

In our view, the South African issue should not be reduced to a morality play, where self-acclaimed purity and rhetorical radicalism are the main issues at stake. This debate has exhausted itself in fruitless accusations about "Canadian government machinations" on the one side and, on the other, dismissive claims that critics on the left lack information and are ideologically biased. Both remain trapped in their prejudgments. Even though strong values are important in guiding analysis and policymaking, they ought not to be allowed to blind or encourage mere self-serving partisanship. Too much wishful thinking has misled foreign South Africa observers. Instead of predicting events, they have simply fitted them into predetermined static categories.

The Canadian debate on South Africa during the 70s and 80s was preoccupied with collusion with Apartheid and moral purity. Most advocacy groups devoted only a mere fraction of their energy to equally sophisticated reasoning about strategic developments in South Africa itself. Invariably the Apartheid state was treated simply as a monolithic racist entity, beyond the pale for most activists and too contaminated for strategic involvement. This led to major shortcomings in existing studies, particularly since the normalization of South African politics has increasingly eroded the simple dichotomy of oppressors and victims. It is this lacuna that the present study attempts to address.

Apartheid critics have mostly focused on its undoubted brutality. But in addition to brutality there has always been paternalistic benevolence as well. This benevolence, from corporate charity to the caring feudalism of conservative farmers, oiled the system and helps to explain why it lasted so long. The focus on brutality is mostly concerned with victims who are assumed to play no active part in history. Yet this victimology needs to be balanced by descriptions of how the seemingly powerless survive, give meaning to their lives and act upon their circumstances. We intend, therefore, to ground moral conclusions much more in the unique local context and, by so doing, perhaps remove some preconceived notions with which an overreported conflict is nevertheless misunderstood. In short, we want to emphasize the rich texture and unreported ironies and contradictions which the usual unnuanced reasoning on Apartheid misses.