

SOUTH AFRICAN

Background

How do you look into a kaleidoscope that is constantly shaking and then describe to someone else what you are seeing? So it is with trying to describe the South African. There is no static, typical South African, so be prepared for the unexpected when having S Africans on your team. The land fosters the individual - all sorts of them. With a myriad of ethnic groups, each with its own language and culture, hopes and aspirations, it would be naïve to select one person, analyse him and apply your findings in general to the nation.

Historically, the incoming Europeans pitted themselves against the various African people groups which were subdued either militarily or sometimes through very dishonest bartering. The gold and diamond riches of the country initially brought the Dutch and French Huguenot settlers (who later became known as Afrikaners) into conflict with the British colonial bosses, but before and after the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 they clubbed together to keep people of colour out of the electoral process.

The country is still in a phase of transition after generations of colonialism, racial domination and discrimination. The first fully democratically elected government in trying to rectify the errors of the past has sometimes gone overboard and erred on the other side. For instance, whereas previous governments have clearly favoured the Christian religion, Islam has recently been receiving a clear nod ahead of Hinduism and Judaism although the four religions are formally regarded as equal. In keeping with the spirit of complete tolerance, sangomas (witchdoctors) have been upgraded in social standing. Recent introduction of lenient conditions of bail for criminals has resulted in a spiralling of violence and general criminality.

Characteristics

With the passage of time the different groups have influenced each other, for example, through the interchange and exchange of food recipes, dress designs, and language carry-overs. However, the following characteristics may generally be applied to all groups in South Africa:

Industrious. Most South Africans are not afraid of hard work. In every South African cultural group, the laggard is reviled. Though the outside world pictures a white man standing over and issuing orders to a host of black workers, this is not a completely true picture. The old stereotypes on both sides of the racial divide have not been completely overcome. The tempo of work is different in the various groups, and of course there are exceptions in every (sub) culture.

Leans toward formality. South Africans, for the most part, have traditionally been more formal than many other nationalities, but this is changing radically. They would typically dress more formally for special occasions, church, weddings, funerals. The education systems of the past impressed upon them a great sense of respect for authority and procedure. Regardless of the intense heat, most South African men would wear suits to a wedding. Ladies would also dress up for such events. But this is also changing as more and more South Africa adopt the casual dress code.

Love of Sport. Sports of every kind play a large part in South African recreation. International sanctions in the past have precluded South Africans from proving their prowess, but they have caught up. In most sports they are reckoned in the top or subtop group. There has been a clear division in interest along racial lines. The whites love their rugby and cricket, while blacks have been

predominantly interested in soccer. The spectator and participation landscape is also changing quite rapidly, as more children in the black schools are exposed to cricket and rugby.

A Changing Country. The world is still aghast at the changes that have taken place in South Africa within recent years. The stereotype white boss turned out also to be fair-minded, liberal, willing to share and cast in his lot with the black man. And the black South African has shown himself to be just as co-operative. There may have been isolated bridges between cultures in the past but they were the exception rather than the norm. However, in the white, Indian and Coloured communities negative feelings towards the African majority are now deepening and the divisions are widening. They are becoming much more sceptical because of the effects of the government policy of affirmative action. This was intended to rectify the wrongs of the past, but has been creating deep resentment in its implementation, which is being felt as racism in reverse. There are also still some situations where White superiority is present. However, there are also more opportunities for people of Colour, but it's up to the individual to make use of these opportunities.

Religious. Religion is an important factor in the life of most South Africans. A good number of people are church-going, Bible-reading, prayer-saying and God-fearing.

Among the Blacks, the African Independent Churches and Zionists form an important group. Unfortunately integration within some traditional church denominations has not happened fast enough for evangelical Christians across communities in society to interact and work together. This is happening much faster among the independent and charismatic churches and organizations from within those denominations. The leadership team still tends to be predominantly White even though the congregation is mixed. Within the Afrikaans-speaking the bulk belongs to one of the Reformed Churches. Among the English-speaking the Anglicans, Catholics and Methodists are predominant. The major religions of Islam, Hinduism and Judaism are all well represented in the country's three biggest cities: Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban.

High-Speed Drivers. Anyone venturing onto the highways must have his wits about him. The taxi drivers, sometimes not properly licensed, are the scourge of the roads.

Criminality and Violence. In previous eras the police often turned a blind eye to gangsterism and drug addiction in exchange for information about anti-apartheid activists. The end of apartheid signalled a marked increase in violence and criminality. The situation got out of hand to such an extent that a group called PAGAD (People Against Gangsterism and Drugs) started taking the law into their own hands in the Cape.

Xenophobia. In another part of the country ethno-political clashes and the brutal killing of farmers have been claiming many lives. Fear has gripped society where the value of human life seems to have been drastically diminished. Xenophobia is on the increase with a greater number of African immigrants moving into townships and running the spaza shops much to the disdain of local residents.

Social Life. The average South African loves eating (especially meat). Whoever can afford it loves a good barbecue (braai) together with friends, and many groups slaughter animals for different social occasions.

THE BLACKS OF SOUTH AFRICA

There are nine major language groups among the Black population. All of them are community and family-oriented people with lifestyles based on the traditions of the past. The Zulu and Xhosa speakers are numerically the biggest tribes, with their traditional homes in the Eastern Cape and Kwazulu-Natal respectively. Sotho, Tswana Shangaan and Venda are a few others with relatively big numbers. The former two language groups straddle the independent neighbouring countries of Lesotho and Botswana. Respect for Chiefs and tribal elders is highly esteemed in all the tribes. Their advice and wisdom is generally sought and heeded although some changes are slowly taking place.

Women are subservient and rarely involved in the decision-making process. They may be the breadwinners but generally the men maintain discipline in the home.

A characteristic of the Blacks is their exuberant feast celebrations. Song, dance and story-telling flavours the cultural life of the tribal South African and children are taught the 'ways of the forefathers' from a very early age. Initiation rites and ancestor worship is common.

While this was not always the case, Blacks tend to be very disillusioned as their lot in life has not improved much – it seems life is even tougher now.

THE URBAN BLACK

Migrant labour is a major feature of South African life. Family life seems to be effectively destroyed due to the fact that the men who were working in the cities were not allowed (in the previous era) to have their wives and children with them. Many men still live separated lives from their families. This has severely affected the moral fibre of society to the extent that leaders previously looked up to have no moral and ethical stature. Their involvement in the Struggle against Apartheid, gives them prestige and honour.

The infrastructure of the former 'homelands' of the Blacks was not developed. Extreme poverty is still rife in the rural areas as a legacy of the past. AIDS is wide-spread among the Black community. Many women visiting antenatal clinics are HIV positive. The unemployment rate among the Black community is very high, especially among young men. Unemployment in other cultures is also on the rise. .

THE WHITES of SOUTH AFRICA

There are two large language groups of White South Africans - The Afrikaans and the English speakers. Major differences are evident between these two groups. (There are also minorities of almost every other European language).

History

The Afrikaners, as they prefer to be called, are descendants of Dutch, French, and to a lesser extent German, English, Scottish, and Scandinavian settlers. The Afrikaner identity developed over three and a half centuries. Conflicts with local tribal groups have been numerous since 1652, as settlers and locals have competed for land and resources. From the very beginnings the Reformed tradition and the Dutch heritage were pushed at the expense of other cultures.

In 1834, a national movement - the Great Trek - was started. About 97% of pioneer Afrikaners (Voortrekkers) moved interior in search of independence and in protest against British colonial rule

which was perceived as destroying their traditional values. It was no coincidence that the Great Trek started in the same year in which slavery was abolished in the British Empire.

Characteristics

General. In character the Afrikaner has been independent, hard-working, creative, self-willed and headstrong. A decisive battle fought at Blood River in 1838, resulted in many Afrikaners and Zulus being slaughtered. The seeds of prejudice and mistrust took root and have blossomed on both sides over many years.

Farmers. Numerically most Afrikaners today are to be found in the cities, but much of the farming area in the country is in the hands of this group. They are well-educated, friendly and very hospitable and generally remain conservative.

Morality. Traditionally a Christian nation, the Afrikaners have always been God-fearing people with high moral standards. However, with urbanisation, as well as financial, academic and political success after the Second World War, there has been a steady drop in the moral standards of the average Afrikaner.

Family Life. The father has the last say even when daughters are married. Holidays are spent together. Men generally do not do chores at home.

Inferiority Complex. Afrikaans-speaking South Africans battle with the labels 'uneducated' and 'backward' thrust upon them by English-speaking South Africans. They are often found defending their culture and their language (Afrikaans) to the hilt.

Work attitudes. Faithfulness and determination are characteristics born out of years of domination by the English-speaking White South Africans. They usually accomplish a task once they start it.

Openness. They are more direct and up front with their feelings in a situation than the English-speaking group (in line with their Dutch heritage).

Weaknesses. Intolerant of other ethnic groups, battles with a heritage of racial superiority. Lacks a 'servant-heart'. Finds it difficult to see and agree with another person's viewpoint. This also tends to be true of leadership, even in the church.

ENGLISH-SPEAKING

Characteristics

Family. The nuclear family is of great importance. The British contributed decisively to the development of the industrial infrastructure of the country but imperialism left deep scars, especially with regard to the Afrikaner.

Materialism is very evident. It is considered important to have nice things (clothes, car, and homes).

Independence is seen as a strength. It is 'wrong' to depend on others. Only ask for help if you are desperate.

Repaying favours. If someone does a favour, the person feels obliged to make some kind of repayment.

Planning and preparation is important at the expense of spontaneity.

Openness. They love democracy, have a sense for fairness and an individualistic method of decision-making. Everyone has the right to express his or her opinions. The English-speaking universities were regarded as bastions not only of good learning but also of opposition to apartheid. A major achievement of this group in the apartheid era was the erosion of the Group Areas Act, e.g. through the successful boycott of buying property in District Six (a traditionally coloured slum area of the 'Mother City' - Cape Town). They are less direct in their relationships than Afrikaners.

THE COLOURED SOUTH AFRICAN

Heritage

This group of people are found predominantly in the Cape region and have a long established heritage stemming from European colonialists, imported slaves and the indigenous Khoi and San, respectively called Hottentots and Bushmen derogatively.

Characteristics

Family. These relationships are strong and family members often live in close proximity to each other.

Elders. Respect for elders and the aged is of utmost importance.

Openness. Open expression of opinion is presently being encouraged among the younger generation. This was not so a mere decade ago. (As a result, in a team setting it may depend on age as to whether they will express their opinion on a subject or not.)

Hospitable. Hospitality plays an important role in daily life. They are sociable and easily adaptable people. They tend to be laid-back.

Leadership style. Decisions are made democratically. They may be made collectively within the framework of family life.

Weaknesses. Tendency to easily compromise values and standards; No long term goals; life is lived from day to day; Narrow viewpoint from a local community perspective - not geared towards a world-view; May be unwilling to confront problems.

Inferiority complex. During the apartheid era, Coloured were not "white" enough, so they thought. Now many feel they are being marginalised because they are not "black" enough. Feelings of inferiority are prevalent.

Islam. There is a mutual distrust between the majority Coloured and his counterpart in the Muslim subculture. Islam was established in South African mainly through the work of political convicts from the Indonesian Archipelago. Islam got a major boost through apartheid legislation in the Western Cape, the part of the country where the majority of its adherents are found. The forced removals of Coloured people coincided with a gradual increase of drug addiction, prostitution and gangsterism. In all three areas Muslims were affected drastically.

INDIANS of SOUTH AFRICA

History

Indentured labourers came from India to work in the sugar-cane plantations of Natal. Right from the start legislation from South Africa's 'Christian government' was heavily stacked against the Indians. Their continued residence in South Africa remained uncertain until the 1960s when the Prime Minister stated that they could remain here permanently. The South African Indians are found predominantly around the cities of Durban and Johannesburg where many are traders.

Characteristics

Religion. Most Indians are Hindus but in Durban there are large groups of Christians as well. Originally farm labourers, they are extremely hard working.

Hospitality. They are highly hospitable to the extent of depriving themselves if necessary. It is expected that hospitality will be returned.

Family. They are very family-oriented and women are expected to be submissive and passive.

Condescending. There is a deep mistrust between Blacks and Indians, especially in Kwazulu- Natal. Blacks are looked at condescendingly by Indians, even those in the church, and are often used as servants and are not treated well.