# Report reflection of experiences in SA

Mental analysis of situations in South Africa (SA) required patience, comprehension, a healthy amount of introspection and the ability to project yourself in the current social construct. After contemplating thoroughly, I decided it would be more effortless to characterize my experiences in SA with an adjective, which was “confusing”.

It was not the number of mendicants at airport that had me confused, nor was it the contrast between the “suburbs” and the townships filled with hungry people that had me confused. Neither was it the immense inequality and economic differences between rich and poor that had me confused from the first day. Finally, I thought that maybe the number of actual “black” nationals versus “other nationals” with different ethnicities had me confused. However, this was also not true as we could see the same phenomenon in Belgium. The first word that comes up in my mind if I would like to describe my occurrences in SA would be “perplexed”. After the second week in Gauteng (Pretoria), observations in classes, shops and even in my residence, arose a certain believe that “political” conversations with locals should serve as a proper tool of communication. In that way locals will find it easier to provide an explanation, overview of their in-depth and everyday experiences in this country. At first, it seemed like a lot of locals where only disturbed with the current government and its certain level of incompetence. But, according to several locals, the current political party – who already have been in power for 20 years- has played a significant role in subverting the happiness, equality and economic status of the citizens in a SA.

If 1989 was the year in which of a lot of German nationals found joy, then 29 years ago, was the year for the “dark complexioned citizens” of SA. The last standing block of “The Apartheid” came tumbling down and in its events paved way for the “Newly” written constitution that was manufactured/assembled to serve as a diving board for the “people of colour” that were persecuted and maltreated throughout these years. A lot of promises such as equal division of the land, investment in domestic education, work and infrastructure were made by this party (government). However, even nowadays these commitments were not kept by the people in power. In fact, if we look at certain numbers covering socio-economic problems, we can see an increase in unemployment, xenophobia and racist attacks by far-right wing movements during the last 5 years. As an outsider, I think it is important to understand that understanding these topics require a certain amount of “pre-history of SA” to understand some or many cultural differences here in SA. One of the most significant “hot-topics” in SA would be the “mutual racism” after the “Apartheid”. This means that being black in a primarily “white dominated” neighbourhood could be one of the key issues that get local harmed in SA and vice versa. However, this pattern of mutual racism can be traced back to the townships to, where nationals will come from different ethnical groups or tribes.

Mostly, these “tribal wars/ outbursts” are re-occurring phenomena which results in “cultural attacks” or “tribal attacks”. These deep-rooted “tribal-wars” are the effects of rules and regulations implemented by the colonizers before and during the “Apartheid”. During these vulnerable times, land was divided and distributed by the “people in power”. The division was also based on the “complexion of your skin and ethnicity”, which meant that if you were Zulu you had to move to the region where they had divided land for the Zulu people. This together with the “Bantu education”, which major provision was enforcing racially separated educational facilities, ensured for the development of this “micro-migration”. Because of this tribes and ethnical groups were put in the same situation but divided more than ever. According to academics, this resulted in a different development of aspects of self-identity. Adding other factors such as pride, social behaviour and cultural norms resulted in a more separated national congregation due to segregation.

Although many of the interlocutors were bestowing me with arguments, numbers and even graphs- from Wikipedia- I still had a hard time to believe that the incompetence of certain politicians in the government caused all this inner frustration, anger, disappointments and political situations. I believe that being misinformed is far worse than being not informed at all. This way of thinking helps a lot because being acquainted with something without more accurate arguments, details and verification of my reflection would become jejune and uninteresting. At that moment I decided to ask more nationals and shift the conversations to the people working in academics. I initialized conversations about socio-economic problems and its developments focussing primarily on the main concerns of the yearly increasing unemployment rate and its correlation with xenophobic attacks. The locals portraited a rather vivid picture called “the poorness by outer ethnicities”. According to the “uneducated, meticulous and unskilled” nationals, racism and “cheap, unskilled immigrants” are most likely the reason why the unemployment rate has reached an all-time high of at least 40%. More specifically, they claim that most of the farming land is still largely owned by the “Afrikaners” or “Caucasian” population and because of this, farmers tend to decide in favour of “cheap, unskilled immigrants” from neighbouring countries such as: Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia and Botswana instead of hiring SA nationals.

This upcoming shift in micro-economics, has increased concerns of a numerous number of nationals – a large part of those living in townships- about “immigrants” and their impact on the “SA job market”. Nationals have come aware of the competition of their position as “the poor working class”. Due to these concerns, the government has seen an increase of xenophobic attacks on “economic immigrants” by SA nationals. Moreover, since the government promised the land retributions only a small number of “black” farmers have received a piece of land. Thus, this has resulted in unrest and dissatisfaction of a whole lot of “black” nationals. They feel betrayed and unheard by the government and because of this a lot of citizens in SA are asking the question why it is still like that. Because of the % unemployment, criminality has increased in the last five years and keeps on increasing. There is an overproduction of low skilled labour of neighbouring countries and because of this shift in economic situation, frustrations are growing among the citizens of SA. This is a phenomenon that can be also be seen in a lot of more developed countries (e.g. Belgium, the Netherlands, France).

Last part is about my self-identification…..

It is also difficult here to have that feeling because people heavily identify themselves as various ethnical groups. I identify myself as a Ghanaian bestowed with the Belgian culture, which I think is accepting both cultures and taking have best cultures.

This would be one of the biggest differences that I have seen here. Back in Belgium, xenophobia among the nationals will result in discrimination when searching for residence or work. Not often will xenophobia lead to physical attacks.

I am stating all these problems because I believe that these factors highlight the most important cultural differences between SA and BE. It had never crossed my mind that going to SA would let me see so much division and togetherness at the same time.

I believe that in Belgium a lot of people are racist or discriminate without even knowing that they are racist or discriminate (look at the recent elections.)

For me the RSA is the land where everybody is welcome to stand under the same umbrella when its raining. However, standing under the umbrella and accidently stepping on somebody’s sneakers could cause expelling from under the umbrella.