SOUTH AFRICA: CONTESTED TRANSITIONS

The inauguration of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela as President on 10 May 1994 marked the end of era, indeed the end of a way of life, for South Africa. Or did it? Most South Africans finally became citizens in their own country. Their new constitution guaranteed equality and promised not only equity but redress for the discrimination and injustice of the past. The imagination, persistence, and resilience that characterized opposition to minority rule could now be turned to reconstruction and development. New leaders, new rules, and a new agenda. Yet much remained the same. Even as the new leaders moved into their offices, laws, administrative rules, common practices, interpersonal expectations, and more all reflected the legacies of discrimination and racism.

Many commentators describe South Africa as in transition from apartheid to development. In practice, reconstructing South Africa requires confronting multiple, overlapping, and sharply contested transitions. How, for example, should government be organized? Will local authorities facilitate genuine popular participation or function to entrench elite privilege or to re-create the dependent status of women? Will education fulfill the promise of protesting students and become fundamentally liberating, or will schools remain conservative barriers to change? Can socialist and communist ideas guide national development or will they be discarded as obstacles to economic growth and entry into the global capitalist system? Will vibrant community organizations retain their militancy and autonomy, or will they be constrained and disempowered as they become part of the bureaucracy? Now, as South Africa has marked more than 20 years of majority rule and as we have mourned Nelson Mandela’s passing and celebrated his life, these questions persist. Indeed, protesting students insist they be addressed.

The seminar’s major task will be explorations in comparative social history. What are the roots of the current situation, and in what ways do they shape and constrain future possibilities? How do people in contemporary South Africa confront the ideas that have shaped their understanding of their own country as they reconstruct their history? How do official stories interact with popular tales? Who are the story tellers and their audiences?

Participants in this seminar will explore efforts to create a non-racist, non-sexist, democratic South Africa by analyzing these and related contested transitions. Within that common framework students will identify particular arenas of special interest to pursue in more detail.

This seminar has no prerequisites and will not assume particular prior knowledge or experiences. In the expectation that students will have diverse backgrounds and different level of familiarity with Africa, the seminar will enable participants to develop their own interests and their expertise.

Organization

This course develops the breadth of a survey though the interactive style of a seminar. We will meet weekly. I shall take responsibility for introducing the topics, reviewing relevant research, and suggesting appropriate readings. Class participants will share responsibility for the content and conduct of the seminar, including summarizing and criticizing their readings, contributing to the collective online discussion, and suggesting avenues for developing further the topics we discuss.

Each seminar participant will select, early in the Quarter, a particular organization or individual in contemporary South Africa for continuing attention throughout the course. As the Quarter progresses, seminar participants will focus part of their effort on that organization or individual, including noting current events, developing a relevant bibliography, doing supplementary reading, and sharing their puzzles, observations, and insights with other class members.

Weekly videos (Mondays, 12:30–1:20 pm) will provide additional perspectives on contemporary South Africa. Occasional longer films or other special presentations may be scheduled during the Quarter.
Requirements

A seminar is the product of its participants. Hence, each participant will share in the responsibility for the direction and conduct of the seminar, as well as completing her/his own individual work.

This seminar will require both broad and focused reading by its participants. That reading must be critical and analytical. The assigned readings are of course entry points to the topics considered. Accordingly, seminar participants will be expected to develop their own supplementary reading lists throughout the Quarter.

Students will be expected to do the necessary reading for the course, both from the works suggested in the syllabus and from sources they locate themselves. Students will be expected as well to participate in the seminar’s collective effort, including reporting on particular readings, presenting their own ideas and insights, providing feedback to their colleagues, and contributing to the collective online discussion.

To facilitate regular and prompt feedback on students’ work, the assignments for this seminar will be relatively brief and distributed throughout the Quarter. Students will prepare two analytic reviews of selected readings and a Critical Essay on the organization or individual on which they focus. Developing the Critical Essay will require maintaining an online journal over the quarter, with regular entries. To reinforce the collaborative nature of our work, students will comment online on each week’s topic, regularly add to their online scrapbook on their primary focus, comment on other class members’ journal entries, and share responsibility for two mini-debates on contested transitions in South Africa. Students will report periodically on assigned readings and present their Critical Essay observations to the seminar.

Clearly, this seminar will require initiative, self-direction, and collective responsibility on the part of each participant. Each individual’s own work is intended to contribute to a collective product. For that to be possible, each individual’s own work must be thorough, creative, and timely.

Except by special arrangement, written work will be expected when due and will not be accepted after the last class meeting.

A Write 2 Course

South Africa: Contested Transitions fulfills the PWR 2 part of Stanford University’s Writing and Rhetoric General Education requirement. As we work on understanding contemporary South Africa and its social history, students develop research, writing, and oral presentation skills. Designed to facilitate that, the class assignments listed above require research and involve both written and oral presentation.

Writing for this course includes: 2 Analytic Essays; 1 Critical Essay (composed of online journal entries, online journal feedback, and a final summary essay); and weekly comments and responses on the current topic in the course web site. Oral presentations include: reports on assigned readings (twice during the quarter); updates on the Critical Essay; and collaborative participation in mini-debates on post apartheid policy decisions (twice during the quarter).

To enable students to present their work to an informed and spirited audience, we will organize a Contested Transitions mini-TedX toward the end of the quarter. After course enrollment has stabilized, we will set the date and time.

In addition to the instructor and the course assistant, Stanford provides strong support for the development of communication skills, including the Hume Center for Writing and Speaking and other resources, through the Introductory Seminars program.
Readings

Several sorts of readings are necessary for this class: broad overviews of major events and actors, analyses of specific issues and interactions in South African history, politics, and society, and empirical studies of particular people, places, and events. Both to provide alternative perspectives and because historically most South Africans have had limited access to research libraries, scholarly journals, and academic publishers, we will also draw on the observations and analyses presented in novels, poetry, and drama.

We will use regularly:
- Like the videos, novels are another entry point into understanding South Africa. Among South Africa’s best known authors is Nadine Gordimer. An engaging and challenging novel is:
- Among the other books that class participants may find useful as a basic resource is:

All seminar participants will be expected to review a limited set of basic readings for each seminar topic. Some will be available as a Course Reader, while others will be available through Course Reserves in Green Library and electronically on the course web site: http://web.stanford.edu/class/history48q. The History/AAAS 48Q Course Reader will be ordered online from University Readers in electronic or print format. Placing a print order provides immediate electronic access to the first 30% of the Course Reader in pdf format. To order, log on to https://students.universityreaders.com/store/ and follow the instructions.

Readings for each topic are listed in the schedule of seminar sessions. Readings are located in several places, including Marais, the Course Reader, web reserve, and Green Library reserve. Since all students can access online sources, with the exception of a few especially important documents, sources available online will not be printed or added to library or course reserves. Since some important sources, especially those we identify during the Quarter, may not be on library reserve, seminar participants will need to locate them in the general library collections and share them with other class members.

Since an important goal of the seminar is to enable students to develop their skills in finding and using relevant research, seminar participants will be expected to supplement those suggested readings with other materials relevant to the topics considered and to their specific topical focus.

Studying contemporary Africa requires regular use of both electronic and print sources. Course assignments and discussions will therefore encourage students to develop their electronic searching and locating skills for sources available in both print and electronic form. Note that electronic sources will not in themselves provide a sufficient foundation for our seminar’s work. Even as the volume of material available online increases, printed publications—books, scholarly articles not yet online, newspapers, and government documents—will remain important.

The list of seminar sessions, topics, and dates, along with suggested readings, is attached. The materials included in Course Reader are marked 📖. The materials available electronically on the course web site are marked 📈. The lists of readings for each theme are of course themselves introductions to broad topics and themes. Course participants will need, therefore, to develop the skills of addressing a list that contains more readings than can be accomplished within a single week and that must be supplemented by additional readings selected by each individual. Those skills include: identifying quickly the major thrust of the argument presented in an article or book; surveying the contents of a book through its preface, introduction, table of contents, and initial and concluding chapters; associating authors with particular schools of thought and/or methodologies; reading for a narrowly defined purpose; building on reading previously done; and sharing reading responsibilities with other class members. Each week, each class member will need to make judicious choices about what to read and how to read it.
Evaluation and Grading

The primary criteria for grading will be both individual progress (in mastery of the course themes and relevant literature and in critical, analytic, and synthetic skills) throughout the Quarter and, since collaboration with others is essential to our approach, contribution to the collective effort of the class. Thus, no student will be disadvantaged by a relatively more limited background at the outset.

Written work will be evaluated as it is submitted. I am happy to meet with seminar participants to supplement the written evaluations.

This course will require a substantial independent and self-sustained effort, as well as a creative contribution to a collective enterprise. For those who accept that challenge, the course should prove demanding, involving, and rewarding.
Schedule of Seminar Sessions

Introduction: Contested Transitions in South Africa (9 January)

Our principal concerns in this initial session are to introduce the course content and organize the seminar, to explore the interests of course participants, and to begin to address general issues of approach and method in the study of contemporary South Africa.

Hein Marais, *South Africa Pushed to the Limit*, Introduction and Chapter 1


Eve Fairbanks, “‘You Have All the Reasons to Be Angry’: A Massacre and the Fight for South Africa’s Future,” *New Republic* (March 2013).

South African History: An Overview (16 January)

What are the major roots of the contemporary transitions in South Africa? How can we use our knowledge of the past, itself contested, to understand the interactions and conflicts of the present? And how does the present inform and revise what we (think we) know of the past? To address those questions, we must explore both history and historiography— who has written the history of South Africa? whose history has been written? what have been the principal tools for writing that history and what are the consequences of using those tools? who tells the story differently?


Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, Chronology; Chapters 1-4

Liberation Struggles: From Generations of Resistance to Negotiations (23 January)

The struggle against apartheid in the late 20th century had deep roots. Resistance to white rule in South Africa has taken many forms, including direct armed confrontation, infiltration and subversion, collaboration, negotiation, boycott, individual protest, mass demonstrations, assertion of local culture and experience, nationalism of several sorts and forms, and more. Our first task in this session is to understand the history of resistance in South Africa—ideas, contexts, forms, practices, and outcomes. How has each generation sometimes built on, sometimes ignored, and sometimes rejected earlier approaches? We will consider as well the path to majority rule, which traversed both armed struggle and extended negotiations. Who were the negotiators? For whom did they speak? On whose support could they rely? What made a negotiated transition possible? (As you read, keep track of the sequence of events, especially from the 1948 elections through Sharpeville, the Rivonia Trial, the Soweto student uprising, the states of emergency, and the unbanning to the 1994 majority rule election.)

Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, Part I, Chapter 4; Part II, Chapters 6, 8, 9-10

Marais, *South Africa Pushed to the Limit*, Chapter 2


[Note: The list of supplementary readings is especially lengthy today to help you work on choosing among readings by: (1) developing a clear sense of an author’s major concerns and argument after a quick reading, (2) reviewing multiple readings quickly to determine which best meet your needs (and therefore to which you will return), (3) associating authors with a particular approach or school of thought, (4) exploring readings that are available only in the library, and (5) building on previous reading. Hence, you should look at all of these readings and then select a few for careful attention.


Alister Sparks, *Tomorrow Is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Negotiated Revolution*, Chapters 4-5 (and skim)


Somadoda Fikeni, “The Polokwane Moment and South Africa’s Democracy at the Crossroads,” in Peter Kagwanja and Kwandiwe Kondlo, editors, *State of the Nation: South Africa 2008* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008), 3-34 [Note that the annual editions of the *State of the Nation* and other HSRC publications are available online: [www.hsrcpress.ac.za](http://www.hsrcpress.ac.za).]


The Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Historical Construction and Reconstruction (30 January)

With its long history of racial discrimination and systematic exploitation and repression, what was to be the foundation for constructing the new South Africa? Political participation, universal suffrage, and a majority government were and are essential. But what might promote unity in this very divided society? The demand to convict and imprison apartheid’s leaders and administrators was loud and strong. But in the early 1990s the new South African government opted for reconciliation. A very visible Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created to expose what had happened and for those who cooperated, including assassins and torturers, to grant amnesty. Political compromise? popular theater? an effort to shape attitudes, morals, and ethics?—the TRC remains enigmatic. Whose interests were served? With what consequences?

The primary reading assignment for this session is to explore the major documents of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, beginning with its web site <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/>. You should be sure to locate and skim a copy of the Commission’s Final Report.

To support that review of primary source materials, each student should locate and list at least three sources (print or electronic) on the TRC, including analyses that are sharply critical of the TRC and its role, and read and be ready to report on one of those sources.

 supplementary readings

Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (a very personal account of the TRC)


Constructing the New South Africa: Mass Democracy and the Entrenchment of Privilege (6 February)

Today we focus on the first of the series of overlapping transitions that we will consider. A major challenge of this era, both before and after the 1994 election, is to write the rules for what has been termed the New South Africa. What interests are to be given the strongest protection? Why? How? What is the appropriate division of authority and responsibility among national, provincial, and local leaders? What are the desirable, and reasonable, boundaries between public and private? between individual and community? How
should the rules themselves be written and modified? How can broad participation be assured and minority interests recognized without entrenching privilege or impeding change?

Marais, South Africa Pushed to the Limit, Chapters 3, 11


supplementary readings


Ashwin Desai, We are the Poors: Community Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa, Chapter 13: Mpuamanga’s New War


Identities: Persistence and Transition (13 February)

Often, the history of South Africa is presented as the story of the creation and mobilization of identities, especially those of race and ethnicity. Yet for many South Africans, that assertion is itself a contentious claim. We are born Black, or Zulu, or Indian, or female, they insist. In this view, people cannot choose or easily modify who they are. Others, however, insist equally energetically that identities are socially constructed and can therefore be socially modified. Since we too face discrimination because of race and skin color, we too are black, asserted South African militants who were themselves legally categorized as Indian or Coloured. In this session we consider identities—asserted and assigned, inherited and created—as another of South Africa’s contested transitions.


Amanda Gouws, “Women’s Activism Around Gender-Based Violence in South Africa:: Recognition, Redistribution and Representation,” Review of African Political Economy 43, no. 149 (July 2016): 400-415

Gordimer, Burger’s Daughter
supplementary readings


From the RDP to GEAR: Old Socialism and New Capitalism (20 February)

For much of their history, the African National Congress and its allies, especially the unions and the Communist Party, linked opposition to apartheid to opposition to capitalism as an economic, social, and political system. Yet since assuming office, that coalition has embraced an understanding of South African development, indeed of the global political economy, that seems strikingly similar to the perspective of the World Bank, the United States, and other advocates of a capitalist world system. Have South African communism and socialism become little more than political slogans? Or have South Africans assumed global responsibility for defining communism and socialism in the post-Soviet Union era? Are South African workers and employers argumentative allies or implacable enemies? (For our discussion today, come prepared to make the case for GEAR [and ASGISA] or a return to the RDP and to criticize the alternative—we will assign roles.)

Marais, *South Africa Pushed to the Limit*, Chapters 4-8

Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, Part II, Chapter 7:170-179; Part III, Chapter 12


Eddie Webster and Glenn Adler, “Toward a Class Compromise in South Africa’s ‘Double Transition’: Bargained Liberalization and the Consolidation of Democracy,” *Politics and Society* 27,3(September 1999): 347-385

Stephen Gelb, Macroeconomic policy and development: From crisis back to crisis, via the RDP, GEAR and ASGI-SA (South Africa: 2010)

supplementary readings


Allister Sparks, “The Great U-Turn,” in Beyond the Miracle: Inside the New South Africa, Chapter Nine


HIV and AIDS: Controversies and Contentions (27 February)

Policy making is always a conflictual process. HIV and AIDS are no exception. To explore this contested arena, we will begin by exploring the strong skepticism about HIV and AIDS that informed public policy during Thabo Mbeki’s presidency. A few critics and their supporters inside and outside South Africa reject both the reports on the extent of HIV and AIDS and the link between HIV and AIDS, and for many years
that was the official position of the South African government. We will be concerned with both the substance of the disagreements and their role in policy making.

Two sorts of readings are necessary for this discussion. First, we need to develop a basic understanding of HIV and AIDS in Africa and in South Africa. For that, online sources are especially helpful. Second, we need to explore public health policy issues specific to South Africa. Accordingly, there are two lists below, both intended to permit a broad reach and to be sure there is new reading for students who have already worked on these themes. Make judicious choices from each list.

>>> HIV and AIDS globally and in Africa >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

Note that the UNAIDS web site is periodically reorganized. You may need to use the home page <www.unaids.org> and then jump to specific documents rather than using the URL for each individual document. Among the useful sources on that site are:

>>> HIV and AIDS in South Africa >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>


>>> HIV and AIDS: South Africa policy issues >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

Marais, *South Africa Pushed to the Limit*, Chapter 9


Gumede, “Mbeki’s AIDS Denial—Grace or Folly?,” in William Mervin Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC*, pp. 149-174

supplementary readings


Nthabiseng Motsemme, “‘Loving in a time of hopelessness’: On township women’s subjectivities in a time of HIV/AIDS,” in Gasa, editor, *Women in South African History*


From People’s Education to the National Qualifications Framework (6 March)

At critical moments education was clearly at the center of South African struggle. Just as Bantu Education was designed to allocate roles and constrain aspirations, so was People’s Education conceived as a strategy for mobilization against discrimination and oppression. Many people expected post-apartheid South Africa to have a radically different education system. Yet much of the debate today seems to assume that once they have been desegregated, schools will be organized and function pretty much as they have in the past. Here, then, is another of South Africa’s contested transitions. What are the competing agendas? Whose agendas are they? What are the current forms of struggle in this domain?

Marais, *South Africa Pushed to the Limit*, Chapter 10


FS The Children’s Charter of South Africa (Adopted by Children’s Summit of South Africa, 1 June 1992)


Reconstruction and Development: Policy Choices (13 March)

We conclude the Quarter by exploring the broad transformation agenda in contemporary South Africa, as it has evolved from the Reconstruction and Development Programme of the 1994 election to Growth, Employment, and Redistribution through the 1999 election. What has been the trajectory of these efforts to build the new South Africa on the legacy of apartheid? Why? With what consequences for the future?


FS Neville Alexander, Thoughts on the New South Africa, “Enough is as good as a feast,” 189–201


Marais, South Africa Pushed to the Limit, Chapters 12-14


Ashwin Desai and Richard Pithouse, “‘What stank in the past is the present’s perfume’: Dispossession, Resistance, and Repression in Mandela Park,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103,4(September 2004): 841–875
Sheila Meintjes, “Naked women’s protest, July 1990: ‘We won’t fuck for houses,’” in Gasa, editor, *Women in South African History*

**Video Schedule (Mondays, 12:30–1:20 pm)**

| Jan  | 8   | Where Do I Stand? |
| Jan  | 15  | — | Martin Luther King, Jr. Day |
| Jan  | 22  | We Jive Like This |
| Jan  | 29  | Generations of Resistance |
| Feb  | 5   | Maids and Madams |
| Feb  | 12  | In a Time of Violence, Part 1 |
| Feb  | 19  | — | Presidents’ Day |
| Feb  | 26  | In a Time of Violence, Part 2 |
| Mar  | 5   | In a Time of Violence, Part 3 |
| Mar  | 12  | Testing Hope: Grade 12 in the new South Africa |