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IES Dialogues on Differences

Journal Entry 3

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**What are some examples that you can describe of ‘culture’, ‘diversity’ and ‘difference’ being used in the United States? How does this compare to South Africa?**

The United States has recently seen a shift away from forward/progressive thinking as United States President Donald Trump grew in power over the course of his election campaign. Trump’s use of fear tactics in his campaign and agenda helped him secure the GOP Presidential nomination and overtake Democratic representative, Hillary Clinton, but ultimately labelled him as an ignorant bigot. In context of the United States’ two-party system, there seem to be two dominating schools of thought concerning Trump. From a conservative view point, Trump is a successful business man who is not afraid to speak his mind. From a liberal view point, Trump is a bigoted madman who is unfit to be the President of the United States.

Trump has made the public aware of his intentions which reflect on the US as a whole as lacking compassion and progressive thinking. Mobilization against the Black Lives Matter movement, selection of an all white-male cabinet, suppression of religious freedoms through a Muslim ban, refusal to accept refugees, and plans to build a wall and “have Mexico pay for it” are just some of the tasks on Trump’s controversial agenda. Trump is stifling the United States’ melting-pot culture, he is limiting diversity, and is ignorant and intolerant of people’s differences. So rather than Trump’s agenda being an example of how ‘culture’, ‘diversity’ and ‘difference’ are being used in the United States, it would be more accurate to say how ‘culture’, ‘diversity’ and ‘difference’ aren’t being used in the United States.

I am rather unfamiliar with the situation in South Africa, especially with Jacob Zuma’s agenda. Besides knowing his name, the only piece of his history that I am aware of is the corruption charges against him in the mid 2000’s that were later declared unlawful in the late 2000’s. Side note, this would actually be a really interesting topic to talk about in class. How did this information manage to not hurt his political career? It seems unsettling that a man charged for corruption managed to escape conviction and then rise in power. Back to the point… Recently, many people have expressed disapproval for Zuma’s actions. Many street lights along Main Road have anti-Zuma stickers on them that read “Zuma must fall”. From what I understand, he is being criticized again for corruption.

**What are some of the current debates on these issues and what is shaping these debates?**

The United States is slow to accept progressive ideals because much of the population is engrained in tradition. It is the reason that so many United States presidents end up being re-elected for their second term in office. People are so scared of change and what might happen. The focus on the potential negative aspects of change often outweigh the focus on the potential positive aspects of change.

Cultural awareness and diversity is growing at an individual level, but legislation slow to mirror social values. Younger generations are more accepting of cultural changes than older generations, while older generations seem to resist change. This difference might explain why legislation lags behind the speed at which cultural/societal values change because those in power tend to belong to the older generation. Trump is a great example of the traditional conservative mind-set because many of his policies are traditional and regressive in nature. Students at UCT would argue that change is very slow in South Africa as well. It is post-apartheid and promises were made by government officials to return stolen land back to black and coloured individuals and fight inequality, but it has been more than twenty years and no real change has been made. Protests reflect the people’s wants but legislation has not seen many changes. Hopefully the future will have more forward thinking people in places of power to reflect positive aspects of an ever changing society.

**What socio/cultural/ethnic/economic differences have you observed so far and how do you imagine this class assisting you in processing those observations.**

Here is a quick list:

* children without shoes running on glass
* increased trash/litter
* less access to educational opportunities
* increased number of beggars
* worse customer service
* increased health consciousness

All but the last two points stem from economic inequality and poverty. Perhaps this class can offer me guidance in understanding what government assistance is given to groups like these. Also, I am curious about how different communities view homelessness and beggars. How do these thoughts compare with American thoughts on homelessness and poverty?