold War in the developing world, and African history. He is currently working on the final stages of a book manuscript, entitled The Alchemist and the Hammer: The Struggle to Preserve Apartheid, 1974-1978, under contract with Oxford University Press, and has an article forthcoming in the Journal of African History (2015).

Contact Information

Jamie Miller, Postdoctoral Fellow, Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, 154 Uris Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14850 USA. Email: jamie.miller@cornell.edu. Web: https://cornell.academia.edu/JamieMiller.

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On 16 August 1971, the leaders of white South Africa's parliament, executive, foreign service, and military congregated on the tarmac of Waterkloof Air Force base in Pretoria. In the wake of the Afro-Asian assault on apartheid in the early 1960s, visits by foreign statesmen were rare. But the guest arriving that day, the regime's leaders believed, could change all that. Malawian President-for-Life Hastings Banda's five-day state visit was the first to South Africa by the head of an independent African country. He was welcomed with a twenty-one gun salute at the airport and whisked down the new N1 highway to Johannesburg's President Hotel, where up to 3000 South Africans – white and black – awaited the spectacle.[1] Pretoria spared no expense, as Prime Minister John Vorster fêted the Malawian leader at a series of banquets.[2] Banda did not leave his hosts disappointed. 'South Africa doesn't need a certificate of respectability,' he told the press: 'It already has one.'[3]

Banda was not alone. In the years between Foreign Minister Hilgard Muller's first visit to Malawi in 1968 and South Africa's disastrous intervention in the Angolan Civil War in the second half of 1975, Vorster's 'outward policy' prompted a flurry of bilateral meetings between South African representatives and their African counterparts.[4] By the time of Banda's visit, South Africa already had regular dialogue with just under half of all the countries in independent Africa.[5] Then, in response to the Carnation Revolution in Portugal and the pending decolonisation of the Angolan and Mozambican bookends of South Africa's *cordon sanitaire* of white-ruled states, Vorster launched a parallel campaign aimed specifically at Southern Africa, which quickly came to be known as 'détente' (1974–5).[6] Why did Pretoria reach out to independent Africa

[1] 'Le président Banda en Afrique du Sud', *Fraternité-Matin*, 17 Aug. 1971; 'Thousands of South Africans give Kamuzu great welcome', *Malawi News*, 20 Aug. 1971.

[2] Hastings Kamuzu Banda Collection (HBA), Indiana University, Box 7, Programmes, 12, Programme for State Visit to South Africa, 16-20 Aug. 1971.

[3] 'Le président Banda en Afrique du Sud', *Fraternité-Matin*, 17 Aug. 1971

[4] Vorster's 'outward policy' is also widely known as 'dialogue' as well as 'outward movement'. The one term has been used here for simplicity's sake.

[5] South African Department of Foreign Affairs Archives (DFAA), 1/99/19, 13, Africa: SA Policy in Africa and Relations with African States, report, author unclear, 'Houding van Afrika-State teenoor Suid-Afrika', April 1972.

[6] The first use of the 'détente' label appears to be in the opening of a new file in Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith's office on 11 Oct. 1974: ISP, Deposit 4, Box 6, Détente: Official Communications with South Africa, Volume 1. The term was in common usage in the domestic and international press by

through its 'outward policy' and 'détente' campaigns? How did the apartheid regime reconcile such a course with its racial hierarchies at home?[7]

Although these counter-intuitive events have attracted no shortage of attention, scholars have been signally divided in their analyses. One school has seen Pretoria's African outreach as driven primarily by economic considerations.[8] 'The requirements of economic expansion were vitally important in the shaping of South Africa's policies towards Africa', Sam Nolutshungu declared.[9] Others take the economic argument further, spelling out its strategic corollaries. The outward policy was designed to establish a sphere of hegemony throughout Southern Africa, asserted Sean Gervasi.[10] Eschewing economic rationales, a second school has seen the outward policy as an essentially geopolitical programme designed to corrode the Republic's international isolation by working through Africa.[11] In a resilient variation, numerous studies interpret Pretoria's African outreach as a detour – an end run, in American parlance – to improving relations with the West.[12]

Much of this literature was written contemporaneously. Often working with limited or no access to South African archives, scholars inevitably made extensive

the end of the month, of which the earliest mention appears to be 'New face of black-white confrontation in southern Africa', *Boston Globe*, 14 Oct. 1974.

[7] The motivations of those African leaders willing to engage with Pretoria, though beyond the scope of this article, merit much fuller investigation than they have heretofore received.

[8] B. Davidson, 'South Africa and Portugal', (New York, 1974); S. Nolutshungu, *South Africa in Africa: A Study in Ideology and Foreign Policy* (Manchester, 1975), 122; R. Johnson, *How Long Will South Africa Survive?* (New York, 1977), 64; R. Southall, *South Africa in Africa: Foreign Policy Making During the Apartheid Era* (Braamfontein, South Africa, 1999), 12; R. Southall, 'South Africa', in *The Political Economy of African Foreign Policy: Comparative Analysis*, ed. T. M. Shaw and O. Aluko (Aldershot, UK , 1984), 232-35; R. Molteno, *Africa and South Africa: The Implications of South Africa's 'Outward-Looking' Policy* (London, 1971).

[9] Nolutshungu, *South Africa in Africa*, 121-2.

[10] S. Gervasi, *Industrialization, Foreign Capital and Forced Labour in South Africa* (New York, 1970), 102.

[11] G. Cockram, *Vorster's Foreign Policy* (Pretoria, 1970); A. Vandenbosch, *South Africa and the World: The Foreign Policy of Apartheid* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1970); Larry W. Bowman, 'South Africa's Southern Strategy and Its Implications for the United States', *International Affairs* 47:1 (1971), 19-30; Nolutshungu, *South Africa in Africa*; C. Legum, *Southern Africa, the Secret Diplomacy of Detente* (London, 1975); O. Geyser, *Detente in Southern Africa* (Bloemfontein, 1976); A. Chambati, 'Detente - an External View', *South African Institute of Race Relations* (1976); D. Worrall, *The Republic of South Africa and Detente* (Salisbury, Rhodesia, 1976); D. Hirschmann, 'Southern Africa: Detente?', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 14:1 (1976), 107-26; J. Spence, 'Detente in Southern Africa: An Interim Judgement', *International Affairs* 53:1 (1977), 1-16; J. Seiler, *Southern Africa since the Portuguese Coup* (Boulder, 1980); R. Jaster, *South Africa's Narrowing Security Options* (London, 1980); J. Swanepoel, 'Die Diplomasie van Adv. B. J. Vorster' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Orange Free State, 1982), 136-255; D. Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation: South African Foreign Policy Making* (Johannesburg, 1984), 38-42; J. Barber and J. Barratt, *South Africa's Foreign Policy: The Search for Status and Security, 1945-1988* (Johannesburg., 1990), 143-150.

[12] C. Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand: The Rise and Fall of the South African Security State* (Basingstoke, 1996), 35; R. Irwin, *Gordian Knot: Apartheid and the Unmaking of the Liberal World Order* (New York, 2012), 163. A more perceptive thread – and one followed by this article – is that enunciated by Adrian Guelke: '[B]y showing that it could enter into constructive relations with African states', South Africa 'hoped to demonstrate that apartheid was compatible with the post-colonial world and there was no need for change'. See A. Guelke, *Rethinking the Rise and Fall of Apartheid: South Africa and World Politics* (Basingstoke**,** 2005), 116.

assumptions about how Pretoria engaged with independent Africa based on their understanding of its relationship with black Africans at home, neglecting the white polity's own *perceptions* of that relationship. Among the economic school, Marxian classifications of South Africa's racial hierarchies as a sophisticated vertical class structure were often highly influential, informing a common identification of Pretoria's outreach into Africa as an extension of exploitative capitalist interests.[13]Although this theoretical approach has largely long since fallen into disfavour, the economic thesis continues to cast a long shadow. In the most detailed recent study, Roger Pfister depicts South Africa's outreach into Southern Africa, at least, as being economic in nature,[14] though the archival evidence confirms Adrian Guelke's earlier speculation that Pretoria was actually prepared to take an economic hit in exchange for political benefits in Africa.[15]

The geopolitical thesis casts Pretoria's outreach as an exercise in *realpolitik*, with limited exploration of the intellectual currents and political dynamics beneath the two-dimensional diplomatic surface.[16] Yet to understand what African outreach meant, we need to grasp how apartheid and African nationalism were variously understood in the corridors of power in Pretoria, through reference to the ideas and historical experiences that shaped the Afrikaner National Party's (NP) ruling ideologies.[17] Much like the prospect of increased trade with independent Africa, potential improvements in Pretoria's standing in Washington - an important consideration in the regime's overall foreign policy profile - were hardly unapparent to South African policymakers.[18] But the thesis that African outreach specifically was 'directed as much at Washington as at Africa',[19] as expressed in perhaps the most sophisticated of these analyses, reflects a decidedly outdated 'centre-periphery' model of Cold War relations. Newer approaches to international history,[20] recent calls to include settler societies in understandings of

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[13] See F. Johnstone, 'White Prosperity and White Supremacy in South Africa Today', *African Affairs* 69: 275 (1970), 124-40; H. Wolpe, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid', *Economy and Society* 1: 4 (1972), 425-56; M. Legassick, 'South Africa: Forced Labour, Industrialisation, and Racial Differentiation', in R. Harris (ed.), *The Political Economy of Africa* (Boston, 1973), 229-70.

[14] R. Pfister, *Apartheid South Africa and African States: From Pariah to Middle Power, 1961-1994* (London, 2005), 6.

[15] A. Guelke, 'Africa as a Market for South African Goods', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 12: 1 (1974), 80.

[16] An important exception here is H. Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders: A Supreme Test of Power* (Cape Town, 2012), 89-138.

[17] For core texts on the Vorster government's broader political, historical, and ideological context, see T. Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (London, 1975); H. Adam and H. Giliomee, *The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power* (Cape Town, 1979); D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948-94* (Randburg, 1996); H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003); and Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders*.

[18] DFAA, 1/33/3, 28, USA Relations With South Africa, J. S. F. Botha, Embassy of South Africa, Washington, D. C., to Secretary for Foreign Affairs, US/SA Relations, 6 Feb. 1974.

[19] R. Irwin, *Gordian Knot*, 153.

[20] See especially O. Westad, 'The New International History of the Cold War: Three (Possible) Paradigms', *Diplomatic History* 24: 4 (2000), 551-65. For a sampling of work following Westad's lead in emphasising shifts in the ruling ideologies of Global South actors in the Cold War, see P. Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002); T. Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2011); and J. Friedman, 'Reviving

decolonisation,[21] and moves to foreground the domestic political scene in African history,[22] as well as the fruits of a broader archival base, all direct the historian's lens towards the ideological factors informing South African state agency, specifically evolving conceptions of Afrikaner nationalism in a localised African context.

On a purely diplomatic level, Pretoria indeed strove to exploit cleavages on the African scene that cut across anti-apartheid sentiments and thereby gain limited forms of international acceptance. Yet this article argues that African outreach was intended to do much more. Vorster's aim was to create a forum in which Pretoria could advance a new state identity underpinning longer-term security: the acceptance of the Afrikaner community as part of independent Africa via an 'Africanisation' of apartheid. As James Brennan and Jonathan Glassman have variously demonstrated, the racial divisions stratifying post-colonial social orders were not innate, but constructed and contested structures, shaped alternately by specific processes of pre- and post-independence governance, tensions between communities for resources and status, and self-identification through metaphor and discourse.[23] Amid substantial opposition, Vorster sought to navigate much the same process and manipulate it to the Afrikaners' advantage. Nationalist leaders were no more immune to the 'contradictions of accumulation and control', in John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman's term, than their imperial predecessors or white counterparts elsewhere on the continent: they had to keep Africans in a position of subjugation and exploitation, while simultaneously being seen to govern for the benefit of the social order as a whole.[24] Vorster's strategy for dealing with this challenge in a changing world was to fundamentally reshape the ideological basis for the regime's existing racial hierarchies through embedding South Africa's existing apartheid order, with some minimal alterations, in a different network of values and norms. Apartheid would be rearticulated both to black Africa and to the white electorate as representing a network of interdependent nations – each with an equal claim to African nationalism - rather than a hierarchical system entrenching white racial dominance. Pretoria's relationship with independent Africa became the central engine for this landmark shift. If Africa's opposition to South Africa was largely a function of the perception that apartheid was among the last and most oppressive vestiges of colonialism, then Vorster's African outreach was an attempt to shatter this association between Pretoria and the practices of European empires by redefining apartheid into the norms of the post-independence era. Statecraft was conscripted in the service of state-building; diplomacy in the service of ideological renewal. This was not an effort merely to divide and lure African leaders, or to get back in Washington's good graces. It was a campaign to contest and shape the definition of a legitimate African state.

Revolution: The Sino-Soviet Split, the "Third World", and the Fate of the Left' (unpublished PhD thesis, Princeton University, 2011).

[21] A. Hopkins, 'Rethinking Decolonization', *Past and Present* 200**:** 1 (2008), 211-47.

[22] M. Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics: A History of Opposition in Zambia* (Surrey, England, 2011), 1-19.

[23] J. Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington, IN, 2011); J. Brennan, *Taifa: Making Nation and Race in Urban Tanzania* (Athens, OH, 2012).

[24] J. Lonsdale and B. Berman, 'Coping with the Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State in Kenya, 1895-1914', *Journal of African History* 20: 4 (1979), 491.

The first part of this article charts the emergence of Vorster's reconceptualisation of the Afrikaner national project. The second explores his initial efforts to establish a foundation in foreign policy for reimagining of the regime's relationship with African nationalism. Finally, this article explains how Vorster bolstered this vision through détente policies that distanced his regime from both erstwhile allies across Southern Africa, as well as exploring the increased domestic opposition to his new agenda that this shift provoked.

'WE ARE NOT EUROPEANS'

The ideological edifice of the apartheid state as envisaged by John Vorster's predecessor, Hendrik Verwoerd (1958-66), was unapologetically exclusive, driven explicitly by the unilateral preservation of Afrikaner independence.[25] That edifice stood on twin foundations: the nationalist precepts espoused by mid-century Afrikaner intellectuals, often expressed through religious tropes; and norms and discourses that drew directly on conceptions of racial supremacy.[26] The Afrikaner had been 'planted here at the southern point' of Africa, he proclaimed in a landmark 1958 speech commemorating the 1838 Boer victory over the Zulus at Blood River, 'so that from this resistance group… all that has been built up since the days of Christ may be maintained for the good of all mankind.' Just as the original *voortrekkers* [Afrikaner pioneers] had been decried by hostile missionaries for insisting that 'the supremacy of the white man' was 'necessary' for civilised development, as Western powers forsook traditional bonds of race in the era of decolonisation, it once more fell to whites in Africa to 'be an anchor and a stay for Western civilisation and for the Christian religion'.[27] Such ideologies were equally expressed in Cold War terms, with communism positioned as the atheistic, barbaric antithesis of 'civilisation'.[28]

As newly independent African and Asian states pushed South Africa to the brink of expulsion from the international community in 1960-1, Verwoerd vaunted a practical solution to the emergence of African nationalism: the creation of homelands or *bantustans*.[29] Blacks would be expelled from the white state and granted the opportunity to progress separately towards 'survival and full development, politically and economically'.[30] However, the ideological basis of Afrikaner legitimacy and control remained unchanged. '[T]his Republic is part of the White man's domain in the world… He, and the spirit with which he is endowed… will always be needed where order and peace and progress are desired,' Verwoerd reiterated in 1966.[31] While the regime continues to occupy an ambiguous position in historical narratives of colonialism, the ideological discourse of the Verwoerd era was decidedly 'colonialist'

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[25] T. Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*, 259-300.

[26] For leading texts in the nationalist canon, see N. Diederichs, *Nasionalisme as Lewensbeskouing en sy Verhouding tot Internasionalisme* (Cape Town, 1935); and G. Cronjé, *'n Tuiste vir Die Nageslag: Die Blywende Oplossing van Suid-Afrika se Rassevraagstukke* (Johannesburg, 1945).

[27] A. Pelzer (ed.), *Verwoerd Speaks: Speeches, 1948-1966* (Johannesburg,1966), 206-11.

[28] I. Filatova and A. Davidson, *The Hidden Thread: Russia and South Africa in the Soviet Era* (Johannesburg, 2013), 200-03.

[29] Pelzer (ed.), *Verwoerd Speaks*, 271-95.

[30] Pelzer (ed.), *Verwoerd Speaks*, 509.

[31] Pelzer (ed.), *Verwoerd Speaks*, 509.

or 'neo-colonial' in that it unashamedly sought to maintain and reproduce much of the discredited conceptual foundation that had sustained European colonial projects in Africa.

Upon Verwoerd's assassination, Vorster's central political priority comprised the fulfilment of his predecessor's separate development vision. However, Vorster realised that the old framework of norms, values, and institutions that sustained the South African regime both domestically and abroad was losing currency, such that pursuing the separate development goal within the existing conceptual framework would lead only to unsustainable isolation. He therefore sought new scaffoldings of legitimacy for the state by embarking on a most unexpected political campaign: to corrode the identification of his regime as a brutal remnant of European colonialism and redefine the white polity as part of independent Africa.

After only six months in office, he launched this campaign in a speech in the Afrikaner heartland in Bloemfontein. In the nineteenth century and culminating in the Boer Wars, he stressed, Afrikaners had formed 'the first African state to have revolted against [British] imperialism. It [was] the first state in whose midst there were cries for emancipation and independence.' From this invented tradition of anti-colonialism emerged a claim to the nativist territorial nationalism of the post-independence era: '[W]e are in every respect a part of Africa.'[32] On the face of it, this was simply an extension of a pre-existing strand in the Nationalist canon.[33] However, Vorster's purpose was quite different, as he then used this reformulation of the historical foundations of Afrikaner nationalism as a platform from which to conceptually reshape apartheid around norms of interdependence and co-existence rather than dominance and hierarchy. '[I]f Nationalism was right for my people then it is right for anyone, irrespective of his colour or identity', he continued.[34] The erstwhile language of unbridled white dominance was slowly eschewed. Instead, the watchword became co-existence of white and black on an equal footing, both inside the republic's borders between the regime and the homelands and on the continent as a whole. Vorster was determined to appropriate the very same principles which South Africa's enemies used to attack the regime—anti-colonialism, the elimination of racial hierarchies, and self-determination—adapt them to the Verwoerdian programme of separate development, and use the new constructs to justify Afrikaner independence and viability at the core of a broader white power structure.

This was no mere shift in emphasis or style from his predecessor. Despite his creation of the homeland vision, Verwoerd's conceptualisation of Afrikanerdom retained a fundamentally inimical relationship with African nationalism. Just before his death, Verwoerd met with Leabua Jonathan, soon to be leader of independent Lesotho, but pointedly refrained from lunching with him.[35] In contrast, Vorster believed that the emergence in the post-independence era of the nation-state as the sole repository of

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[32] Vorster speech in Bloemfontein, 18 Mar. 1967, in Geyser (ed.), *Select Speeches*, 74. For more on invented traditions see E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

[33] See for instance Verwoerd's reply to Harold Macmillan's 'wind of change' speech. Pelzer (ed.), *Verwoerd Speaks*, 336-9.

[34] Vorster speech in Bloemfontein, 18 Mar. 1967, in Geyser (ed.), *Select Speeches*, 74.

[35] Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, 261.

legitimate sovereignty opened a path to justify Afrikaner legitimacy on the very same basis as the nationalist claims of new African states. African nationalism, previously viewed as an existential threat, could actually be used to strengthen the Afrikaner claim to legitimacy. The articulation of separate development as facilitating a horizontally structured multi-*national* polity in contrast to a vertically stratified multi-*racial* one only reinforced 'the inalienable right of each national group' – Afrikaner and African alike – 'to its own particular territory'.[36] The argument that the morality of separation derived from its facilitation of parallel nationalisms had been stressed in what appears to be the first written mention of the term 'apartheid' in its modern usage, by Dutch Reformed Church pastor J. C. du Plessis in 1929. Rejecting an existing policy that offered blacks no 'independent national future', du Plessis had advocated that the Gospel be brought to bear in a way that fitted the African 'character, nature and nationality'.[37] Now, Vorster revived and foregrounded this subordinated element of apartheid discourse:

> [W]hat is the basis of separate development? It is, in the first instance, the right of the Whites to preserve their white identity… But what he wants for himself he does not begrudge those of other colours in South Africa…[I]f [the black man] comes to you and says, I want political rights, then I say to him you may have your political rights, but not in my territory… I say to him he can develop into a free independent nation in his own territory… Our whole policy is aimed at leading [South Africa's blacks] to independence, to self-determination.[38]

The audience for such messages was as much domestic – as with this speech, delivered in the small rural town of Naboomspruit - as foreign. Continuing, Vorster told his fellow Afrikaners outright: '[W]e have too long described ourselves as Europeans to the outside world. We are not Europeans, we are of Africa as any other person is of Africa.'[39]

But how to give this ideological shift from vertical racial hierarchies to parallel national communities some policy reinforcement? The Verwoerdian model presented apartheid as a monolithic programme. Total separation of the races was both the ends and the means; apartheid was, in Verwoerd's phrasing, 'a rock of granite'.[40] Conservatives duly rationalised that a crack anywhere in the rock, of any type, only weakened the whole. Vorster saw things more pragmatically. Unlike Verwoerd, he had never been part of the nationalist intellectual circles of the 1940s and had little time for ideological rigidities.[41] Shortly after becoming prime minister, he reportedly told a group of Nationalist Party members of parliament (MPs):

> The cardinal principle of the NP is the retention, maintenance and immortalisation of Afrikaner identity within a white sovereign state. Apartheid

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[36] J. Vorster, *South Africa's Outward Policy* (Cape Town, 1970), 10.

[37] H. Giliomee, 'The Making of the Apartheid Plan, 1929-1948', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29: 2 (2003), 373-4.

[38] Speech, Naboomspruit, 17 Jun. 1971, in Geyser (ed.), *Select Speeches*, 144-7.

[39] Speech, Naboomspruit, 17 Jun. 1971, in Geyser (ed.), *Select Speeches*, 148.

[40] G. Scholtz, *Dr. Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd, 1901-1966*, vol. 2 (Johannesburg, 1974), 162. New research suggests that in private forums, Verwoerd did sometimes sketch out a more nuanced vision of the future of race relations in South Africa. Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders*, 77-9, 81-4.

[41] For the best analyses of the development of apartheid ideology, see A. Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa* (New York, 1990), 147-82; and Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 415-28, 464-71.

and separate development is merely a method of bringing this about and making it permanent. If there are other better methods of achieving this end, then we must find those methods and get on with it.[42]

For Vorster, the overarching imperative of horizontalising the ideological foundation of the social order meant the gradual detachment of petty apartheid, which discriminated among South Africans based on race alone, from separate development, which drew distinctions based on (attributed) ethnic or national identities.

Vorster's new state-building agenda proved destabilising to an Afrikaner community accustomed to Verwoerd's uncompromising assertions of unilateralism, hierarchy, and supremacy. Early in Vorster's tenure, even very minor reforms designed to represent a more parallel rather than hierarchical conception of the relationship between South Africa's ethnic communities – such as allowing non-white athletes to represent the republic in sporting competitions (although without competing alongside or against white South Africans) - provoked a vicious conservative backlash. The resulting internecine *verlig-verkrampstryd* (1968-70), fought between those prepared to countenance some minor reforms in order to keep the separate development programme compatible with the changing realities of South African society and an evolving world (more pragmatic *verligte* Afrikaners), and those who saw any mitigation of total racial separation as opening the door to the eradication of Afrikaner self-determination, culture, and viability (dogmatic *verkramptes*), severely damaged party unity, consumed Vorster's first term as prime minister, and buried his reform agenda.[43] Some *verkramptes* saw his reframing of the Verwoerdian gospel as little short of apostasy. A former Calvinist minister and editor of the Pretoria daily *Hoofstad*, Andries Treurnicht, provided the intellectual ballast to a political cause more often articulated in cruder terms: 'If petty apartheid lapses completely, then grand apartheid is senseless, superfluous, and unnecessary, because if white and non-white are acceptable to one another at all levels of everyday life and they mix everywhere without reservation, then it is senseless to force them to live in separate states or residential areas.'[44] Quite so.

Vorster ultimately triumphed over his conservative foes, but he did not extinguish their cause or ideas. Only four out of 126 Nationalist MPs left the party in 1969, though at one stage it appeared that perhaps as many as forty would do so.[45] The prime minister crushed the breakaway Herstigte Nasionale Party (HNP) at the 1970 national elections and then used his new political mandate to shame leaders of the Broederbond, the secretive ethno-nationalist organisation to which many Afrikaner elites belonged, into purging renegades from the organisation in the name of preserving *volk* unity.[46] However, it was evident to all that the HNP constituted only 'the merest tip of a large *verkrampte* iceberg', in David Welsh's phrase.[47] In 1969, then chairman Piet Meyer had told the Broederbond outright that the notion that good relations between

[42] D. Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Charlottesville, VA, 2009), 83.

[43] For three informative yet divergent accounts, see A. du Pisani, *John Vorster en Die Verlig-Verkrampstryd* (Bloemfontein, 1988); B. Schoeman, *Vorster se 1000 Dae* (Cape Town, 1974); and J. Serfontein, *Die Verkrampte Aanslag* (Cape Town, 1970).

[44] A. Treurnicht, *Credo van 'n Afrikaner* (Cape Town, 1975), 22.

[45] I. Wilkins and H. Strydom, *The Super-Afrikaners* (Johannesburg, 1978), 177.

[46] Wilkins and Strydom, *The Super-Afrikaners*, 187-90.

[47] Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 83.

South Africa's different groups could develop through 'the removal of so-called "petty apartheid"' was 'very unrealistic' and the mark of 'a spineless Afrikanerdom'.[48]

Into the 1970s (and beyond), the persistent claims of *verkramptes* to be the true representatives of Afrikaner values and history directly challenged the NP's identity as the political incarnation of the *volk*.[49] This domestic opposition was a critical factor in the acceleration of Pretoria's African outreach from 1970 on. After the *verlig-verkrampstryd*, Vorster had limited incentive to pursue his vision through sustained domestic reform, thereby risking entanglement once more in destructive internal battles over Afrikaner national purity. Instead, he turned to foreign affairs, where he was slowly gaining traction with African leaders, where he as prime minister had the most freedom of manoeuvre, and where he was least constrained by the entrenched racial and nationalist norms of his party.

THE OUTWARD POLICY

Verwoerd had seen little need to reach out to independent Africa.[50] 'It is not that we are not willing to enter into friendly relations with any well-disposed African state,' he explained in 1962, 'But they must first abandon their hostility towards South Africa.'[51] Where Verwoerd saw an impasse, Vorster instead saw an opportunity. He placed the execution of his outward policy in the hands of a small team of trusted advisors, comprising Muller as foreign minister, Brand Fourie as secretary for Foreign Affairs, and Hendrik van den Bergh as the Bureau for State Security (BOSS) chief.[52] Reporting directly to the prime minister, they worked discreetly to open doors to Africa, reasoning that if South Africa offered to help African states achieve their goals, then those states would embrace mutually advantageous cooperation rather than assuming the posture of confrontation that emanated from their anti-colonialism and pan-Africanism.[53]

To find common ground, Vorster articulated a new vision for Africa's future grounded in economic development and continental cooperation: interdependence between independent states, regardless of colour. 'The problem of the Third World is not political rights, but the very basic necessities for existence like bread and butter and

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[48] Wilkins and Strydom, *The Super-Afrikaners*, 202-4.

[49] O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, 138-42.

[50] In 1949, the year after becoming the first apartheid-era prime minister, D. F. Malan introduced the Africa Charter as a basis for cooperation with colonial powers. It committed South Africa to 'retain[ing] Africa as a reserve... for the further development of West European Christian civilisation' and preserving as much of the pre-war status quo on the continent as feasible. *Hansard*, House of Assembly Debates, 11 May 1949, col 5662. For more on South Africa's policy towards Africa in the 1950s, see G. Olivier, *Suid-Afrika se Buitelandse Beleid* (Pretoria, 1977), 126-33; G. Olivier, 'South Africa's Relations with Africa' in R. Schrire (ed.), *South Africa: Public Policy Perspectives* (Cape Town, 1982), 269-85; G. Berridge, *South Africa, the Colonial Powers and 'African Defence': The Rise and Fall of the White Entente, 1948-60* (New York, 1992).

[51] P. Meiring, *Die Lewe van Hilgard Muller* (Silverton, South Africa, 1985), 77.

[52] From 1974 onwards, the Department of Information launched parallel covert overtures to Africa as part of its policy remit. For the most reliable account, see L. de Villiers, *Secret Information* (Cape Town, 1980).

[53] This premise was the golden thread running through all incarnations of Vorster's foreign policy until the game-changing Soweto riots of 1976.

employment,' Nationalist MP L. A. Pienaar summarised.[54] In seeking a discourse through which to argue this new model of post-independence African politics and a network through which to connect South Africa with potential fellow-minded states, the language and structures of the Cold War provided ready tools. Vorster and his team appreciated not only that anti-communist (or 'moderate') African states were distinctly more receptive to their overtures than radical ones whose ideologies dictated a more militant brand of anti-colonialism, but that by constructing relationships with the former it could help deepen the cleavage between the two blocs.[55] Given the 'Russian penetration and violence that Africa is facing' and 'the Red-Chinese belt in Africa', Vorster suggested in 1971, 'the leaders in Africa who are concerned about the peace and the security and the prosperity of Africa should find and understand each other.'[56] Three years later, he extended this vision, predicting that South Africa's engagement with its black neighbours would form the basis of 'a power bloc... against communism'.[57] Pretoria therefore strove not merely to take advantage of African regimes' Cold War loyalties, but to strengthen those identifications and commensurately weaken the importance of anti-apartheid militancy as a central ideological pillar of African state identity.

This pitch to reshape the contours of African geopolitics was well timed. By the late 1960s, militancy against white rule had run aground. In 1968-69, only four African states bothered to pay their Organisation for African Unity (OAU) Liberation Committee dues.[58] This situation both reflected and spurred a much broader failing to articulate state identities that were substantively broader than mere opposition to ongoing white rule as a symbol of the colonial past. In francophone Africa, institutions like the African and Malagasy Common Organisation (OCAM), created in 1965 to sustain a moderate *françafrique* vision of close links to Paris and broadly status quo social structures, were collapsing into irrelevance; only three heads of state attended its 1973 summit in Mauritius.[59] This crisis of state identity spurred two trends. First, African leaders increasingly articulated their ruling ideologies in Cold War terms. As Frederick Cooper contends, rulers found themselves in charge of 'gatekeeper' states, with legitimacy coming from foreign recognition of their ownership of the gate. As leaders searched for ideologies to help them govern what were often fractious and unstable societies, they became increasingly receptive to those with external legitimacy, whether radical-communist or conservative-'free world'.[60] Second, African leaders' heightened sensitivity to the precariousness of power amid extensive political instability provided an incentive to entrench the boundaries of political contest in the nation-state while shunning transnational claims on their citizens' identities (and, potentially,

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[54] *Hansard*, House of Assembly Debates, 6 Aug. 1974, col 123.

[55] Pretoria explicitly classified African states according to this dichotomy. DFAA, 1/99/19, 13, Africa: SA Policy in Africa and Relations with African States, report, author unclear, 'Houding van Afrika-State teenoor Suid-Afrika', Apr. 1972.

[56] Vorster speech at Goodwood, 31 May 1971 in Geyser (ed.), *Select Speeches*, 139.

[57] Vorster speech in the House of Assembly, 4 Feb. 1974 in Geyser (ed.), *Select Speeches*, 212-3.

[58] C. David Dalcanton, 'Vorster and the Politics of Confidence', *African Affairs* 75: 299 (1976), 169.

[59] J-P. Bat, *Le Syndrome Foccart : La Politique Française en Afrique, de 1959 à nos Jours* (Paris, 2012), 340-1.

[60] F. Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge, U.K., 2002), 156-7. For a nuanced exploration of such a process in a broader political context, see E. Schmidt, *Cold War and Decolonization in Guinea, 1946-1958* (Athens, OH, 2007).

loyalties).[61] Both developments favoured Pretoria's promotion of the inviolable state as the essential principle of Africa's future, while also providing favourable intellectual terrain for Pretoria's efforts to exile anti-apartheid militancy, with its explicit challenge to that principle, to the radical agenda. At the June 1971 Addis Ababa summit of the OAU, a body largely defined by the twin causes of opposition to white rule and pan-African unity, no fewer than six anti-communist states – Gabon, Côte d'Ivoire, Lesotho, Malawi, the Malagasy Republic, and Mauritius – risked being seen as sell-outs on both fronts by voting against a resolution that rejected engagement with Pretoria, in effect repudiating the existing approach of confrontation and isolation. A further five out the thirty-nine states present abstained.[62] 'We have cut the black countries to our north completely in half – they are at one another's throats', Vorster later exaggerated to Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith.[63]

Yet Vorster sought not only to build new relationships with African states in an effort to alleviate international isolation, but also to parlay Africa's engagement with the regime into a more enduring ideological foundation for the state's legitimacy. He duly mobilised the new and tentative co-existence with African nationalism on the continent behind the old Verwoerdian argument that separate development was the only means of enabling each of South Africa's ethnic groups to exercise their right to self-determination. On one front, Pretoria's new willingness to engage with independent African states was advertised as proving its good faith regarding co-existence within South Africa. In the wake of the June 1971 OAU summit, Vorster used the diplomatic gains abroad to energise his domestic agenda, embarking on a week-long 'listening tour' of the homelands. Simultaneously, the white polity's ability to interact productively with the new homeland entities was presented as a symbol of its readiness to co-exist with African nationalism across the continent. In a 1969 speech at the Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns [Academy for Science and Art], Vorster spelled this out: '[W]hat I consider most important of all, what will eventually turn the scale in our policy of co-operation with Africa, is that, slowly but surely, it is becoming clear to the African states that we are absolutely honest towards our own black peoples within our borders.'[64] Better ties with Africa and Vorster's state-building agenda at home thus became mutually reinforcing programmes. This was not a charade intended for foreign consumption, but a top-down campaign to promote a new ideological foundation for South Africa's social, political, and economic structures – and one that captivated its advocates. Foreign Minister Muller scrawled excitedly on one letter from Secretary of Foreign Affairs Fourie:

> Most [foreign observers] fail to see that the position in SA is changing – not as a result of pressure from without, not in the form of concessions for favours (eg. Respectability) – not as a quid pro quo – not as a result of fear or eagerness to win friends – but as a result of the implementation of the policies of the Govt, re

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[61] For more on the tension between pan-African and state-bounded conceptions of postcolonial society, see F. Cooper, 'Possibility and Constraint: African Independence in Historical Perspective', *Journal of African History* 49: 2 (2008), 170-9.

[62] These were Dahomey, Niger, Swaziland, Togo, and Upper Volta. Pfister, *Apartheid South Africa and African States*, 58.

[63] I. Smith, *The Great Betrayal: The Memoirs of Ian Douglas Smith* (London, 1997), 197.

[64] Vorster, *South Africa's Outward Policy*, 10.

the various non white peoples. Policies consistently declared & maintained and implemented with increasing speed... to achieve self-determination.[65]

To Vorster's team there was no contradiction between hosting Banda and imposing apartheid. Rather, the two phenomena were perfectly compatible under the cardinal principle of respecting each national community's right to fulfilment and independence.

Accordingly, as African leaders began engaging with Pretoria on a regular basis, Vorster exploited the atmosphere of flux created on the domestic political scene to signal a move away from the hierarchical racism of the past. 'Under no circumstances should you slight a person who speaks a different language, whose skin is a different colour, who has a different standard of civilization,' he declared in 1970, 'You must never adopt the attitude that you are better than another person.'[66] The next year, he went further: 'If your policy is founded on your being better than someone else because you have a white skin, it is wrong, foolish and vain. What are you but a creature of God, as he is, to raise yourself and think you are better than he?'[67] These were truly radical statements in the context of the policies of his party and the racial mores of his electorate. More was to come. During Banda's state visit in 1971, Vorster allowed himself to be photographed sitting between two black women. This was nothing short of scandalous to *verkramptes*: the photo appeared in every copy of the HNP's publication *Die Afrikaner* for months afterwards.

Vorster's outward policy experienced only mixed success on the international stage. In 1969, fourteen Eastern and Southern African leaders signed the 'Lusaka Manifesto', which stood firm on militancy towards Portugal and Rhodesia while qualifying the existing support for armed struggle against South Africa.[68] African leaders were prepared to flirt with abandoning their commitment to bringing down the apartheid regime on the grounds that the existing OAU policies of blanket hostility, economic boycott, and support for liberation movements were proving ineffective. However, Vorster's broadening of the conversation with independent Africa did not eliminate the fundamental abhorrence many African leaders felt towards a system deeply redolent of the racism and exploitation they associated with their own experiences of colonialism.

Even Banda, the leader with whom Pretoria found the warmest reception, reflected the tension between these two impulses. His diplomats saw the OAU as 'vocal' and 'emotional', and its anti-apartheid militancy as yielding only 'popular but unrealistic pronouncements or policies'.[69] He also defined his governing ideology against the 'other' of communist power, rather than white rule. In a personal letter he told Kenneth Kaunda that he 'bitterly resented' the Zambian President's criticism of Malawi's cooperation with Pretoria: 'More than once, you have sent your Ministers to

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[65] Archive for Contemporary Affairs (ARCA), PV 528, MB 10/1/2, Hilgard Muller, Korrespondensie, Fourie to A. M. Mogwe, permanent secretary to the president, 24 Feb. 1971, 11.

[66] *Hansard*, House of Assembly Debates, 15 Sep. 1970, col 4209.

[67] Speech, Pretoria, 28 June 1971, in Geyser (ed.), *Select Speeches*, 158.

[68] Fifth Summit Conference of East and Central African States, 'Manifesto on Southern Africa', (Lusaka, Apr.1969).

[69] National Archives of Malawi (NMA), 45/1/13, V, John R. Ngwiri, Secretary for External Affairs, to Minister for External Affairs, 'Report of a Mission to the United Nations', Apr. 1972. I would like to thank James Brennan for this document.

Russia, China and other countries for discussion or negotiations on trade and other matters. Neither I nor any of my Ministers or anyone else in this country, has ever said a single word against you personally… [b]ecause, we feel it is none of our business whatsoever.'[70] This encapsulated at one stroke the fusion of anti-communism and state-based geopolitics grounded in non-interference that Pretoria was promoting on the continent. However, having worked as a young man in the mines near Johannesburg, where racial oppression and economic exploitation went hand in hand, Banda was under no illusions about the power structures of apartheid. His unpublished autobiography, which he wrote while imprisoned by the British at Gwelo in 1959-60, relates: 'The idea behind the policy of apartheid, is not justice and equity to the Africans, but rigid control over them, in order, the better and more effectively, to keep them in perpetual subjection and serfdom.'[71] Even as he accepted a soft loan from Pretoria to build a new capital city and fulfil his modernisation agenda, he told South African officials, 'I am as strongly opposed to apartheid, colonialism and discrimination as is any other African leader'.[72] There was extensive talk in *verligte* circles about granting meaningful rights to Africans living in urban areas, repealing large swathes of the most offensive petty apartheid legislation, and deracialising public spaces en masse. 'In South Africa we have a government and a people that is moving away from racism, that is moving away from discrimination, that wants to rectify it and get it out of its system,' announced promising MP Louis Nel.[73] However, the relative lack of concrete legislation to give effect to the vaunted flattening of South Africa's racial hierarchies was a major obstacle to recalibrating African understandings of what separate development entailed.

From its height in 1971, the outward policy stalled as radicals effectively reinvigorated the cause of anti-apartheid militancy. In 1972, the 'Mogadishu Declaration' largely repudiated the 'Lusaka Manifesto' in favour of a return to blanket confrontation. By early 1973, one BOSS analysis of the African scene observed starkly: 'In the face of the stronger military disposition and the formal rejection by the OAU of dialogue with South Africa as a path to reaching a modus vivendi, the enthusiasm of supporters of dialogue has faded and with it our hope for the expansion of our outward policy.'[74]

However, instead of reassessing the feasibility of their new models of African identity, South African policymakers perceived in the recent setbacks only a case for renewed efforts to stop Pretoria's relationship with Africa being hijacked by communist-backed radicals. 'If it were not for the interference on the part of Russian militarism and Chinese insurgence, we would reach an agreement with Africa,' concluded Defence Minister P. W. Botha.[75] Indeed, Vorster's new thinking soon became entrenched in policymaking circles as establishing a strategic template for long-term viability. Far from apartheid constituting a barrier to the regime's acceptance on the continent, the government rationalised that it was *especially* among African leaders, as Muller put it, that South Africa's 'bona fides [would] not be generally accepted until

[70] HBA, Box 1, Correspondence, 2, Banda to Kaunda, 28 Nov. 1967.
[71] HBA, Box 3, unpublished autobiographical manuscript, 1959-1960, 554.
[72] HBA, Box 2, Writings, 3, Banda speech, Liwonde, 4 Jul. 1970.
[73] *Hansard*, House of Assembly Debates, 28 Oct. 1974, cols. 6576-77.
[74] DFAA, 1/99/19, 14, Africa: SA Policy in Africa & Relations with African States, Report, 'Agtergrond Dokument oor die Situasie in Afrika vir Sover dit Bedreigings vir die RSA Inhou', Jan. 1973.
[75] *Hansard*, House of Assembly Debates, 9 Sept.1974, col 2486.

we have taken our policy to its full consequences, in other words, until the homelands have become independent states.'[76] By the time regime change in Portugal shifted South Africa's strategic calculus in April 1974, South Africa's foreign policy rested on three principles: first, that a distinction existed between African states' declared opposition to apartheid and their willingness to act to overturn it; second, that this distinction was congruent with the fissure between moderate and radical regimes on the continent, not with the division between white and black ones; and finally, that through judicious diplomacy that distinction could be maintained and exploited, buying South Africa time to grant its black peoples self-determination through the homelands, convince the world of the legitimacy of these polities, and eventually overturn Africa's opposition to Pretoria. 'The policy of separate development can be sold in Africa,' the prime minister assured his caucus behind closed doors as late as 1975.[77]

DETENTE

The decision by the new Portuguese regime to withdraw from Angola and Mozambique alarmed many within the South African power structure. The halcyon days of the *cordon sanitaire* were over. 'There was an immediate sense that… there was a change and it was a change not for the better', recalled Jeremy Shearar, Chargé d'Affaires at the South African embassy in London.[78] 'It is clear that our adversaries smell blood,' reported the South African mission to the UN.[79]

Vorster saw things differently. The prime minister understood that his inability to match his Africanisation programme with much more than token reductions in military and diplomatic support for Salisbury and Lisbon, as well as South Africa's continued dominion over South-West Africa (SWA), substantially undermined the government's efforts to dispel widespread perceptions of the regime as a form of colonial rule. In 1968, Kaunda had written to Vorster: 'It is only South Africa's apparent decision to throw her lot in with the rebel regime in Rhodesia which has brought her into the full focus of criticism by the rest of the international community.' That apart, the Zambian president continued, he 'certainly would be interested' to learn more about Pretoria's envisaged program of leading its African communities towards self-determination.[80] Now, Vorster saw that circumstances had presented a prime opportunity to reinforce the regime's move away from racial hierarchies and bolster South Africa's case for a moderate and interdependent Africa as an alternative to the ascendant radicalism that demanded the destruction of the white regime. The appropriation of the 'détente' label itself for the new venture was a clear nod to Pretoria's desire to embed African geopolitics in an explicitly Cold War context – as defined by the apartheid regime.

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[76] DFAA, 1/99/19, 14, Africa: SA Policy in Africa & Relations with African States, Speech by Muller at Opening of Stellenbosch University, 19 Feb. 1973.
[77] ARCA, PV 408, NP Caucus, Notule, 25 Feb. 1975.
[78] Interview with Jeremy Shearar, Pretoria, 18 Aug. 2011.
[79] DFAA, 1/14/3, 5, Portugal Relations With South Africa, SA Mission to the UN, New York, to Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Pretoria, 13 Jun. 1974.
[80] Kaunda to Vorster, 15 Aug. 1968, in K. Kaunda and J. Vorster, *Dear Mr Vorster … : Details of Exchanges between President Kaunda of Zambia and Prime Minister Vorster of South Africa* (Lusaka, 1971).

The first test came in Mozambique. With independence pending, Ian Smith asked Vorster to help Mozambican separatists establish a rump state south of the Zambezi River friendly to both Rhodesia and South Africa.[81] Pretoria was also approached by white settler or multi-racial but right-wing groups seeking support, funds, and arms for coups in both Angola (by at least five separate groups between April and September 1974) and Mozambique (at least three groups).[82] All received short shrift: they missed that Vorster was less interested in maintaining a white-ruled neo-colonial status quo than in creating a brand new architecture for international co-existence on the continent. To the prime minister, the incoming wave of decolonisation posed no threat to South Africa:

> We must view the developments in Moçambique in the light of our own policy, which is based on self-determination. Several neighbouring countries are under Black governments and we ourselves are in the process of creating some more by leading our own Black homelands to independence.

> The emergence of a Black government in Moçambique therefore does not upset us in the least.

> OR

> is but another proof that our policy based on self-determination [in contrast to Portugal's policy of assimilation] is a sound one.[83]

Mozambique was just the beginning. Vorster simultaneously sought to shift perceptions of his regime's role in SWA. Already in August 1973, he had announced his intention to usher SWA towards a controlled form of majority rule.[84] Now, a top secret committee known as Bronze – featuring among others Fourie, van den Bergh, and local white representatives – met to explore ways in which SWA could become fully independent through separate and ethnically defined political entities, much as in South Africa.[85]

Finally, Vorster turned his attention to the long-running political impasse in Rhodesia. Over the previous year, he had repeatedly overruled Botha's and the defence force's recommendations of new military assistance to the beleaguered Smith regime.[86] Now, the prime minister's second thoughts gave way to strident action. From his backchannel conversations with the Zambians, Fourie reported that black Rhodesian expectations had escalated.[87] Vorster concluded that the Smith regime had become more of a liability than an ally. If South Africa were to co-exist peacefully with black Africa in the new environment, the cautious and piecemeal approach of the outward policy

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[81] Smith, *The Great Betrayal*, 160-1.

[82] DFAA, 1/14/10, 1, Portugal's African Territories, Brand Fourie to van den Bergh, 10 Sep. 1974.

[83] South African National Archives (SANA), MEM, 1/564, I13/2, Eerste Minister: Buitelandse Sake, 'Moçambique', draft speech for Vorster, late 1974.

[84] At van Wyk, *Dirk Mudge: Reënmaker van Die Namib* (Pretoria, 1999), 31.

[85] Interview with Riaan Eksteen, Swakopmund, 2 Aug. 2011. See also van Wyk, *Dirk Mudge*, 34-47.

[86] Ian Smith Papers (ISP), formerly of Cory Library, Rhodes University, Deposit 5, Box 16, Defence Matters with RSA, Vorster to Howman, 21 May 1973; South African National Defence Force Archives (SANDFA), Group 1 – Chief of Staff Operations, Box 3, Waardering: Die Militêre Bedreiging teen die RSA, 'Waardering: Die Militêre Bedreiging teen die RSA', Nov.1973.

[87] B. Fourie, *Brandpunte: Agter Die Skerms met Suid-Afrika se Bekendste Diplomaat* (Cape Town, 1991), 109.

would not be enough. Seizing the initiative, Vorster resolved to ride the wave of re-energised African nationalism and work with regional leaders to broker the removal of white minority rule in Rhodesia.

With this in mind, Vorster sat down secretly with Kaunda's right-hand man, Mark Chona, in Cape Town. Chona told the leader of the apartheid regime that he spoke not only for Kaunda, but had also met with Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Seretse Khama of Botswana, Frelimo President Samora Machel, and interim Mozambican Prime Minister Joaquim Chissano. All had reiterated the *Lusaka Manifesto*'s acknowledgement of Pretoria's non-colonial status 'in the strongest possible terms'. They saw South Africa as an 'independent and sovereign state' and agreed that the Afrikaners were 'not merely people in Africa, but people of Africa'. As Chona stressed on no fewer than five occasions during the conversation, Africa would not 'take the fight' to South Africa and there was 'no question of interfering in [its] internal affairs.' Instead, Africa sought Pretoria's co-operation on the Rhodesian issue, which was 'a stumbling block in trying to get Africa to understand the South African problem' which was 'totally different'.[88] Without evidence from the Zambian archives to contextualise this extraordinary meeting from Chona's perspective, it is hard to know if he was just telling Vorster what he wanted to hear, or if some black African leaders had accepted that avoiding a brutal racial war across the region required Pretoria's co-operation regardless of the signal it sent to black South Africans – or a bit of both. Regardless, Vorster was more than receptive. He and Chona spent the afternoon constructing a detailed framework to remove the 'stumbling block' to Pretoria's acceptance as a full part of Africa.

As détente dramatically materialised in the southern autumn of 1974, with Kaunda and Vorster publicly acting out a carefully choreographed scene of reconciliation and co-operation, and Ian Smith reluctantly agreeing to resurrect negotiations, two powerful critiques emerged on Vorster's domestic front. First, Botha and the military were ardently opposed to the new direction on security grounds. Instead of seeing the decolonisation of the Portuguese colonies as an opportunity to prove the regime's ability to coexist peacefully with black African governments, they saw events through the prism of a communist-backed OAU assault against white rule in Southern Africa. '[T]he change of government in Mozambique is certainly the greatest potential threat which [South Africa] has ever had,' the defence minister wrote in a strident letter to his prime minister. The OAU's 'ideology has already for a long time declared war on the white ruled states – because they are white, and because the power is in white hands', he asserted; accordingly, 'the longer Rhodesia can remain standing the more advantageous it will be for [South Africa]'.[89] In party forums, such as the annual congress of the Cape NP in September 1975, Botha proclaimed that he 'identified wholeheartedly with the détente policy'.[90] In reality, Botha and the military continued to believe that the OAU's drive 'to force the existing order in white-ruled Southern Africa to change' would be relentless due to the inherently expansionist doctrines of its

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[88] DFAA, 1/157/3, AJ 1975, 'Meeting between the Hon. Prime Minister and the Zambians', 15 Oct. 1974.
[89] SANA, MEM, 1/572, I15/2, 'Die Militêre Milieu in Suider-Afrika Waarin die RSA Hom Tans Bevind', attached to P. W. Botha to Vorster, 2 Oct. 1974.
[90] SANDFA, Group 4- P. W. Botha, Box 142, 76/1, Strategie: Algemeen, Volume 1, P. W. Botha, Speech, 'RSA se Strategiese Posisie', 1-3 Sep. 1975.

communist backers.[91] In handwritten notes for his contribution to the annual no confidence debate in February 1975, Botha revealed his true feelings: 'Nie détente nie – maar appeasement – paaiery! (Not détente – but appeasement – appeasement!)'[92]

On a separate front, many in the electorate were instinctively resistant to the notion that Pretoria might 'sell out' the white Rhodesians and failed to see how abandoning one of South Africa's few allies constituted wise foreign policy. In June 1975, Vorster and Smith attended a rugby match between South Africa and France at Loftus Versfeld, Pretoria. When Vorster's presence was announced by loudspeaker, he received warm applause; but when the embattled Smith was introduced, the crowd went into raptures.[93] Vorster had to avoid getting too far out in front of these popular attitudes and allowing détente to become a focal point for the 'fifth column' of far-right wingers who remained in his party even after the traumatic HNP breakaway.[94] From the NP's own back-benches, Treurnicht criticised those 'urging that South Africa should dissociate itself from Rhodesia… and that Rhodesia should stew in its own juice'.[95] It was not only on the far-right that such ideas reverberated. In October 1974, Ben Schoeman, Vorster's recently retired deputy prime minister and former leader of the Transvaal NP, launched a blistering attack on détente in a speech in Kimberley:

> I think that we as White people must be under no illusions. The Black military states with their Communist allies have only one aim and object in view and that is the surrender of the White man in South Africa. Nothing less than Black majority rule will ever satisfy them. Those misguided people who believe that appeasement will satisfy them are living in a fool's paradise.[96]

The reality was that outside Vorster's foreign policy circle, white South Africans were fundamentally conflicted over détente. They were excited by the prospect of an end to confrontation, violence, and isolation. 'There is a curious mood in the Republic today which is almost euphoric,' observed London's *Financial Times* in a feature article. 'For the first time for well over a decade White South Africans, pilloried and isolated in the international community, now believe they are well on the way to acceptability. They find it a heady experience.'[97] However, white South Africans were reluctant to stomach the steps Vorster was outlining as necessary to achieve these ends: a move away from the old affinities of the white redoubt, with all that entailed for shifts in racially hierarchical thinking more broadly.

Vorster worked hard to neutralise these fears and condition public opinion to support his diplomacy. Through confidential briefings of newspaper editors – some of which he conducted personally in the cabinet room – the prime minister ensured that

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[91] SANDFA, Group 3 – HSI/AMI (Volume 1), Box 407, Direktoraat Militere Inligting, 'Die Militere Bedreiging Teen die RSA', 15 Nov. 1974. See also SANDFA, Group 3 (Volume 1) - AMI/HSI, Box 380, The Current Military Threat to the RSA and Rhodesia February 1975, Volume 14, 'The Current Military Threat to the RSA and Rhodesia February 1975', 12 Feb. 1975.

[92] ARCA, PV 203, P. W. Botha, 4/2/66, Toesprake, Notes for Speech to the House of Assembly, 6 Feb. 1975.

[93] Interview with Pik Botha, Pretoria, 5 Apr. 2013; Smith, *The Great Betrayal*, 165.

[94] du Pisani, *John Vorster*, 183.

[95] *Hansard*, House of Assembly Debates, 25 Apr. 1975, col 4820-22.

[96] B. Schoeman, *My Lewe in Die Politiek* (Johannesburg, 1978), 408.

[97] 'South Africa's Trade Routes to Détente', *Financial Times*, 15 Oct. 1975.

both the Afrikaans- and English-language dailies showed striking support for his counter-intuitive initiatives.[98] The press largely avoided any implication that South Africa was interfering in Rhodesia's affairs and explicitly assured readers that a settlement in Salisbury would not create momentum towards a transfer of power in South Africa because the racial orders in the two were different. 'For now, the details of the settlement agreement are Rhodesia's responsibility', *Die Transvaler* editorialised:

> In South Africa many people argue emotionally about Rhodesia because whites are involved. They consider South Africa's position as analogous to Rhodesia's. Our policy however guarantees separate development and the authority [*seggenskap*] of each group over its own affairs. This eliminates the whole question of majority rule in South Africa.[99]

This delicate recalibration of the argument over détente and the accompanying subtle neutralisation of the population's pan-white sympathies was precisely what Vorster sought. The prime minister likewise ensured that Muller told the Perskor newspapers not to publish a word of Schoeman's Kimberley speech. (The task of speaking to the Cape-based Nasionale Pers papers was delegated to P. W. Botha, a member of its board, who neglected to convey the message.[100]) Ultimately, opponents of détente could not match Vorster's offers of access or patronage and found their perspectives marginalised. Schoeman later raged in his memoirs against a rare 'unholy alliance between the liberal English press and certain of our Afrikaans newspapers... on Rhodesia they spoke with one voice.'[101]

Vorster also sought to use the Broederbond to market détente within elite Afrikaner circles. In both November 1974 and February 1975, Vorster appeared before the Broederbond's Executive Council (*Uitvoerende Raad*, UR). On both occasions, he stressed that events compelled the government to act decisively. 'Urgent action is necessary', he said in November; 'We must consider what is necessary to maintain control over our political destiny and ensure our White identity', he echoed in February.[102] Although such views were doubtless distributed to each of the Broederbond chapters, Vorster's message was not alone. In May 1975, the UR tabled its own extended study of détente. The study was careful to display support for the merits of Vorster's overall vision:

> Détente must serve as a prerequisite for the development of a situation of real peace, where sovereign states exist alongside each other and where simultaneously there reigns cooperation on all levels of common interest, without ceding one's own identity and without the interference of one in the internal affairs of the other.

However, it continued, while the OAU had at times embraced negotiation (the Lusaka Manifesto) and other times confrontation (the Mogadishu Declaration), its commitment

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[98] ARCA, PV 132, B. J. Vorster, 5/1/19-22, Aantekeninge en Dagboeke, Vorster's Dagboek. One exception was the Bloemfontein daily *Volksblad*, whose editorials were consistently sceptical that détente with black Africa was feasible.

[99] 'Wanbegrippe oor Rhodesië', *Die Transvaler*, 18 Jan. 1975.

[100] 'Schoeman Speech Ignored', *Sunday Times*, 8 Dec. 1974.

[101] Schoeman, *My Lewe in Die Politiek*, 411.

[102] Afrikaner Broederbond (AB), 1975/1-5URanotDB, Box 1/1/23, 1 Besluite: Agendas & Notules, 'Verslag van Samesprekings wat by die UR plaasgevind het', 28 Feb. 1975.

to the removal of white rule as a whole remained unchanged. 'One thing remains however consistently clear, and this is that African countries will never change course on their ultimate aims in Southern Africa,' the report stated. Africa and Pretoria had 'irreconcilable aims'. The unmistakeable implication - that Vorster's dream of peaceful co-existence with African nationalism was not realisable - was clear enough.[103] For all Vorster's efforts, opposition to détente persisted. When he addressed the NP caucus in late February 1975, with détente foundering on Smith's intransigence, Vorster's words pointed to the unspoken divisions within his own party: 'We have to stand together. We can never always stand together, but standing together [now] is essential. Our calling is to live in Africa.'[104]

Despite these misgivings, Vorster's improbable ideas gained substantial traction. By the end of 1974, his idea of horizontal co-existence had become the core of a new Africanised identity for the regime, providing Afrikanerdom with much needed ethno-nationalist direction in the wake of the *verlig-verkrampstryd*. Emerging MP Dawie de Villiers, a future minister in the Botha and F. W. de Klerk governments, as well as the post-apartheid Government of National Unity, encapsulated the new thinking: 'We shall have to give more content to our African identity… In order to be able to do this, we shall have to give up many of our prejudices concerning Africa and the people of Africa.'[105] Pienaar used Vorster's new ideology to hammer the opposition United Party (UP) for maintaining an antiquated policy of 'one united colonially inspired South Africa'. The UP 'had only one idea: of the White man governing the Black man in South Africa.' This stood in stark contrast, he insisted, to Nationalist policy: '[W]e have changed to a South Africa which is being shared... The decolonisation process has been tackled successfully… When the winds of change blew through Africa it was the National Party which conceived the idea of the liberation and decolonisation of the Bantu peoples of South Africa.'[106] The government even portrayed African outreach as a long-standing Nationalist tradition. 'Even the Voortrekkers established relations with Bantu chiefs for diplomatic affairs,' the 1974 election manifesto informed voters.[107] 'The White Nationalist has never at any time seen himself as a colonialist in Africa. He has never at any time been afraid of the upsurging nationalism among the Blacks and he does not disregard the right of the Blacks to self-determination,' proclaimed MP J. J. Engelbrecht.[108] The shift in the historicisation of Afrikanerdom's relationship with African nationalism since Verwoerd's Blood River speech was unmistakeable.

CONCLUSION

In his analysis of South Africa's relations with black Africa, Roger Pfister suggests that South Africa's diplomacy during this period constituted an effort to convince Africans that 'not all whites supported apartheid'.[109] Not so. Instead, John Vorster attempted to use diplomatic successes in black Africa to drive an unlikely relegitimisation of

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[103] AB, 3/75/Staat, Box 3/1/8, Staat: Détente in Suider-Afrika, 'Détente in Suider-Afrika', May 1975.
[104] ARCA, PV 408, NP Caucus, Notule, 25 Feb. 1975.
[105] *Hansard*, House of Assembly Debates, 10 Sep. 1974, col 2608.
[106] *Hansard*, House of Assembly Debates, 6 Aug. 1974, col 122-3.
[107] R. McLachlan, ed. *Vrugte van Die Nasionale Bewind* (Cape Town, 1974), p. 26.
[108] *Hansard*, House of Assembly Debates, 12 Mar. 1971, col 2666.
[109] Pfister, *Apartheid South Africa and African States*, 71.

apartheid as a system compatible with post-independence norms of self-determination, development, and state autonomy. Unwilling to change what apartheid was, he resolved to change what it meant. This unlikely initiative was launched on two fronts: persuading black Africa that apartheid meant something new by rearticulating existing racial hierarchies in the language of parallel national development, thereby Africanising the identity of Afrikaner nationalism; and convincing white South Africa that the discrete racist measures of petty apartheid could be jettisoned from the programme of separate development without injury to the original Verwoerdian master plan.

This story eclipses conventional understandings of the relationship between the apartheid regime and independent Africa in the broader context of decolonisation. Vorster's outward and détente policies constituted attempts to create an alternative model of African identity governed by discourses of non-interference, mutual economic development, and anti-communism, thereby enabling the polity to reach across the colour line and lay an equal claim to the power and protection of African nationalism. This was far from a refusal to acknowledge that the age of white supremacy was over; it was, in fact, a recognition that changed times required the adoption of new paradigms of security and legitimacy. Indeed, Vorster was willing to go further still and abandon the racial bonds of the white redoubt: he reconceptualised the category of 'whiteness' in national rather than racially supremacist terms and trading in the anchor of 'European' that had featured so prominently in Verwoerd's ideological legacy for the unlikely identity of 'African'.[110] These counter-intuitive efforts demonstrate the potency of post-war norms of non-racial governance. Even Pretoria, supposedly the ultimate hold out, took them firmly into account. These efforts also support historians' growing appreciation of decolonisation as a multi-faceted contest replete with conflict, failure, and contradiction, rather than as a set of north-south transfers of political power.[111] Further, this analysis contributes to emerging understandings within African historiography of the racial categories underpinning national identities as politically malleable, rather than rigid in meaning or content.[112] From here, we can begin to bridge the history of state-building in early independent black Africa with that of ideological renewal and nationalist introspection in apartheid South Africa.

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[110] I am grateful to Daniel Magaziner for discussions on this point. For recent work on global 'whiteness' see, M. Lake and H. Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge, 2008); and B. Schwarz, *The White Man's World* (Oxford, 2011).

[111] For a mere sampling of recent examples, see M. Terretta, 'Cameroonian Nationalists Go Global: Form Forest Maquis to a Pan-African Accra', *Jounral of African History*, 51:2 (2010), 189-212; F. Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton, NJ, 2014); and D. Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, and Decolonization* (Cambridge, 2009).

[112] Glassman, *War of Words*, 3-22.