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# A Lens into South Africa

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Introduction

Nelson Mandela wrote in his book*, A Long Walk to Freedom*, “No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”  (Good Reads, 2014). Known as one of the greatest civil rights leaders worldwide, Mandela had a vision for his country and the way it should be. To break the streak of [apartheid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apartheid_in_South_Africa), or ‘being apart’ in South Africa, he tacked institutionalized racism, poverty, inequality, and fostering racial reconciliation. While South Africa has made tremendous steps forward, including electing Nelson Mandela as the first black chief executive in a democratic election, South Africans still struggle to find the balance between old customs and a new nation of equality. Like Nelson Mandela said, people aren’t born hating other people, they learn and are taught it. From infancy humans are consumed by culture, and in order to understand the behaviors and ideas a culture instills in its’ people, one must analyze its various social institutions.

Social Stratification

# The social stratification of South Africa can almost always be seen with just the eyes. Although a lot of progress was made towards ending the segregation of black South Africans when Mandela became president, the real culture and problem has not yet died out. The ‘old’ apartheid system of South Africa illustrates a typical racial caste system of social stratification. After world war two, the population of South Africa was divided into four registration groups: the 4.5 millions white descendants of European immigrants, the 2.5 millions so called colored people who have descendant from more than one race, the 1 million people of Asian/ Indian descent and the 43 millions black Africans (Giddens, 1994). Levels of segregation were based on micro segregation which included separation of public places such as public toilets, washrooms, railway carriage and public beaches had separate facilities for white and non whites.  Then mezzo segregation where white and non- white neighborhoods were designed, and black people were even compelled to move to homelands- a kind of ghetto and macro segregation, where whole peoples were segregated in distinct territories (Giddens, 1994). Under this system of government, the black natives were denied their civil rights, citizenships, proper education, ownership of land and any voice in parliament. Most of them were put in menial, low paid and working-class jobs. However, the struggle of young black resistance and the election of Mandela as president changed the situation and banned the Apartheid system in South Africa. This system, banned since 1994, still affects daily life today just as the Civil Rights Acts didn’t end instantly in the United States (History Channel, 2014). Bias and harsh attitudes are still present but the government is pressing forward in forming a stronger more united South Africa.

Family and Marriage Practices

South Africa's white families are small, live as a nuclear unit, generally are close-knit, and enjoy a good standard of living. Black South Africans traditionally live in extended family settings, with a dominant father at the head. Married sons leave the extended family to begin their own households (ProQuest, 2014). Here the real culture is evident verse the ideal culture talked up in the government. Both white and black South Africans follow their own heritages’ standard of living. Family ties remain strong, and extended family plays an important role during problems and times of crisis, in which members are expected to help and support one another. Relatives play an important role in caring for children and providing aid to those in need. The high number of children born out of wedlock often causes many generations to live together. Both high HIV/AIDS infection rates and high unemployment rates in South Africa cause some elderly grandparents to become the main providers of the families, supporting their children and grandchildren with pension money (ProQuest, 2014). Male dominance of the family is a feature of South African families that cuts across ethnic and geographic lines.

The government since 2001 has recognized traditional African laws such as lobola and polygamy. Lobola is practiced in many ethnic groups and involves a complex process of negotiating a ‘bride price’ between two families. The families agree on a price, traditionally paid in a number of cows, that the groom must pay the bride's family (ProQuest, 2014). Many modern families opt for cash for the sake of convenience. Paying lobola can take years. In most Xhosa and Zulu families, the lobola must be paid in full before a couple can marry. Some women's rights activists believe that the lobola provides women with protection (ProQuest, 2014). While the tradition of homogamy remains, South Africa displays and allows many exogamy, endogamy, and heterogamy marriages.

In 2006, South Africa became the fifth country in the world to allow same sex marriage. According to the 2011 census, 36.7% of South Africans ages 20 or older were married, 43.7% had never been married, 11.0% were living together like married partners, 5.7% were widowed, 0.9% were separated, and 1.9% were divorced (Ngyende, 2014). Marriages are considered sacred and usually involve the union of extended families and sometimes even entire communities. Certain practices such as polygamy and lobola are viewed as preventing divorce and marital disintegration. However, cohabitation without marriage is a common domestic living arrangement in black and mixed-race communities, and divorce rates in South Africa are currently rising to above 50 percent (ProQuest, 2014).

Government and Structure

South Africa’s national legislature has two houses, a 90-member National Council of Provinces and a 400-seat National Assembly. Council members are elected by the nine provincial legislatures, with each legislature selecting 10 members (ProQuest, 2014). Members of the National Assembly are elected through a proportional representation system. All members of Parliament are elected to five-year terms. South Africa's president is chosen by the National Assembly on the basis of the majority party's recommendation and can then serve a maximum of two five-year terms (ProQuest, 2014). The African National Congress (ANC) is the dominant political party in South Africa and has maintained a majority in Parliament since the end of apartheid. The ANC maintains an alliance with the Congress of South African Trade Unions or COSATU, the largest of the country’s trade union federations, and the South African Communist Party (SACP) (ProQuest, 2014). The ANC identifies itself as a social democratic party, and much of its party ideology revolves around efforts to reduce the socioeconomic divisions in society that resulted from apartheid.

Efforts to decrease these divisions include various affirmative action programs, including the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) program, which is designed to create a higher percentage of black ownership and control of businesses and the economy (ProQuest, 2014). The BEE creates racial quotas for business ownership, which have been controversial. Land reform by transferring white-owned land to black ownership is another contentious issue in society. South African elections are free and fair, and citizens are able to vote at age 18. Turnout of registered voters for parliamentary elections regularly exceeds 75 percent (ProQuest, 2014). Many communities in South Africa are allowed to follow customary law, which is based on the tribal traditions and historical culture of the people in the community. When constitutional law and customary law conflict constitutional law is supposed to prevail, but that isn’t always the case. This can be a source of conflict between traditional and national leaders.

Economic Philosophies

South Africa is the richest country in Africa. They have a relatively high gross domestic product (GDP) much higher than most African countries. The GDP reflects a wide gap between whites and others in terms of income, because whites usually earn far more than blacks. Mixed-race people earn closer to the average national GDP (ProQuest, 2014). The unemployment and poverty rates are reaching 25 percent (The Heritage Foundation, 2014). More than half of all export earnings come from minerals and metals. South Africa is one of the world's largest producers of platinum and gold. It also exports diamonds, chrome, and coal. The industrial base is large and diversified, and new investment is allowing for growth. Wine and tourism are fast-growing industries. The service industry accounts for about two-thirds of GDP and about two-thirds of the labor force (ProQuest, 2014). To improve market conditions and raise capital, the government has privatized both in whole and in parts, some of the largest state enterprises. South Africa has a system of capitalism and its’ economic freedom score is 62.5, making the economy the 75th freest in the 2014 Index. Its score is 0.7 point higher than last year, with improvements in investment freedom and freedom from corruption offset by declines in six areas including fiscal freedom, labor freedom, and monetary freedom. South Africa is ranked 6th out of 46 countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, and its overall score is higher than the world and regional averages (The Heritage Foundation, 2014).

Religion

South Africa is a secular democracy with the freedom of religion. Many religions are represented in the ethnic and regional diversity of South Africa’s population. Most South Africans are Christians. Afrikaans speakers belong primarily to the Dutch Reformed Church. English-speaking whites belong to Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Methodist, and other congregations. Blacks typically belong to African Independent churches, the largest of which is the Zion Christian Church, that combine Christian and traditional African beliefs in their worship patterns. Some South Africans adhere solely to indigenous belief systems, though many people mix Christian and traditional beliefs and practices. The majority of Indians are Hindus, the rest are mostly Muslims and Christians. About 15 percent of South Africans claim no religion (ProQuest, 2014). A 2012 study found that about two-thirds of South Africans consider themselves religious, which is a decrease from previous years. From the 2001 census: 36.6% of South African’s said they were Protestant, (11.1% Zionist Christian, 8.2% Pentecostal/Charismatic, 6.8% Methodist, 6.7% Dutch Reformed, 3.8% Anglican) 7.1 % claimed Catholic 7.1%, 1.5% Muslim, 36% other Christian, 2.3% other, and 1.4 % unspecified, 15.1% none (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014).

Recreation

Soccer, rugby, and cricket are the most important, supported, and recognized sports in South Africa. Whites prefer rugby and cricket, while blacks mostly follow soccer. South Africans of all backgrounds cheer for their country at international events. All ethnic groups value competitive sports, which are increasingly open to a broader population. Those who can afford equipment or memberships participate in squash, lawn bowling, golf, field hockey, and sailing (ProQuest, 2014). Netball is an extremely popular game for women, since men only play rugby. It is very similar to basketball without a backboard. Many children in rural areas and townships grow up making their own toys, like tin guitars, wire cars, and nylon soccer balls. The South African government promotes indigenous games such as *intonga* or *induku*, stick fighting, *diketo*, a game of tossing and arranging pebbles, *jukskei*, an Afrikaner game in which players try to knock over an upright stick using the wooden pin from an ox's yoke, *dibeke*, a running ball game with two teams of 12 players, *shumpu*, a singing and dancing game, and *mancala* which is a traditional African strategy game (ProQuest, 2014).

In 2010, South Africa was chosen over Egypt and Morocco to be the first ever-African nation to host the FIFA World Cup (FIFA, 2014). Having successfully campaigned for South Africa to be granted the host, Nelson Mandela was very emotional when he held the FIFA World Cup Trophy. This is a powerful representation of the progress South Africa has made as a country and the success from it. When looking at South Africa through a functionalist lenses it can be found that recreation as a whole, and the World Cup in particular, provided South Africa with a common sense of unity and pride in their country. It also broke the barriers of social class and race, which are a huge dividing factor in South Africa. The World Cup brought in tourists and boasted the economy promoting the area and what it had to offer. This gave it’s people confidence in their homeland and put their country in the global limelight. The World Cup helped South Africa grow by globally supporting and showing the world the wonders it holds.

South Africa after the apartheid became a ‘new’ place, a country striving to move forward from racial prejudices. Nelson Mandela inspired the breakage of the distinct racial groups dividing the country. However, what is said and what is done are two different matters. The country was already dependent and had functioning societies with the split racial group territories. People were not going to move and mix if there was no need. Race is always evident and prevails no matter what governing authorities say or do. In the United States, the Civil Rights Acts didn’t fix every problem. It was a start of a movement that lasted for years to come. The battle of race and inequality is still a fight fought today. Equality is what is ideal, but a racially separated culture is not easily undone and untaught. Today, South Africa has a mix of cultures and ethic groups sprouted from rich culture and history unlike anywhere else. To unite and become one among many tribes and backgrounds will always be a struggle, as it is in other African countries with diverse tribes and culture. The number of official languages is proof of the diversity of heritage. South Africa has 11 official and 36 national languages! The end of the apartheid was the start of a movement that will change South Africa now and in the generations to come.

Conclusion

South Africa is teeming with many cultures all fused into one nation. The diversity of life creates an atmosphere unique to Africa. The old social stratification is breaking away but the racial segregation remains because a countries transition to equality doesn’t happen overnight. The family life of South Africans depends highly on the culture and area they were raised in. The ideal culture of equality may be the goal, but the real culture includes many peoples of different races all speaking native languages and passing on their own customs. Blacks, Colors and Whites all have their own heritages’ they follow resulting in different standards of living. South Africa’s government is a representative democracy, one long fought for and well respected. For being the wealthiest country in Africa, the high unemployment rate of 25 percent still echoes in the great deal of poverty experienced. The various religions practiced nationally are another example of the great diversity. Sports and recreation however, have brought the nation together especially when they hosted the World Cup in 2010. The apartheid has ended, and as a result South Africa must continue to unite in the good times and the bad. In every area and institution the separation is clear, even today. The ‘long walk to freedom’ is a long and hard one. Mandela was a living light among the darkness in the beginning of this journey for South Africa, and his attitude and vision must continue to be pursed. Just as Nelson Mandela said, “It always seems impossible until it's done.” (Good Reads, 2014).

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