Black
Male
Thirties
Free State

With a system that was as pervasive as apartheid was, it is difficult to isolate a single experience and point to this as the most significant experience of racism. I could say that my whole life has been characterized by immersions in the evils of this system from which it feels like it will take a lifetime to disentangle myself, and the preoccupation with which feels like insanity at times. This is mainly because of the elusiveness of the racism that is the main feature of apartheid (others could be the evil that is part of humanity and downright ignorance). I will however, recount some of the experiences that my mind allows me to isolate and recall.

Firstly, as a child, I was born on a farm, and I spent most of my early to middle childhood on these farms, which experience was interspersed with stints of township life. In this context, my first encounter of a white person was seeing the white owner of the farm arriving occasionally, and how we were told to keep as far away from where he was as possible. This memory brings back my maternal grandfather holding his hat in his hands, and uttering 'ja baas' continuously. In terms of this experience, I learned that the world I inhabited required that I stay out of the way of a white person, almost becoming invisible, until he needed something from me. Secondly, at that young age, I became exposed that the way of interacting with a white person involves never contradicting him, no matter how well you knew your work. My grandfather had spent all his life on the farms, and knew quite a lot about how to look after the animals on the farm.

What has become the most indelible memory of the days of apartheid is the experience of having a parent who works 'in the kitchens'. The proximity that this allowed us to the white people was different to how things were on the farms. The moments of proximity were largely stolen, because my mother was not allowed to keep us in the maid's quarters for too long (more than one day). So we had to be very quiet if we were visiting my mom, who only

came home for a weekend once every month or bimonthly. Should the 'Missus' decide to inspect my mom's room through the window, she could do this without sparring a thought for my mom's privacy. In anticipation of this, we would hide under the bed when we heard her calling or walking too close towards the window. We also had to wait until the baas and the missus had gone to town before we could leave my mom's room. Similarly, we could not come in if they were in the kitchen where they could see us.

My mom worked for long hours, so that even when we were visiting her, we would spend long hours without seeing her. If she wanted to cook something, she would have to do this quietly, either in the early hours of the morning, or late at night because she was not supposed to have any food other than the leftovers from the table of her white employers. Any smell of food would invariably attract lots of attention and questions.

So, I grew up knowing my place: As far away from the white person as possible. The white person had power to invade my mother's privacy, and to decide when she could see her kids. I had to be as quiet as possible around a white person. Any marker of my existence disturbed her/him.

I watched my mother bringing up white kids, serving white people to ensure that we were fed. With each year that passed, I watch her energy slipping away, ounce by ounce, punctuated by unceremonious dismissals if my mom dared expressed an opinion, and re-employment when they could not find another áussie' (not Australia) that could be as obedient as my mother. I watched a life of a parent being offered for the convenience of a white person, until there was nothing left. My mother worked for the one family for more than 20 years. When she left their employ, there was no pension, and not even money for a couple of months. She was discarded because they had no use for her any more.

This, above all has become the hue of my process of disentanglement.

Male
White
Fifties

I grew up, Jewish, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, in the little Boland town of Ceres, about two hours drive from Cape Town. In Ceres, because of the policy which became known as the Coloured Labour Preference Area, there were hardly any black African people permanently living[1]. It was a small town, where whites quite rigidly, voluntarily, segregated themselves into English and Afrikaans speaking communities. These lines of distinction showed themselves along the affiliations of church, school and social institution, as well as the personal friendships which whites cultivated and engaged in. Being Jewish put one slightly outside both these camps, with quite complicated outcomes regarding relationships with both the English and Afrikaans communities, depending on the topic under discussion. For example, I remember the building of the first Roman Catholic Church in Ceres, and the consternation this caused, because in 'that' church, white people and people of colour worshipped together, like in the Anglican Church.

When I was in Standard 1 and 2, probably about eight years old, a question I was frequently asked was '...is jy a Nat of a SAP?' [2] Quite frankly, in the beginning, I didn't know what they were talking about! The Nationalist Party had won the elections of 1948, and, as I later understood, these were weighty questions for the classmates who asked them, and their parents who were obviously crowing at home, and educating their children in the finer points of their struggle for liberation. It was a question I was only asked in Afrikaans.

[1] In the nomenclature of the time, in English, black African people were Natives – in Afrikaans 'Naturelle'. These were the official words used before Bantu, and all those other supposed euphemisms became fashionable, or were mandated. The previously 'approved' words started with "K", and had served both the English and Afrikaans communities, and was still in frequent use then.

[2] The 'Natte' were obviously the Nationalists, while the 'Sappe' were the, by then defunct, Smuts led South African Party, which had by then morphed into the United Party

In the early 1950s there was great agitation, which eventually succeeded in 1954, to remove 'Coloured' people from the voters role, where they had limited representation, by a small number of White Parliamentarians .

Our house was the second to last house, in what was to be zoned as the 'white' area of the town. Less than 30 meters away was the area which would in time be zoned 'coloured'[3]. It was a Glebe, an area of Anglican Church owned land, on which parishioners were permitted to live. In fact people of all denominations, all of whom would eventually be defined as 'coloured', lived there, including a handful of Muslim families. My playmates were the little coloured kids from across the street in the Glebe, and we were in and out of each other's houses all the time. It got to be so 'bad' that my Mother sent me to a little nursery school when I was 4 years old. This was quite unusual in those times, in that place, and the reason given was to '... get me off the streets'. When I went to the local Primary School, an Afrikaans medium school, it had one English class for all the standards from Sub A to Standard 5. I began at that school in 1951, and the domestic's son, Boetie, used to help me with my homework.

Next door to our house, on the other side, was a motor garage, Havenga Motors, the local General Motors dealership. I played there virtually every afternoon, hanging around, talking to the mechanics, and probably being a great pest, but learning a great deal. In about Standard one or two I became a Cub, in the local white Scout troop, the 1st Ceres Troop. One of the guys I knew from my playing in the Glebe, was a scout-master in the 'coloured' Troop, while one of the mechanics at Havenga Motors, was an assistant scout-master in the 1st Ceres. I used to see the 'coloured' scout-master walking to the village, up from the Glebe, past our house, past Havenga Motors, to the Main Street. The militaristic conventions of the Boys Scouts at that time required/suggested that you would greet the scout-master when you saw him in the streets with a salute, so one day I was on the garage driveway when the 'coloured' scout-master walked by. As I had done in the past, I saluted him. The white assistant scout-master/mechanic, who happened to be around, asked me what I was doing,

[3] The race based laws took a while to be spun out in their entirety. In the period described, the intentions to bring them about were there, but the various laws, all of which rested on categorising every inhabitant of the country into one or another 'racial' classification, actually came into being over a number of years.

and I told him that I was acting out the precepts of the boy scout lore, saluting the scout-master. He told me I should not do that, but couldn't explain why not. I remember so clearly being completely confused by this. Over 55 years later I could take you, and point to the exact spot where that transaction took place, it's so indelibly burned into my memory.

In 1956 I went to boarding school, in Cape Town, and effectively I never went back to Ceres, except for vacations. In retrospect I also, quite quickly, took on a new 'mantle', one that reduced my visits to the Glebe, and put a distance between me and my childhood friends there. I remember hearing that Boetie had become a labourer, and eventually gotten into trouble with the law. He was really smart, much smarter than I was, and the inability of him to fulfil his potential and promise, because of his 'position' in the society, was something I've wondered about many times over the years.

The public transport link from Cape Town to Ceres was/is via a train to Wolseley, a little villiage about 20 kilometres from Ceres. Then it's by the SAR&H railway bus to Ceres, and on to Prince Alfred's Hamlet, another little town which is not on the railway line. The train that we caught, or sent stuff on, was the 4pm Port Elizabeth Mail from Platform 14 on the Cape Town Station. The Cape Argus used to be loaded on the train, and by 8 pm it would be delivered to Luyt's Cafe, in Voortrekker Street, Ceres. There was a ritual, whereby the English speakers who 'took the Argus' would congregate outside Luyt's Cafe from about 7:55pm. In the distance you'd heard the Diamond T's diesel motor coming down 'Die Nekkie' – the end of Mitchells Pass as it descended into the village. It was much too steep to use just the wheel's brakes on the railway bus, so they had to use the air brakes of the manifold as well, causing the exhaust note to change to a very loud blaring sound that you could hear all the way into the village. Then the group who read the afternoon English paper would surge forward into Luyt's Cafe, wait for the bundle of papers to be cut open and unwrapped, and in five minutes we'd all be gone.

One of those who took the Argus was Eddie Ried, first a teacher and later the headmaster of the 'coloured' Prince Alfred's Hamlet coloured primary school. He lived in the Glebe, maybe 50 yards North East of where we did. He had a pellet gun in his house, and I'd go there to shoot at bottles and tins, in his quite large garden. There were no municipal regulations

then about discharging guns in municipal areas. His unmarried sister Chrissie, lived in the same house, and another sister and her husband, and it was an open house for me. I'd walk there, over the tarred road that our house stood on, and around the corner on the dirt/gravel road that was the boundary between the white and the coloured areas, and on to Eddie's house. His English was accent-less and impeccable, and he was in every way a someone to look up to, respect and learn from, as was his entire family.

After I'd been at boarding school for a couple of terms or so, I was waiting for the Argus, and he drove up in his little square, mustard coloured, Ford Prefect. He got out, and we greeted each other, and in the course of the greeting I said to him '... if this was any other place but Ceres, I'd shake you by the hand.' He looked at me as if I'd smacked him in the face, which I had.

Growing up in Ceres, with the veneer of some time at boarding school, something had been put into my mind, and from my mind, into my mouth, which once it was out, I could never bring back. I've regretted those ideas, those words and the effect of them since sometime in the mid-1950s. As the years have passed that regret has festered and matured into embarrassment, shame, and guilt. Eddie Ried died a few years ago. My brothers, one of whom still lives in the Ceres valley, kept me updated about his career, his retirement and eventually his death.

I never did apologise for my insensitivity and hurtful behaviour, and that incident, as well as the one with the two scout-masters, are two that I carry with me as being a significant formative occurrence in my life.

'White'
'Female'
Early-30s (born 1976)
Born and raised in Cape Town

In some ways, I had an unusual 'white' upbringing in South Africa. My mother had been raised in polite white society in Cape Town during the 50s and 60s, her parents having sent her to St Cyprian's all-girls private Anglican school in an attempt to consolidate their class-leap from white working-class Woodstock to upper-class Bishopscourt (her father having made it big in property development). Being somewhat disgruntled with the social expectations of high English-speaking Cape Town society, she left to study in the United States, and there found as disreputable an American as she could to marry, causing all sorts of consternation amongst her family and peers. Her husband, my father, returned with her to Cape Town to set up life, and both worked at the Cape Times newspaper, my mother as a theatre critic, my father as a photographer.

My mother having had contact with 1960s America, and bringing home with her a man who had been at least peripherally involved in the hippie movement, began to scour 1970s Cape Town for alternative people who could help her think beyond the limited social and subjective imagination of her school and university friends. Although she had been aware of explicitly political anti-apartheid activism from student movements at the University of Cape Town, neither she nor my father were particularly interested in seeking out an alternative life centered around political action. Rather, they began frequenting Krishna temples, ashrams, unconventional Christian congregations, until eventually they found a group of like-minded New-Agers – many of them Jewish hippies coming off of one or another drug – who were setting up a spiritual commune on a small-holding on the edges of the city.

At its height, there were around thirty-five of us living on this small-holding, growing our own vegetables, taking turns cooking and cleaning, eating together every evening. It was an experiment in collective living, and as a child it was wonderful to have so many caring adults around, and so many other children with whom to play, devise skits and song-and-dance

routines, which we performed for the adults at dinner-time. But the experiment, this alternative bubble, could not escape the logic of the apartheid Group Areas regime. Apart from one older black couple, who had to be known as the domestic helpers in order to remain on the property, the commune was all white. As the city grew to include its peripheries, the exclusive suburb of Constantia grew up around the commune, and the new upper-class neighbours were constantly trying to find ways to get us evicted off of the property by invoking new suburban bylaws concerning the number of bathrooms, kitchens and family units allowed on each erf.

To earn money, the members of the commune ran a small hotel business together. Although the meager profits of the hotel business were collectively shared by the commune's white worker-residents, and although labour conditions were not as poor as elsewhere, the lowest-paid and menial jobs at the hotel were all filled by black employees who did not and could not live on the commune property. Our communal dinners were often held in a large dining room at the back of the hotel kitchen. All of the hotel's black employees were invited to join commune residents for dinners. The intention, I think, was to create racially integrated communal meal-times, but the dining tables were always segregated. As children, we were never encouraged to sit at the 'black' tables, nor to learn the isiXhosa that would have allowed us to integrate more easily into the conversations at those tables. The experiment remained an experiment in alternative white communalism. Despite all of the collective work parties and shared cooking arrangements, we still had a black domestic worker coming once a week to clean our clothes and floors.

The limits of my mother's commitment to an alternative lifestyle emerged when I had to be sent to school. It was decided that, with the help of my grandfather's money, I would follow in my mother's footsteps and be sent to St Cyprian's. The choice of an expensive main-stream private school was offset by the fact that I would receive a 'very good education' and that the school, being private and therefore protected from the apartheid government agenda, was 'non-racial'. But there were in effect very few black girls who attended the school. Apart from the handful of daughters of Anglican priests from Cape Town townships who received scholarships through the church, and a few 'coloured' and 'indian' girls from the city's merchant and professional classes, most of the black school-girls were the

daughters of diplomats from other African countries, or Bantustans. Although, to be honest, I knew extremely little about the lives of the black girls in the school. It was as if, to me, their stories were of inconsequence. The hegemony of whiteness in the school undermined any claims it may have had to 'non-racialism'.

I remember once, when we were living for a few years in a sister commune on the outskirts of Johannesburg, and I was attending Kingsmead College, my mother suggested that we invite the daughter of a Venda administrator home for a long weekend because she was the only girl left in the boarding house, as everyone else had gone home to their families. Her name was Tshilidzi, and I remember her as very small, very shy and very dark. We were eleven-years old, and we were classmates, but I had very little to say to her. I can still remember the feeling that I was supposed to be 'good' to Tshilidzi, a sentiment that came mostly from my mother, but I had no idea how to talk to her or how to play with her. She just seemed very shy and very different to me. I think that was the first and last time I had a sleepover with a black school mate.

When I returned to Cape Town and St Cyprian's for high school, my life became a little more entwined with black girls at school, in particular through being on sports teams with black school mates, and traveling together on school hockey and netball tours (the netball teams were always blacker than the hockey teams). Race never seemed much of an issue for me traveling and playing sport, but when I think back on it, I always knew so much more about the lives of my white school mates than my black school mates. There were sisters at the school, one of whom – Leila – was in my class, who I discovered much later (in my early 20s) were part of a politically active nominally Muslim family who had been moved out of District Six and were living in University Estate. I had no idea of their history, nor do I think it would it have mattered much to me had I known. There simply wasn't much space within the school context for having such stories count.

Which wasn't to say that a discourse about apartheid wasn't present in some way. Leila would bring it up occasionally, and some girls at school seemed more able to communicate about politics than others, but it was seldom made explicit enough for me to understand that I should be taking it seriously. I knew I had to be 'kind' to black people, especially the

school cleaning and gardening staff. But I also remember feeling defensive when I was confronted with too much of a challenge. Before Leila had to leave our Standard nine class because she was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome, she became quite a powerful presence in our class, challenging, contesting, speaking out in a sardonic tone about many issues raised during class time. I clearly remember being irritated and provoked by her. And I remember my internal response, a retort that I can still hear inside my head when I think back to that time. I remember thinking about Leila: 'I'm so glad that you will not be allowed to vote'.

N36

Male
White
Thirties

An incandescence radiated the crisp light, breaking it into wavy illusions just before my eyes. The reason for the heat was a black body – my white one responding in a cutting jar of confusion, a seething many minded meander in my tummy and loins. She had just told me about the death of her mother – scarcely an erotic conversion and here I was in a desirous sort of twist against my liberalism. It had never occurred to me that desire and sensibilities would tango on different sides of the trailor park. Can you be liberal and want to fuck in the same place? These incantations inside suggested not, but for the first time in my life I did not care. Her on the floor, her on my dick, touching me, fucking me and ultimately alienating me into an exquisite outsideness; beyond the tracking tedium of my reversal of historical fortunes.

She continued to share, with an openness that was burning me with the most sincere fire I had ever tasted. An erotic moment without a doubt; a destructive moment, yes; I was not sure if I could feel a possibility for newness – or an utter devastation from which I would not recover. I also could not discern which of these would be the more exciting. Annihilation or rebirth – maybe both…

This is an extract from a piece I wrote about a psychology class I once had in which I participated in a counseling exercise with a black female student.

I was born to English speaking, middle/working class parents in Johannesburg in the 1970's. Owing to the history of my family, my father's afrikaansness loomed like a spectre in the food we ate, the politics we admired, his disciplinary style and in many other countless ways in the ebbs and flows of our lives. He would identify and disidentify with conservative Afrikanerdom in rapidly alternating fits of admiration and denigration. In essence he was a self loathing Afrikaner who only spoke English, or a self-loathing Englishman who desperately wanted to speak only Afrikaans.

I was raised in an extremely segregated society. My exposure to black people was limited to the staff who ran our home and maintained our garden (when we were able to afford this). My father's racism was always filtered to me through my mom's disapproval of him as a man. Thus my experience of racism was negative – but only in a relational sense…these were the pathways of mom's displeasure with dad – and if given the choice of what kind of

a man to be – this was not the way to go. Yet filtered through my mother's experience, the big black marauding man was a murderous, terrifying, sexually violating animal – never in so many words, but through a vigilant paranoia. From both my parents – sexuality was infused – either in the sexual relationship between my parents, or in the dangerous other in my mother's imagination.

Our economic life was always connected to racism. Deep feelings of shame and embarrassment ran through the family about not having enough money. Racism was the way in which our family could feel better about ourselves. Denigrations and put-downs served to bolster a very shakey whiteness that should have resulted in wealth, intelligence and superiority. I think that it was uncomfortable for my parents more closely identify with the poverty of blackness than the privilege of whiteness. It was a profoundly disorientating experience to see Mr Mandela being released on TV – here was the leader of our country – and so our families' house of cards fell.

Anyway somewhere in all of this I stumbled upon a woman who I desired more powerfully than any other woman I had ever encountered whilst at university. This desire was profoundly unsettling and exciting at the same time. Hence the narrative.

Male
'White'
Fifties
Academic
Originally from Northern Cape

Brazil, Barack and me

I was born in 1959, the same year that the Brazilian movie *Orpheu Negro* (Black Orpheus) was released. The movie is set in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and involves a lot of singing and dancing – a bit like Sarafina, I guess, but with a better soundtrack. Anyway, apparently Barack Obama's mom saw the movie and was so inspired by the black sexiness of it all that she was in a particularly receptive mood when she met Barack's Kenyan dad shortly afterwards (and the rest, as they say, is history). Barack junior was not that impressed when he got to see the movie – in fact, he was a bit shocked by the stereotypical way (sensual, musical, violent) it depicts black people (although I want to believe that he does appreciate that it was instrumental in his being with us today, plus one should probably accept that in 1959 people weren't really all that politically correct yet).

Meanwhile back in South Africa we of course had 'racial problems' of our own. For example, in the same year that Barack's mom fell in love with the idea of blackness, 1959, the PAC was formed – which must mean something.

As a newborn I of course didn't know anything about any of these things. I first learnt about the PAC in a "youth preparedness" class in Standard 8 and for the first time got to see a few clips from *Orpheu Negro*, on YouTube, only the other day. But in a way I do think these sorts of things must have been quite significant in how I got to be the racialised being I am today. I sort of took it in with my mother's milk, as they say.

My own dear mother's favourite movie was *Sound of Music*, which in its own way was also kind of about race (see Slavoj Žižek, 2007, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiTum8eQ51E), but by that time, 1965, my mom was already married to my dad and I was like 6 years old so I can't really personally blame the

movie for anything in particular. I'm also pretty sure that by the age of 6 I must already have had some conscious awareness of race. What I can say is that my parents weren't really nasty racist people at all – certainly less so, I think, than some of my friends' parents.

OK, so my earliest memory of race. I remember once we were walking along a little footpath near a dam outside town. We always used to go there weekends. I was maybe 3 or 4 years old. Suddenly there was a big group of (black) people coming from the other end and there was a lot of tension in the air. I remember the word "Bantu" being used. There was some sort of animated discussion and there seemed to be quite a bit of aggression from both sides, but I didn't know what it was about. At the same time, some of the people in the group ruffled my hair, picked me up, and made little jokes with me – the way people do with cute little boys (yes I was cute, really). After a while the problem seemed to have been resolved and the tension disappeared (but we did leave in quite a hurry and never went back to that same spot again).

Although not exactly a racist, my mother very much liked the line "swart en sware drom-barbare" from some (decidedly racist) Afrikaans poem (which has presumably by now been banned from the *Groot Verseboek*), and whenever she recited it in later years I always visualised the incident at the dam. I did also once have a dream where I was caught in the middle between a black horde and white-people-with-guns, but that was much later, when I was in my mid-30s, so probably doesn't count.

Male
White
Gauteng

A Personal Perspective of "Apartheid"

Divested of the unfavourable connotations with which this political system has been burdened, the word "apartheid" means "separateness". This policy was presented to the public and the outside world as a type of parallelism, where whites and blacks should each follow a separate course or line along which its development will run, separate from the others' but with similar opportunities; and never the twain shall meet. The problem with this concept, as some people felt and experienced, was that in practice these parallel lines did not run vertically, but horizontally, and that the top line was for the whites and the bottom line for the blacks.

The attitude that we bring to a situation is to a large extent dependent on past experience, influences that we were subject to and our individual needs and temperament. In addition, without always realising it, we instinctively tend to conform to the group norm. In a certain sense, then, we are what we are because we are where we are.

Before expanding on my attitude to the policy of Apartheid and its demise, I wish to relate a few of my experiences from my childhood to maturity in which there was racial interaction and which may serve as a backdrop to my stance in this regard.

Some of my pre-school and primary-school years were spent on a farm. My playmates were the children of the labourers. Together we rode donkeys, played in the river, tried to trap birds, chased hares with the dogs, made jokes and whiled the days away in whatever way came to mind as children do. Everybody referred to these children as piccanins. When the grownups spoke of "children" you knew they meant white children and when they spoke of "piccanins" everybody knew they meant black children. This was generally accepted nomenclature for purposes of convenient specificity and nobody thought this custom

offensive. It may be compared to the modern usage of the term “kids” when we refer to somebody’s small children without remotely implying that the parents are goats.

While playing, we were all equals. Then there was no class distinction. But this changed when playing stopped. When I returned to my home there was no further socialising and nobody would have thought of inviting them to come in. From what I can remember, there were always a few blacks about whom the grown-ups spoke favourably, being regarded as trustworthy. But as regards some of the rest, I often heard remarks about their laziness, unreliability and dishonesty, as, for example, on one occasion when chickens were stolen and at another time when the teats of a cow were mutilated (apparently deliberately torn with a piece of barbed wire to give the impression that the cow had been caught in a fence) by a worker my father had reprimanded. But such matters were over my head; I was only a child and had no problems with my playmates. I do remember, though, that my parents kept a medicine chest from which workers were helped when they came to our house with stomach complaints, headaches or other illnesses, and that my father sometimes took them in the car to the doctor when the complaint was serious or when they were suspected of malingering. I also remember clearly that my father and mother told me to treat the very old blacks with respect. They treated them with courtesy and would brook no sign of disrespect from me to any old person.

Some years later my parents moved to a farm where the present Kyalami is. I was in Standard 4 and had to cycle to school in Rivonia. In those days, all the roads in that area were dirt and fences were few. Following footpaths, one could take short-cuts through some of the farms. One of the footpaths I followed to school every morning led down a fairly steep incline through a dip and a fairly steep rise through a bluegum- tree plantation on the other side. In the afternoons, coming home, I could easily have coasted downhill through the plantation, but didn’t dare to. Instead, this was the stretch of the way that I always pedalled as fast as I could. The reason was that there were sometimes black youngsters hanging about in the plantation. If they saw me, they would throw stones at me and chase me to grab my bike. It was, therefore, my habit to start pedalling hell for leather as soon as I neared the plantation and fly past the trees with my bicycle bouncing over the ruts in the footpath and my schoolbag bumping behind my head. School buses were

brought in later and then it wasn't necessary to go by bicycle. But the memory of this experience has stayed with me.

Several years later, when I was a teenager, I was on a coffee farm in Tanganyika (now Tanzania). It was Christmas-season. I was in a group of several members of my family exploring the surrounding area by foot when we happened to come across the village of a headman. We did not expect this and were filled with apprehension when we suddenly found ourselves in the company of some of the inhabitants. We could not understand their language and neither could they understand ours. Then one of them stepped forward and waved to us to follow him. He seemed friendly and from his behaviour we could tell that he was the leader. Following his motions, we later found ourselves sitting on our haunches around a bowl on the ground and being invited to have some of his brew. The reception we received was most friendly and we all had a good feeling and discussed it when we left the village. Then on Christmas morning we had another surprise: a group of the villagers arrived at our house carrying a chicken and vegetables in baskets as presents from the headman.

Almost a lifetime later I served as consultant to a company in the establishment of a pension fund for their black workers. At that time the idea of a pension fund was new to the blacks and a provident fund would have been more acceptable to them. They wanted access to their money and, moreover, thought that in old age they would be supported by their children. We had long negotiations with the trade union and briefing sessions with workers at all our centres of operations throughout the country. Our consulting actuaries played a pivotal role in the planning of the pension scheme, i.e. the statistical analysis of the profile of our workforce of more than two thousand workers, their age, their sexes, earnings and the employee and employer contributions that would be required to provide certain benefits, with assumptions regarding expected returns on investments, as well as assistance in the drafting of the rules and the registration of the fund and proposals to safeguard the fund by way of insurance policies in the beginning. In addition, employment contracts had to be revised, changes had to be made to our computer systems, forms and returns designed and staff in our pay offices trained. Being involved in the processes of the planning and implementation of the scheme I acted as principal officer of the fund as a temporary measure. The term of my employment was to end with the establishment of the fund. At

the first trustees' meeting of the fund, at which the trade union representatives were to be informed of their fiduciary responsibility as trustees and their training planned and which was to be my last attendance at a meeting, the main spokeswoman of the trade union objected that a white person (meaning me) was the principal officer of a black pension fund. She said she should be the principal officer. Being at the end of my term as consultant, I made no response and after further discussion by the trustees her motion was carried. She clearly had no inkling of the intricacies which had occupied the actuaries and others during the preceding months. At one stage, when asked what a principal officer does, she shrugged her shoulders and said,"They will show me." I don't know whom she meant by "they". To be thoroughly arrogant it helps if one is also completely ignorant.

It is my contention that social engineering (for that is what the policy of Apartheid was) always presents problems in its execution and often has unforeseen effects in its aftermath. There are always winners and losers in these processes with the winners feeling they should have won more and the losers feeling let down by their leaders. To me, on a personal level, whether we have Apartheid or no Apartheid makes little difference. There was a plethora of laws, bylaws, rules and regulations that prescribed conduct under Apartheid, and following the end of Apartheid there is again a seemingly endless stream of prescriptive discriminatory legislation which is supposed to redress discrepancies. There are always excesses. There are always zealots on both sides, and when they happen to emerge on the winning side they climb on the bandwagon and propel the movement to extremes not originally envisaged. Anybody who has studied the French Revolution knows this.

After all the atrocities committed by both sides, the average South African, excluding those who were in a position to enrich themselves in the process, is not remarkably better off than they were before. The majority are still poor and there are more jobless persons. Health care has deteriorated, schooling is in disarray, standards have dropped and any idea of excellence, good management and efficiency has become strangers to our shores. The list of criticism is endless, fill our newspapers and need not be repeated. One could argue that had the previous government not been financially crippled by sanctions instigated by misguided sanctimonious do-gooders, and had millions and millions of rand not been wasted by them on weapons and defence, many, but many, more houses and facilities

would have been provided for the “disadvantaged” by now than have been provided by the present government and its profligate and incompetent ministers and administrators.

It is also a fact that had the ANC not aligned itself to and received support from Russia the attitude of the whites and the government to this movement would have been different, if not subdued. Communism was anathema to the majority of whites and confused the issue. Many whites saw Communism as the main threat, more so than the danger of losing exclusive rights to facilities from which blacks were barred and the scrapping of other petty rules which degraded blacks.

I, myself, was never in favour of such discriminatory restrictions and feel they are to be regretted. But I don’t feel guilty about it. They were a small price the blacks had to pay for all the other benefits they have enjoyed through the presence of whites and what whites have brought to this country. The whites were their gateway to the achievements of civilization. Those achievements were not handed on a platter to the Europeans, but cost them dearly over a long period in their faltering and often-flawed struggles. The account of the suffering of millions and the persecution, torture and excommunication of thinkers and discoverers fill the history books. The price paid by the blacks to benefit from these achievements was infinitesimally small compared to what it had cost the Europeans over centuries. As an example, the concept of Democracy in itself from which blacks benefit is not indigenous, but was brought here by whites. Through social change and acculturation blacks have come to share the European legacy and contribute to it. Their acknowledgement of the debt they owe whites in this regard is still outstanding.

'White'
'Female'
Early-30s (born 1976)
Born and raised in Cape Town

In some ways, I had an unusual 'white' upbringing in South Africa. My mother had been raised in polite white society in Cape Town during the 50s and 60s, her parents having sent her to St Cyprian's all-girls private Anglican school in an attempt to consolidate their class-leap from white working-class Woodstock to upper-class Bishopscourt (her father having made it big in property development). Being somewhat disgruntled with the social expectations of high English-speaking Cape Town society, she left to study in the United States, and there found as disreputable an American as she could to marry, causing all sorts of consternation amongst her family and peers. Her husband, my father, returned with her to Cape Town to set up life, and both worked at the Cape Times newspaper, my mother as a theatre critic, my father as a photographer.

My mother having had contact with 1960s America, and bringing home with her a man who had been at least peripherally involved in the hippie movement, began to scour 1970s Cape Town for alternative people who could help her think beyond the limited social and subjective imagination of her school and university friends. Although she had been aware of explicitly political anti-apartheid activism from student movements at the University of Cape Town, neither she nor my father were particularly interested in seeking out an alternative life centered around political action. Rather, they began frequenting Krishna temples, ashrams, unconventional Christian congregations, until eventually they found a group of like-minded New-Agers – many of them Jewish hippies coming off of one or another drug – who were setting up a spiritual commune on a small-holding on the edges of the city.

At its height, there were around thirty-five of us living on this small-holding, growing our own vegetables, taking turns cooking and cleaning, eating together every evening. It was an experiment in collective living, and as a child it was wonderful to have so many caring adults around, and so many other children with whom to play, devise skits and song-and-dance routines, which we performed for the adults at dinner-time. But the experiment, this

alternative bubble, could not escape the logic of the apartheid Group Areas regime. Apart from one older black couple, who had to be known as the domestic helpers in order to remain on the property, the commune was all white. As the city grew to include its peripheries, the exclusive suburb of Constantia grew up around the commune, and the new upper-class neighbours were constantly trying to find ways to get us evicted off of the property by invoking new suburban bylaws concerning the number of bathrooms, kitchens and family units allowed on each erf.

To earn money, the members of the commune ran a small hotel business together. Although the meager profits of the hotel business were collectively shared by the commune's white worker-residents, and although labour conditions were not as poor as elsewhere, the lowest-paid and menial jobs at the hotel were all filled by black employees who did not and could not live on the commune property. Our communal dinners were often held in a large dining room at the back of the hotel kitchen. All of the hotel's black employees were invited to join commune residents for dinners. The intention, I think, was to create racially integrated communal meal-times, but the dining tables were always segregated. As children, we were never encouraged to sit at the 'black' tables, nor to learn the isiXhosa that would have allowed us to integrate more easily into the conversations at those tables. The experiment remained an experiment in alternative white communalism. Despite all of the collective work parties and shared cooking arrangements, we still had a black domestic worker coming once a week to clean our clothes and floors.

The limits of my mother's commitment to an alternative lifestyle emerged when I had to be sent to school. It was decided that, with the help of my grandfather's money, I would follow in my mother's footsteps and be sent to St Cyprian's. The choice of an expensive main-stream private school was offset by the fact that I would receive a 'very good education' and that the school, being private and therefore protected from the apartheid government agenda, was 'non-racial'. But there were in effect very few black girls who attended the school. Apart from the handful of daughters of Anglican priests from Cape Town townships who received scholarships through the church, and a few 'coloured' and 'indian' girls from the city's merchant and professional classes, most of the black school-girls were the daughters of diplomats from other African countries, or Bantustans. Although, to be honest,

I knew extremely little about the lives of the black girls in the school. It was as if, to me, their stories were of inconsequence. The hegemony of whiteness in the school undermined any claims it may have had to 'non-racialism'.

I remember once, when we were living for a few years in a sister commune on the outskirts of Johannesburg, and I was attending Kingsmead College, my mother suggested that we invite the daughter of a Venda administrator home for a long weekend because she was the only girl left in the boarding house, as everyone else had gone home to their families. Her name was Tshilidzi, and I remember her as very small, very shy and very dark. We were eleven-years old, and we were classmates, but I had very little to say to her. I can still remember the feeling that I was supposed to be 'good' to Tshilidzi, a sentiment that came mostly from my mother, but I had no idea how to talk to her or how to play with her. She just seemed very shy and very different to me. I think that was the first and last time I had a sleepover with a black school mate.

When I returned to Cape Town and St Cyprian's for high school, my life became a little more entwined with black girls at school, in particular through being on sports teams with black school mates, and traveling together on school hockey and netball tours (the netball teams were always blacker than the hockey teams). Race never seemed much of an issue for me traveling and playing sport, but when I think back on it, I always knew so much more about the lives of my white school mates than my black school mates. There were sisters at the school, one of whom – Leila – was in my class, who I discovered much later (in my early 20s) were part of a politically active nominally Muslim family who had been moved out of District Six and were living in University Estate. I had no idea of their history, nor do I think it would it have mattered much to me had I known. There simply wasn't much space within the school context for having such stories count.

Which wasn't to say that a discourse about apartheid wasn't present in some way. Leila would bring it up occasionally, and some girls at school seemed more able to communicate about politics than others, but it was seldom made explicit enough for me to understand that I should be taking it seriously. I knew I had to be 'kind' to black people, especially the school cleaning and gardening staff. But I also remember feeling defensive when I was

confronted with too much of a challenge. Before Leila had to leave our Standard nine class because she was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome, she became quite a powerful presence in our class, challenging, contesting, speaking out in a sardonic tone about many issues raised during class time. I clearly remember being irritated and provoked by her. And I remember my internal response, a retort that I can still hear inside my head when I think back to that time. I remember thinking about Leila: 'I'm so glad that you will not be allowed to vote'.

Male
Black
40s
Gauteng

This is really difficulty exercise. I am not sure what to put down. It seems easier to theorise about racism than connect it to my own experiences. Given the brutality of Apartheid and my own strong reactions against racism somehow my experiences seem minor or insignificant. Yes I can theorise about them and talk about pervasive racism is or how the less significant experiences all build up to this demon. Yet my experiences still seem insignificant in the bigger scheme of things. As I reflect now, there is not one defining moment in my own life. Perhaps I can come to some of the defining ones. As I run through some of them I realize there are far too many to confront. Academia as a space provokes strong reactions about the extent of this racism. At this rate I will need to stop the flow as the floodgates seem to open. The narrative seems to find form as I go along and if there were no defining moments then perhaps there were defining themes.

The first two are not direct but second hand experiences. If there is a connecting thread then it is that racism is pervasive, ingrained and cannot ever be separated from personality. I need to remind myself of this even though this is my stated position. The first concerns a friend who was also an activist. I knew him both as a friend and as an activist and we were fairly close during my high school years. Because we had similar worldviews I somehow never thought about his own experience of racism. I cannot recall the details and again the incident seems minor given what was happening in the 1970's and 1980's in the country. The Rand Show as it was called at the stage I think we boycotted. Somehow he recalled during one of our conversations how his family and he had gone to the show only to be turned away as it was not the days for 'Blacks' or 'Indians' or whatever. In this rather 'trivial' incident I was struck by what a big impact this had on him.

The second incident had an even greater impact on me. I had known my friends father for a number of years and had a reasonably good relationship with him. At times though, I found his 'bitterness' and his prejudice towards 'Africans' quite a barrier. I either distanced myself from these parts of him or tended to psychologise. One day a friend had moved to …… and we had driven together to visit. As we passed a row of houses his 'bitterness' emerged and he recalled with anger how his family had been removed from these houses. In a single moment my perception and understanding of his personality dynamics and his apolitical nature changed. The layers and impact of Apartheid were so many and so deep that it was even difficult to recognize them. The psychology lens that I seem to have distanced myself from had in fact obscured the political so easily.

My own experiences seem to echo another theme. The relative priviledge of my class and race protected me from the brutality of racism. When I think about it, it induced a kind of splitting. An enormous anger and acknowledgement of the brutality alongside a kind of questioning about my own experience of it. My mind seems to come back to an experience in …… in the 1990's. We were told when turning up at a restaurant that they were full. This incident occurred in …… and we had a similar experience I think it was at the …….. I loose track of the sequence now. Both left me with this uneasy feeling of being dished up a good dose of racism, but unable to confront it. What was significant about the …… experience was when I called a few minutes later we were told that there was a vacancy.

I had hoped to stop but cannot end the narrative without racism in academia. Like many of my colleagues and friends training was a constant questioning of and struggle to maintain a black identity. As a trainer I feel the anger rise up inside me as I think of the (perhaps many) 'white' students who in their desire to practice, tolerated me and other staff. This riles me but it was also the attempt to prevent an othering of 'white' that serve to silence me. Even now the silence is deafening. I am fucking tired of those going through the training who have no desire to own their 'whiteness' and priviledge. I seem to digress and perhaps an experience can capture it. With a 'white' colleague we interviewed a 'white' student in the late 1990's. In reference to our institution she made a classic racist slip about enjoying the experience of diversity. I can not recall the exact words but the entrenched racism couched in a discourse of innocence and openness grated. It was obviously too hard for the 'white'

colleague to hear my perception of her remark, after all he had to confront his own racism. Needless to say she was accepted, did rather well and promptly ensured that even her internship was not second rate and changed her internship site the following year. I don't think it's the validation that I constantly sought that angers me most. What angers me most is how I allowed all the politeness and psychology crap to silence me. Am I bitter or real? My experience with staff raises my anger. Again too many experience to crystallize into a defining moment. Silently and politely, listening to a colleague's stories of time in the army, being too afraid of being accused of using the 'race' card or the liberal bullshit dished up by far too many. Does self-reflexivity not extend to ones racial identity? As I write I get worried about my own essentialising and prejudice. I also feel the strong need to qualify my comments or balance it by my own privileges and privileges taking other forms like class and gender. There were clearly people who courageously confronted their own racism and I was and continue to be inspired by them. My own experiences though are too much of the inability to do this and my anger about this and anger at my own silence about it.

A recent engagement with a colleague a 'black' colleague when he related stories of white suffering elicited a cynical comment in jest from me. His response was that I needed to be more empathic. Do I? Is that not the problem that my attempt at empathy and contexualising the 'white' experience has also served to silence me. That this attempt at empathy or the myth of the rainbow nation can serve to prevent ownership of priviledge.

…….. I need closure or a finish. Is there?

Postscript

Yes there certainly is a lot to do. To plagiarise a title, our social amnesia is scary. What this exercise helped to do was to confront this amnesia. I left out some of the identifying details and also changed my first draft. What am I scared about? The silence reemerges? Yes I can emphasise the level of empowerment I need to achieve (I am 'choosing' this) or is it also that confronting this space even now feels too dangerous. Surely it cannot be reduced to my own paranoia.

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