

Writing this report has been hard for two reasons. Firstly, because it is hard to sum up a year of such amazing experiences, but mostly, because writing this report somehow feels like admitting that this wonderful year is truly over.

My experience as the first Kader Asmal scholar has been, in a word, an education. I do not simply mean an education in the academic sense that one would expect from completing an LLM at a world class university, but I will start here.

The first problem I encountered at Trinity was a first world problem if there ever was one – I could not choose between all of the incredible LLM modules on offer. I decided that attending everything I was interested in during the first week would help me choose. This strategy did not help at all - it was a very busy week and in fact left me more torn – I was blown away by the quality of the lecturers and excited by all of the information on offer. After much agonising, I settled on Comparative Civil Rights, International Humanitarian law, Transitional Justice, and International Criminal Law.

One of the things that I have realised this year is that when we are brought up in a legal system and study law in a country, we assume a huge amount as the universal norm rather than understanding particular concepts as peculiar to our individual legal system. For this reason, studying comparative law, as well as international law, not only teaches one about other systems, but leads to deep examination of one's own system. I have been surprised about the insights into South African law I have gained in the past year.

Being in a multicultural setting (and everyone being head-strong lawyers) everybody does tend to think that their system is the best and makes the most sense. However, learning about the South African Constitution in comparison to those of Germany, the US, Ireland, and others, has led me to the considered opinion that ours is truly the best in the world. This is something I have been told multiple times during my legal training, but something I have only come to really appreciate during my LLM. This has increased my excitement about using our constitutional law as a tool for achieving social justice going forward. What has also become very clear to me is that the fact that the South African constitution draws from the successful aspects of the constitutional systems the world over, is not a coincidence. It is rather, at least partly, attributable to the time Kader Asmal spent at Trinity College while in exile. The story about Albie Sachs and Kader Asmal drawing up the first draft of the Constitution on a kitchen table in Dublin now holds a new resonance for me. I feel proud and extremely humbled to be associated with this legacy.

Studying Transitional Justice was similarly inspiring as the TRC often seen as the pinnacle of success in this area. Despite these experiences, academics at Trinity was, on the whole, by no means an affirming experience. At many points my assumptions and understanding of topics I felt very passionate about were seriously challenged. While this was hard, it was also hugely rewarding.

Something I particularly enjoyed at Trinity was the seminar style learning environment offered in many modules. The bulk of the content was covered before lectures in the reading, and we were then encouraged to using the contact time to debate and explore the material in detail. In the second semester I used this as a way to select my modules – choosing small classes which were more philosophical and seminar style, as opposed to being lectures on black letter law or concepts.

Dealing with my first world problem for the second time around, I was surprised at what interested me and what I chose to study. I think we all create a sort of persona around what kind of lawyers we are – I like to call myself a human rights lawyer – but this LLM was also a chance to explore things which I would have normally considered outside of my interests. As an example of this, in the second semester I forwent a human rights course in favour of a course entitled Theoretical and Comparative Criminal law. This course explored and interrogated the jurisprudential underpinning of the criminal law. Despite being thoroughly disconcerting, I think this was the most rewarding course I undertook during my LLM. I was also able to tie this to what I would normally view as my interests, choosing to examine the theoretical justifications of the criminalisation of sex work in my final essay.

Moving on from the academic, the part of the experience that I value most about the entire year was the people I met. I spent time with a diversity of interesting and stimulating people from different countries, some of whom I am sure will be lifelong friends. It is of course not always easy to move across the world knowing no one, but the Graduate Students Union was quite incredible in the way they facilitated events for new postgrads. On this basis I would assure any future or prospective Kader Asmal scholars that there is no need to worry about this aspect. In addition to the amazing people I met at Trinity, meeting the other Irish Aid fellows was great. The Kader Asmal programme is but one part of the Irish Aid programme which brings more than seventy students to Ireland every year to study at universities across the country. The programme is administered by an NGO, the Irish Counsel for International Students (ICOS) who are fantastic about organising events to bring all of the fellows together on a regular basis, usually in Dublin. If I have one criticism of Trinity it is that its students come, for the most part, from the ‘western world’. Through Irish Aid however, I met and befriended people from places such as Sierra Leone, Burundi, Uganda, and Myanmar, to name but a few.

Making friends various from countries taught me a huge amount about different histories, cultures, and attitudes to life. Ireland was however, of course, the biggest cultural experience as it was immersive. One experiences things differently when one lives in a country as to when one travels or visits. You get to understand the humour, the contradictions and the underlying logic of things which at first seems to be random, for example, the bus schedules. While I am, in part, joking about the bus schedules, I witnessed some social phenomena which I think will stay with me forever. The biggest thing that comes to mind is the referendum on gay marriage in May 2015 and the lead up to it. Ireland is a direct democracy and to amend the constitution a referendum has to take place. This was of course interesting to a lawyer in itself, but what was most interesting was the various campaigns, on both the Yes side (for the marriage equality amendment) and the No side (who were vociferously against it).

In South Africa, beyond seeing elections posters on lamp posts every few years, if one chooses to, it is possible to ignore election politics almost entirely. In the run up to the Marriage Equality Referendum however, for at least a month, every second conversation one heard was about the vote. There were public debates on every media forum, people wore badges and T-shirts in the streets, and it was all Ireland could talk about. These conversations went beyond gay rights, but dealt with the place of the Catholic Church in Irish society, and the divide between urban and rural Ireland. It came down to establishing what Irish identity - historically viewed as the most conservative in Europe - is and what it wished to be. This was an extremely stimulating, albeit emotionally exhausting time, and was an amazing experience which will stay with me always. I was lucky to be able to go to Dublin Castle on the day of the results - where the results were being

announced. That day was the most joyous occasion and atmosphere I have ever experienced, with every county in Ireland except one voting Yes.

There were of course bad moments and a few unhappy days, but this year has been one of the best of my life. I am incredibly grateful for this experience. In addition to a huge amount of knowledge I now have, things that will help me in my career, I believe that the perspectives I have gained will serve me well going forward.

Something strange happened this year; almost every time I started to research a topic I needed to write an essay on, without deliberately looking for it, I would find journal article or report written by Kader Asmal himself. I suppose this simply goes to show the academic prowess of Asmal, and that he wrote a lot of articles, however it somehow felt right that I always had an insight into his opinion, whether it be on the TRC or the Chapter 9 institutions.

The opportunity of being a Kader Asmal fellow was truly amazing, and one for which I will be forever grateful. His is a legacy I am proud to be associated with, and, as I found out, it is also a legacy that the law department at Trinity is very proud of. I know they are really looking forward to meeting their next fellow, and the people who are lucky enough to be afforded this opportunity in years to come.