

Community Campus Report

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The event took place during lunchtime at the School of Design Thinking (d-School Afrika), University of Cape Town. The attendees included final year and postgraduate university students, as well as a visiting professor from the Universitat de Barcelona, Spain, who was affiliated with the d-school.

To initiate the conversation, I began by congratulating the South African students on the 29th anniversary of the first democratic elections that marked the beginning of a 'post-apartheid' South Africa on 27 April 1994, also known as Freedom Day. From there, the discussion revolved around the concept of 'national identity' and how young people are integrated into and participate in that identity.

Interestingly, most of the students expressed that they didn't feel a strong sense of national identity in South Africa. They believed that the existing 'national identity' was exclusive and only accessible to those with political and/or economic power. One student commented, "...it feels like there is a privileged group of individuals who define the identity of this country, and the rest of us are expected to simply follow along. This leaves us feeling disempowered to actively participate in the affairs of the country." The overall sentiment shared during the conversation was that for young people to actively shape the future they desire, they should be involved as co-creators of the 'national' identity. This implies that politics shouldn't solely remain in the hands of older politicians, but young people should be included and taken seriously.



The second question posed to the students was: "What do you think is the greatest challenge in today's politics?" In response, the students expressed their perception that there hasn't been significant change since the first democratic elections in 1994 regarding the full emancipation of previously marginalized racial groups. One student remarked, "There is no 'new' South Africa... we've been sold a lie that this is a rainbow nation - the existing inequalities and political divisions prove that we are a deeply divided nation." Another student reflected on the fact that their perspective of Cape Town as a relatively well-functioning city is influenced by their own privileges as students residing in well-served areas. They emphasized the need to question what it truly means for things to be 'working' and consider who benefits and who is excluded. They highlighted the thousands of people living in inhumane conditions in informal settlements throughout Cape Town, a result of racial discrimination and spatial segregation in South Africa. These settlements lack basic amenities such as housing, water, electricity, waste management, and other necessities that we often take for granted. Thus, when discussing resource distribution, it's crucial to consider not only those who are excluded but also those who are marginalized within the system.

Due to the challenging state of the country and ongoing socioeconomic segregation, the students shared that they had boycotted previous national elections. Some expressed skepticism about participating in the upcoming 2024 National Elections, as they perceived little change taking place. One student stated, "It all feels like party politics, and we're caught in the middle of it. We have no voice in the affairs of our country. Our government is willing to protect corrupt leaders at the expense of the nation. So why should I vote? It seems pointless."

Observations and Reflections:

The interaction provided valuable insights, and I want to highlight some key themes that emerged:

- The issue of national identity holds significance for young people. However, it should be inclusive and owned by the youth, rather than being controlled by a privileged few.
- Fostering a sense of national pride is crucial for unlocking the potential of young people. This realization underscores the importance of channeling the skills and leadership of young individuals back into serving their communities.
- Young people don't demand much from their leaders. They simply want to be included in the decision-making processes of their country and communities. Therefore, any interventions or initiatives should focus on empowering young people and ensuring their active participation in community affairs.

