**POL 3013: SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT**

**LECTURE 4: WHEN RHODES MET MANDELA**

**1. Adekeye Adebajo on Mandela and Rhodes:**  Adebajo’s article surely reflects what many people thought when the Mandela-Rhodes Foundation was created in 2002. Its central question is: Should Mandela have lent his name to the legacy of Rhodes? Did Mandela, as Adebajo suggests, betray an essential part of his historical role in South African history in this way? These are good questions, but we should not answer them too easily—for example, by projecting our own hopes and illusions onto Mandela, brushing over the contradictions in his political thought, or losing sight of the continuities between the order established by Rhodes around 1894 and that established by Mandela in 1994.

**2. The legitimacy of vast individual wealth:** Before discussing Adebajo’s argument, it’s worth noticing an area of frequent confusion about the legitimacy of vast wealth, such as that bequeathed by Rhodes, acquired by gaining a monopoly over a resource needed by society as a whole, almost always at significant cost to others, and often through dishonesty and manipulation. Would the same problem exist if Rhodes had left his wealth to his family or friends? To take a contemporary example, is it acceptable for the very wealthy to spend their money by living extravagantly (or invest it in a hedge fund), but not to bankroll a political party or to adopt children from a poor country? When they use their wealth for a philanthropic purpose, it may be different because they are implicitly asking for public respect for this choice. But is the wealth itself not the real problem?

**3. Empire building vs nation building:** Running through Adebajo’s article is a contrast between Rhodes as an empire-builder and Mandela as a nation-builder. In the South African (or African) context, this contrast includes much else. For example, Rhodes’s imperialism depended on military violence against unarmed people (or people armed in a rudimentary way), while Mandela relied on negotiation and elections. But the contrast may not be as strong as we think: South African power in Africa depends on other means, apart from military force. It’s not easy to judge the relative merits of empires and nation-states on civic rights, tolerance, etc., partly because the record is so uneven. The nation-state has been the universal form of political organization for perhaps 50 years by now.

**4. Democracy and race:** There is one undoubted major difference between Rhodes and Mandela. Rhodes created a political order which subjugated the majority on the basis of race; Mandela brought that order to an end. But racial divisions and inequalities remain in the South African order created by Mandela, and may even have grown. In capitalist societies, democratic inclusion has always had the capacity to reconcile formal equality with material inequality. The rise of cabinet government through the party system has also protected dominant classes from democratic challenge. The undoubted significance of democracy in South Africa should not blind us to the ways in which greater democratic inclusivity often goes along with hollowing out of democracy.

**5. Rhodes, Schreiner, Mandela:** Adebajo’s argument is placed in a different light when we take account of the vision of South Africa’s future developed by Rhodes’s contemporary critic, Olive Schreiner. Schreiner was committed to equal political rights, regardless of race, but upheld a very different conception of how these should be embedded within local forms of community, with far more autonomy and transparency in economic life. Is Mandela’s South Africa closer to Schreiner’s or Rhodes’?