N41

African Black
Female
50s
Western Cape

I was born and grew up in Cape Town – actually, not in Cape Town, but in Langa, one of the main institutions of segregation created by the apartheid government in Cape Town. This is an important distinction since Cape Town was really out of bounds. Throughout my years of growing up in Cape Town, I never *saw* Table Mountain. Although Table Mountain was and is clearly visible from Brinton Street, my home in Langa, I just never saw it. Table Mountain, and the rest of the scenic beauty for which Cape Town is most famous, was not my world, not my home. Cape Town's beauty was owned by white people, at least that is what I thought then; it was part of their world about which they were proud, and part of their identity which they took for granted. I, as a black person, had no claim to Cape Town's beauty. I was denied the privilege of "owning" it, being part of it, and so could not dare to enjoy its beauty. I remember an early shopping experience with my younger sister in Cape Town, probably the first on our own, when a young white store assistant took me to a toilet/kitchen/storage area, clearly used by cleaning staff, to try on a dress I was interested in buying. Thinking about this experience now, it is interesting that I had no real memory from the past of Cape Town the city until I started reflecting on my past to consider what aspects of my life I would write about for the Narrative Archives Study. This particular memory of my shopping experience stands out now because I made an effort to confront the parts of my memory that are still somehow accessible, but with possible block.

I realise too, that part of the reason the memory of Cape Town was hidden from my consciousness is because of the feeling of shame and humiliation I felt at the time, that I was sent to a toilet instead of a fitting room. On entering this room and discovering what it was, I felt, in essence, *diminished*, treated *like a black person,* if you see what I mean. I had seen – no, *felt* – this sense of humiliation whenever my father was treated *like a black person* by young white police officers – that is to say treated with disrespect, less human, almost as if he was invisible. It happened regularly when we drove with my parents for the

end of the year trip to the Eastern Cape. My father had to prove that the car he was driving was his. And when my parents acquired a van, and inscribed it with the words: Mayibuye Imbeko Nesidima (Bring back Respect and Dignity) we spent a night in the Worcester Charge office in one of the family drives to the Eastern Cape. The police were convinced that the "Mayibuye" inscription was actually a subtle reference to Mayibuye i-Afrika.

Anyway, back to my humiliating shopping experience – abandoning the dress and the idea of shopping, Cape Town became out of bounds for me. I would later be a great fan of the mail order system…

My memories of years growing up as a child, later as a student and then a professional under apartheid are filled with many stories of humiliation, insults, and exclusion because of the colour of my skin. At the same time, some of these stories are interspersed with brave struggle, standing up and speaking out against ill-treatment – on my own behalf as well as on behalf of others. Each of the stages of my life throughout the years of apartheid – in high school, at university, as a social worker, a clinical psychologist and later in academia – is marked by significant moments of drama. In high school, for example, at Inanda Seminary, I was the only one expelled in September 1971 when I was doing Std 9 (grade 11) after leading a strike and refused to name others. At Inanda, we were lucky to be connected to people like Strini Moodley and others active in the Black Consciouisness Movement. They brought plays to our school, which was an independent school run by progressive-minded American missionaries, the Athol Fugard Classics like *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* and *The Blood Knot*, acted by John Kani and Winston Ntshona. Inanda was a relatively safe place for them to act Athol Fugard's plays, as the plays were illegal according to the apartheid laws. By the time I went to Fort Hare, I was right in the centre of student activism, and the academic pursuits of 1976 and 1977 were "interrupted" by events that unfolded violently in the country. At Rhodes, some of my experiences were surreal – I was there, but I did not quite belong in the white world where so many ex-Rhodesians had found refuge. One such surreal experience was an experience that occurred when watching *Gandhi,* the film, at the local cinema in Grahamstown with a white friend. During intermission, (*Gandhi* is a long film), the manager called my friend aside and told her that we had to leave. One of the students had complained about my presence.

Something similar happened when we attended a psychology conference as Masters Students in Pietermaritzburg in 1983 or '84. I remember that the conference was held at a hotel that had "international status" (Ha!) – a code term for "blacks allowed." It was at the end of the day's events and we went to the club, whatever it was called, where there was music and dance. We hadn't been long on the dance floor when the manager called one of my colleagues. As a black person you learn to read these signs, I knew it had something to do with me, but I found it a little strange since here, at this hotel, blacks were allowed. It turned out that while the rest of the hotel was "international", the club was not. Apparently, the space where people let their hair down through dance and song was local – local rules applied and whites were not supposed to mingle with blacks when they were having fun. They might do something illegal, such as foolishly desire the black woman on the dancing floor. So in solidarity, all my white colleagues walked out and left with me.

At Rhodes, as a trainee clinician, white students had to be asked if they minded to be seen by a black intern….

Anyway, I see the current dramas in my work life not as something new, but rather as a continuity with those dramas from the past.

I joined the University of Cape Town as a member of the faculty staff in 2003. Let me just share a quick story about my family's connection – well, sort of a connection – with UCT. In the 1960s, the well-known anthropologist Monica Wilson led a research project that required her and her research team to conduct interviews in Langa Township. According to my mother, our home sometimes became a "holding" place for Wilson and her young white student researchers and my mother often offered them tea when they stopped by. My mother called Wilson by her first name and described "u-Monica" in the fondest terms. She told me that during those visits by UCT researchers, she would wish that her daughters would one day have a chance to go to UCT, but that she knew that this may never happen. As a young girl at the time I was, of course, not aware of the university on the hill, under Table Mountain. So, now here am I, at UCT, and I discover the book written by Monica Wilson and Archie Mafeje about their study in Langa, and my father's picture is on the

jacket cover of the book! He also appears inside the pages of the book, but nowhere is he mentioned by name.

Anyway, when I first came to UCT I was registered as a doctoral candidate. At an early stage of my doctoral work, I went through a challenging time when it seemed there was no fit between my supervisor and myself. I mentioned this challenge in passing conversation with the then HOD, who encouraged me to “put it down in writing” to give him a chance to address the issue. I wrote the letter describing my experience of supervision, and a committee of senior staff members in my department met in a meeting chaired by the HOD to discuss my letter. Instead of a response discussing the way forward, however, I received a letter questioning my complaint and asking me to “spell out” what exactly my complaint was. After a long protracted exchange of letters, during which I was not once invited to meet the committee to speak about my concerns, I was eventually called to the dean’s office. I was shocked to hear from the dean at the time that my unhappiness about supervision was interpreted as a charge of “racism”. What saddened me the most about it all is that I was given the run-around by the committee of senior department academic staff, that the committee didn’t really listen to what I was unhappy about, and that they went on to pursue an agenda that was never part of my submission in my letter. I gave the committee no grounds to believe that I was accusing my supervisor of racism. It was ironic that while I never made the charge of racism, it seemed that the committee of senior staff in my department were *pushing* me to accuse my supervisor of racism. Why? I asked myself. Was the charge of racism perhaps “easier” than dealing with the substantive questions about what a supervisor’s role is? “Easier” in the sense that it makes the battle lines clearer, there is me on this side and them on the other?

Fast-forward to the years of my tenure as a member of the academic staff in the same department. When two students complained about my supervision, no committee of senior members of departmental staff was called. No one rallied around me as a colleague to question the students’ complaints – not that questioning the students is what I would have wanted. No one, even just on the basis of being given the right of reply, invited me to give my side of the story. When I volunteered information about what I thought had triggered the students’ complaint in the first case and expected a more formal process of hearing my

side of the story, nothing of the sort happened. This was in 2006. In 2008, when my application for promotion was reviewed, the story of the two students emerged as “problems with supervision”.

There is a sense in which I feel there’s an effort by a few of my colleagues to undermine my work and deflate the achievement gained through international recognition of my work. In fact, in conversation with one of my colleagues after my return from giving a keynote address, which was webcast live during an international conference, the colleague came to my office and congratulated me enthusiastically. As he was leaving, however, he remarked, "I wonder what will happen when the bubble bursts." I asked myself, if it were one of his white colleagues, would he have seen it as a “bubble” or a rocket about to launch to greater heights?

Apartheid: The many colours of madness

I was born and raised in Cape Town by parents who were not overtly political. In 1948, my father, a very dark skinned, kinky haired man, classified as Malay was married by Moslem rights to my mother who was classified as white. The awareness of colour, race, racial differences and racism insidiously made their way early into my life as my parents negotiated their differences. My father proudly celebrated my mother's white skin and bright blue eyes and in later years would exploit her green identity card to purchase property in areas reserved for whites. My mother when angry with my father would be heard expressing her regret at not heeding her grandmother's advice of "marrying her own kind", which I understood to mean white rather than Christian.

I spent much of my childhood, like my father, enjoying the association with whiteness whilst being acutely aware that unlike my mother I did not have her blue eyes, her milky white skin, her shade or straightness of blond hair; that I was not white. I was also however acutely aware of the arbitrariness of race as my mother despite her racial classification had essentially been socialized as coloured soon after her white Afrikaner father left her mother. My maternal grandmother was classified of mixed race.

My mother's marriage and consequent conversion to Islam meant that her dress code included wearing longer dresses and headscarves, further removing constructs of whiteness. The most powerful reminder of my mother's whiteness was a large framed portrait of my maternal grandfather in his army uniform occupying pride of place in our living room. The man Dan Pienaar, whom I had never met, or who was seldom spoken of, lived in our home as our very close (by birth) white grandfather.

The absurdity of race was further emphasized by the forced removal of my family from Newlands, Cape Town two years after my birth. Newlands was declared for whites only, which ostensibly meant my mother could legally occupy our house but my father and the 6 children had to leave. My family eventually settled in upper Woodstock, an interesting area

that appeared to slip off the radar of apartheid authorities as families classified as white lived either alongside or in the adjacent streets of those classified coloured. As children we wondered about the “mixed” neighbourhood and when District 6, a mere 3km away was bulldozed we quietly awaited our turn. It never happened. This meant that we lived within walking distance to a school and public swimming pool that were reserved for our white neighbours. The experience of living in Woodstock emphasized the craziness of being assigned a race and its lived consequences. The one experience that raised much consternation during my first years at school was not being able to attend the school that was literally within a short walking distance from my home. I usually struggled to wake up for school and had to be rushed along to avoid being late, which at the time was a punishable offence. Having been caned more that once for late coming I was particularly indignant for not being allowed to attend the neighbourhood school. The irony was that my friends who regularly watched movies in our home and whose mother was much spoken about as she was considered a lady of ill repute attended the local school. She looked like a regular white stay-at-home mom, but during the night she worked as a prostitute. She always used one of my father’s taxis at night and whilst we were taught not to judge her because of how she earned her keep, she on the other hand appeared not to judge us for not being white. Her kids who shared striking resemblance to being Japanese were our friends and regularly shared meals at our house. The awareness of their superiority however was sorely felt when they walked passed our house every morning to the school up the road whilst we had to travel further. On one particular morning I remember one of the children who had been particularly close to my younger sister crying and refusing to go to school unless my sister could be with him. I remember the silence that befell the adults as they struggled to explain to the little white boy why my sister could not attend.

Despite the awareness of the inequities and indignities suffered, my parents like many of my peers’ parents remained resolutely opposed to politics and political discussions. In part they feared for the lives of their children, but it became painfully clear that they could not contemplate an alternative to being governed by anyone else other than white people. Besides, the elders would be heard saying, “the white government has been good to us, look how badly they’ve treated the blacks” intimating that coloured people should be thankful for the relatively marginal way they were being discriminated against.

On occasion my father challenged the status quo by for example agitating and eventually becoming the first person of colour to acquire a sedan taxi license that allowed him to own his own taxi business. He then defiantly employed white men as taxi drivers. His foray into the white property market had more to do with demonstrating his ability to outsmart the government than the more lucrative option of investments. However despite his maverick behaviour in some areas, when confronted by a white person my father would be seen capitulating and embodying all the projections of being less than white. My father would insist on addressing white people as “sir” and “madam” and would make an effort to speak English or Afrikaans in a manner they would approve of.

My parents had been blissfully unaware of the many times myself and a few fairer skin friends had entered the white public swimming pool in our neighbourhood, only to laugh at the cashier who could not tell the difference between a coloured and a Portuguese child. Neither of us coloured children could swim, so we’d pay our entrance fee, walk around, proudly defiant and leave soon thereafter. On other occasions we would go to the “whites only” beaches in Sea Point and laugh at the police whom we believed couldn’t tell the difference between the Jewish beachgoers and ourselves. Again none of us went to the beach to swim, nor did we stay very long but would end our “acts of defiance” by destroying the mail in the mailboxes of the white people living in the flats along Sea Point beach road.

During the school uprisings in the late 70’s my parents did become aware of my involvement in politics and they were terribly upset. My father, who had at the time become a police reservist, could not believe that I would condone the violence and destruction to property that followed political rallies. Moreover, my father who did not have the opportunity to complete primary (junior) school was horrified at the thought that we were rejecting the education system on the basis of inequity. My father opined that we had to be grateful that we were getting an education at all. Soon thereafter my father arranged for me to further my schooling whilst living with my eldest sister in Natal.

Whilst Natal appeared an obvious choice for my father as the province appeared more peaceful relative to Cape Town, the experience in Natal did little to lessen my political

awareness or sooth my burgeoning anger. My introduction to Tongaat a suburb north of Durban was mired in politics of a different kind. As a young teen I became painfully aware of the politics of difference and its manifestation beyond the binary categories of black and white that I had been exposed to till then.

Tongaat, I soon learnt was reserved for Indian people only. My sister settled into marriage with a man classified as Indian, however she appeared to have been largely accepted which is not uncommon for those not of Indian descent but who practices Islam. The religion appears to minimize legislated racial differences. However compared to my sister, I differed in my dress code, was of fairer skin and my racial classification as Cape Malay offered a seemingly insurmountable challenge to the local school authorities who had to consider my application to the school. My application was denied. I was not Indian, a non-negotiable requirement according to the school principal. My late application was hurriedly sent to the nearest school for coloured children, which was at least a 30km train ride away. I spent the first 6months after my arrival in Natal traveling to and from school, again bypassing the school within walking distance from my sister’s home.

My daily train journey ended when the principal at the local school retired and was replaced by a Moslem man. My brother in law, a prominent figure in the community at the time, had secured my place in the school, still reserved for Indians. I was however instructed to wear the Islamic school attire, that included a white pants beneath the school dress. The dress code did little to diffuse my difference as classmates asked about my background, wondered whether we cooked curry and expressed surprised at the softness of my frizzy hair when I agreed they could touch it. I soon stopped wearing the pants and established intimate friendships that dispelled racial differences. On occasion I was reminded of such differences when a friend spoke of the trouble at home where his Indian parents were concerned that he may be interested in more than a friendship with the only coloured girl at school. I left Natal before completing my studies. I completed my schooling in Cape Town at a school at the forefront of political activism amongst Cape schools.

The pain, complexities and madness of colour, race, racial differences and racism of course follows me as race has sadly become the prism through which I inadvertently continue to

view myself and the world. You see whilst I intellectually comprehend that my difference to others has no basis in skin colour, I continue to struggle with the yoke of racism.

N43

Female
Black
Thirties
KZN

Spoiling the fun

My earliest conscious memory of an experience of racism is a memory of when I was 9 years old. At the time my family was living in a rural area on the North coast of then-Natal, where I had been raised and where the family homestead still remains. Visits from 'the farm' to the city didn't occur very often and as children we were very excited when we knew that such a trip was planned. Apart from a long journey in the car, the highlight of most of these trips was going to the local municipal swimming pool, where, even in mid-winter, we would spend the day, while our parents shopped and visited. On this particular trip in 1979, my parents dropped us off at the house of an aunt and uncle in Durban. Although these relatives lived in a so-called 'coloured' township, even as kids we were vaguely aware that one of their daughters was 'a play white' and that apart from my uncle, most of that family 'looked like whites.'

My adult cousin and her husband decided that they were going to take us to an 'even better' pool than the one near their house, and we were beyond excited that the pool they would take us to was on the beachfront. Together with my cousin's two daughters, my younger brother and I went to this 'new' swimming pool. Although I didn't know so at the time, these pools were 'for whites only'. Only after being in the water for a little while, mania subsided and having taken a little time to look around me did I notice that I was the only dark-skinned person in that pool (my brother and young cousins all being fair-skinned and light-haired). No one else seemed to notice this rather surprising little piece of trivia. In hazy retrospect, part of me must have sensed that what we were doing was 'risky' behaviour because I got out of the water and went to my cousins who were sitting and picnicking on the lawn next to the pool and asked them if it was ok to swim in the 'whites

pool'. They replied that it was fine and that I should not worry about it. So I went back into the water and continued playing with my brother and young cousins, wary not to get to near to the white children. The next thing I knew there was a 'policeman' standing at the edge of the pool and calling for me to get out. He had on a brown uniform and what I remember as a sjambok in his hand. I waded to the edge of the shallow pool, a little confused. He said I should get out of the water because this pool wasn't for blacks. I started wading to the pool edge, turning my head to gesture towards my brother to get out with me, having assumed that the policeman was talking to all four of us 'not-whites'. However, it soon became apparent that he was talking only to me. As I got out of the water I told him that my brother and cousins were also in the water and that he should tell them to come out. He asked me to point them out to him, which I did. To my bewilderment, he shook his head and said I must stop 'playing games' and it slowly dawned on me that he did not think or 'see them' as black, but as white. I remember being on the verge of pointing out my adult cousins to the man and then realising that it would not be the best thing to do, because it might get them into trouble, and get me into even bigger trouble. I stood on the side of the pool willing my brother and young cousins to come out with me, but they were either unaware of my situation or willingly chose to dive away and continue with the water game we had been playing. As I stood in the knee-deep water, stalling, the 'policeman' hurried me on, waving his 'sjambok' near me. I jumped out and he walked me to the exit. I knew that my adult cousins could see him marching me out of the pool enclosure and I knew they would come and 'fetch' me, but it seemed like it was a very, very long time before they all came out, with everything packed up and my brother and cousins wet and shivering (and a bit cross with me for ruining their fun). My older cousin then explained the apartheid rules of segregation and although he explained why they were unfair and that we should ignore them and 'not worry about them', it was the first time I consciously realised that I could be treated differently because of the colour of my skin, and that this treatment wasn't just done by individuals who were bad (like policemen patrolling pools), but that 'the government' was behind it and that some could get away with tricking the government, but some could get into big trouble! I have since held government responsible for spoiling any kind of fun!

N44

Male
Black
Fifties
Academic
Originally from the Free State

Contradictions, contestations, conflits, convergence, confusion, construction, constitution, conflagration

To this day I am still not able to clearly describe my experiences of Apartheid because of the many contradictions that I still go through due to the trauma of this horrific social arrangement. However for the sake of producing a comprehensible account, I will tell my story on the bases of 4 scenes which are the following:

Scene 1

I am a 50 year old male who speaks Sesotho and I was born in the rural part of the Free State where I spent most of my early childhood years. My father was a school teacher while my mother used to work in the *family planning section* of the Department of Health then. This meant that by local standards among the Black community, I enjoyed a kind of a *middle class* status. I managed to pass my standards six then at the age of 12 and I had to go to QwaQwa for my high school education as there was no high school for the so-called ***non-whites*** in our home *dorpie*, although there was one for white kids, just four kilometres away. What is interesting is that there was another high school about 30km from our home and I could not be admitted to that school either as that one admitted only Setswana speaking children.

QwaQwa where I finally got my high school education was about 300 km away from my home. Back then it took a full 24 hours travelling to get to QwaQwa from my home and this journey included; firstly taking a taxi for one hour, then waiting for the train for another six hours from 18h00 to 12h00 in a waiting room for ***non-whites*** without windows, let alone air conditioning facilities to protect us against the cold winters' nights. The train would then take another eight hours to get to Afrikaskop. I still do not know what this name meant but

it felt like it was saying that a Black person (African) should be kicked, which thing the ticket examiners used to do on many occasions on the flimsiest of pretexts. For example, I still have a scar on my forehead sustained at Afrikaskop from the white ticket examiner's ticket-validating machine as he hit me with it for not being fast enough to produce a ticket while being demanded due to the fact that I was asleep when he came to demand it. After this long journey in the exclusively ***non-white*** third class coach of the train, not being able to fully sleep as there were no beds to sleep on, we endured another six hours lying in wait on the grass under the trees, waiting for a bus to take us to QwaQwa. The bus itself had no seats in it as it was only meant to transport goods and not humans. So we had to stand the whole four hours journey to QwaQwa. This ritual was repeated every six months when we went home and back to school. The discomfort of this experience did not really get to me then, may be because of my tender age.

On one occasion I had the privilege of travelling by car to school together with some white couple. The wife of the man who drove this car used to work with my mother in the family planning section. So he had agreed to give me a lift. When we arrived at Bethlehem, the couple went to have their breakfast in some restaurant. I cannot really remember the name of that place. After they had eaten they brought me half a loaf of white bread and a pint of milk, which I really enjoyed. Even this incident did not really get to me then because I was *used* to being discriminated against. For example in my home town, whites had access to, say shops, through the front doors where they could choose from the racks whatever it was they needed, while we as Black people communicated with the shopkeepers through a small window at the back of the shop. To make matters worse one could not even see what choices were available through the back windows because of the tight mosquito fence that used to cover the window through which Black people used to make their purchases.

This blatant discrimination did not matter then, or shall I say that it was so rife that it looked normal and natural to be handled that way. In fact I cannot remember myself or anybody for that matter asking why was it that we bought things through that shop window while whites had better access. Nobody asked why the ticket examiners behaved in the manner in which they did towards us and not to their white peers. Nobody asked as to why we were huddled together in buses without seats while whites who dared to visit QwaQwa used the

better and smaller section of the bus which had seats and curtains. Nobody ever asked as to why we did not have high schools nearby while our white counterparts could literally walk to their high schools. Nobody ever asked as to why was it that the majority of the Black kids, we started sub-standard A with, never went beyond standard six education. In fact nobody asked why was it that none of my standard six classmates ever went to any high school at all, to further their education.

Scene 2

My father who was born and bred on a farm, tells me that one day he was talking to the white owner of the farm he lived on and together they were laughing about some funny incident that had occurred that day when the white friend of the farmer came visiting. This white visitor asked the white farmer as to what was it that was so hilarious that a ***kaffir*** could tell to make the farmer to laugh that much. Without waiting for the response the visitor hurriedly left without even indicating the reason for his visit.

This was not all because my father's brother (my Uncle in English) who was staying on another farm had visited my father's family one afternoon. He went home after the visit but could not reach his destination because some white youth caught him on his way and beat him up so badly that he lost consciousness. He was found on the side of the dusty farm road the following morning by someone who knew him. He never fully regained consciousness. The mode of operation of these white boys was very similar to the much talked about lynching of Black people in the United States of America. To this day the boys were never brought to book although they were known in the community.

Scene 3

During my adult days I worked at a university and on some occasion I would be required to attend workshops in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. Most of the time I would drive to and from Cape Town to Port Elizabeth by car because I was (and still am) captivated by the beauty of the garden route. For me this part of the country is like heaven. I mean, one would be travelling very close to the sea but also in very close proximity of the high Outeniqua Mountains, through the greenery of that part of the Eastern Cape. On one such trip I was involved in a car accident around some bend of a meandering road. A one-ton

bakkie literally fell onto the roof of my car and I was unconscious for some minutes after this had happened and was not able to move myself out of the wreckage. To my surprise the people who came to my rescue, who called the police and the ambulance as they tried to take me out of the wreckage were white local farmers in that part of the country. It was dark and over cast but I can still remember the concern on their faces as I came to. They even managed to call my parents from their home stead. This was during the 1980s.

Scene 4

Among the many universities I worked at, I found myself working at a predominantly white university. The manner in which my colleagues related to me made me feel like I really did not belong there. I was made to understand that I did not deserve to be working there. They seemed to see me as a Bantu academic who was appointed merely because of my Black complexion, appointed merely in compliance with the ***equity targets***. In meetings I would be totally ignored and my appeals for equal treatment were just brushed aside because the argument was; why did I accept the appointment at such a clearly white dominant university which overtly declared that Afrikaans would be the only language of instruction and communication?

I came to even doubt my competencies which I had built over a period of 23 years in higher education sector because of this treatment. On one occasion one white senior academic constantly referred to me as ***Blikskottel*** in our conversation. I felt very insulted but did not ask the person as to why was she using such obviously demeaning and insulting word to refer to me. I later wrote her an e-mail politely asking her what did the word ***Black Skottel*** mean (because this is what ***Blikskottel*** sounded to me) and whether she would object if I would use the same word to refer to her and whether I could also use it in my conversations with the Dean, for example She actually was brave enough to respond to me in person and to explain that the word was not ***Black Skottel*** but ***Blikskottel*** and that the loose English translation thereof was ***rascal,*** and that she could not understand why I felt insulted because she was using the word in jest. To which I retorted that, although she may have meant well, that was still an insult to me. She apologised and indicated that she would never call me by that name again. However the next time we met a few days later, she now was referring to me casually in a conversation as; ***mannetjie,*** which I know to be meaning ***a***

small man. This time I lost my temper and insulted her in writing on e-mail which I circulated among all staff so as to push matters to their limits. She never talked to me for a very long time after this humiliation. What is interesting were the e-mails from other white colleagues pledging support to me acknowledging that a person of my age who also had grandchildren did not deserve to be called names like that.

The above has convinced me that the residues of Apartheid will not be easy to uproot as they have deeply enmeshed themselves at the personal and the individual levels and that most of the time the perpetrators and the victims manifest and as well as reproduce these trauma both knowingly and/or maybe unintentionally?

N45

White
Forties
Western Cape

As a young child growing up in Cape Town, we were able to walk and cycle around our neighbourhood without fear. It was the early 70s and Apartheid was running strong. I was going around the block to my friend's house, in the next street.

As I turned the corner a black man was walking along the street. This must have been relatively unusual, or I had simply been brainwashed by my very racist Rhodesian father, and the general separation of whites and blacks, at the time, I froze in absolute fear and immediately thought that he was going to steal me, or do something terrible to me.

His response was to reassure me that I was safe and he would not hurt me. I felt shame, fear, confusion and a sense of powerlessness. I must a have been about 8 years old.

I didn't understand the implications then, but what I did wonder was, 'was my father telling the truth about black people'. This man was kind, and he could have been my father age wise. He was kind, mature and easily read the context, and provided reassurance.

It was my first exposure to an experience that challenged the dominant racial prejudice of the time, and in my family, it was also the first time that I had to face a situation like that alone, that I perceived to be dangerous. I froze in terror. The memory of this experience has never left me, and always reminds me of the power of the mindset, and prejudice.

Given that this experience and its memory has stayed with me for so long, so clearly, I realize that it was the first time that what I had been told was true, had been challenged.

Memories of Apartheid

I was lucky enough to live and work in South Africa from 1989 – 1990 as a 'gap year' – teaching in a black primary school in Johannesburg. At the time of going I didn't realise what a life-changing experience this was going to be – I was born in Kenya to white British parents and really wanted to go back there – or at least somewhere else in Africa. I didn't want to go to a country with apartheid, I didn't want to work as a volunteer within a racist political system and I didn't want to do anything at all that would collaborate with such politics. However, the company I went with gave me no other option in Africa (and I was keen on going back to Africa – my mother said it got under your skin and I wanted to see what she meant) so I went.

At first it was hard: we (Lis - a British colleague and I) lived with rich, white Christians in their palatial homes with black servants and beautiful gardens and taught black children living with HIV/AIDS, TB and the ravages of poverty and apartheid. The contrast was painful to endure on a daily basis – enjoying the comfort and excess of white privilege and witnessing the horrors of the actual and psychological violence of apartheid. After a few months we could bear this no longer and moved out into what was called a 'houseboy's house' – a little cottage on a big estate. This still was very privileged compared to the concrete hollows that our children from the school lived in (blocks of concrete rooms with no windows, no doors, no toilets, no drains, no kitchens that local white farmers generously provided for their workers).

I learnt a huge amount about racism – how it is lived, how it is maintained, and endured, how it crushes the human spirit but also how it can ignite passion, resilience and the determination to survive against the odds – by both white and black South Africans and those who sit uneasily somewhere in between.

There are so many memories about racism and its effects it is hard to know which to choose. Here is one from the early on, in 1989 shortly after my time teaching at the school began:

I soon realised that I knew so little about the children and teenagers I was teaching, their home lives were so different from my own and those described in the textbooks we used at school and I was curious to find out more about their lives beyond the school. So I asked one of the families at the school if I could walk home with them one day after school. There were 5 members of this family at the school – aged from 7 to 22 from memory. (It was common for black teenagers and adults to attend primary schools if there had been little or no school provision for them.) They thought I was joking at first and thought this was really funny. I eventually convinced them that it was something I would really like to do.

I remember walking from the school – a large falling-down church which became unsafe for us to use as the year went on – through the quiet, calm and quite beautiful white suburbs to their farmland. It was odd walking through the privileged white area (very close to where we lived at that time), noticing the averted gaze of the black gardeners and 'housegirls', the quiet but calm attitude of my students and my own anger bubbling away inside me. The white school and the white homes had tennis courts, swimming pools, servants and land – lots of space and lots of sprinklers is what I remember vividly. The reality of these children's lives – walking quietly through such privileged spaces, trying not to be seen or heard – dawned on me and I vividly remember the anger and feelings of self-disgust this brought up as I had lived in such spaces of white privilege. I remember feeling so angry about it and knowing my anger was naïve and also a product of my own privilege. I was familiar with the trappings of the white middle-classes aboard (being an expatriate child in the South Pacific) but suddenly I saw all this for the first time – and experienced it as the product of a systematic regime of white privilege and racism.

I wanted my response, one of indignation and rage, to be theirs. I wanted them to be as angry as me. Their acceptance and calmness in the face of such injustice seemed to speak of two things: they did accept it – and yet, they did not. Elias, the eldest, told me that this was what God had wanted. Asking him a bit more about this I discovered this is what their

(white and black) church leaders had told them: God had created black people to serve whites. I remember feeling completely gagged by this. This seemed to be a coping strategy – one that explained and even softened the injustice of apartheid – perhaps their reward would be in heaven, Elias said. Was it kind to challenge this?

But their acceptance also revealed a political wisdom – and a more critical response. Getting angry on a twice-daily experience of walking though spaces of white privilege which denied their humanity and denied the awfulness of their own lives would serve them no benefit. Reserving their energy, their resourcefulness and their politics for school and hopefully for a space where they would be heard was much wiser.

I can remember struggling with my anger – wanting to express it as I felt it so forcefully but also feeling that this too would be an expression of my own privilege. It was a powerful lesson – and only the beginning of many.

N47

Fifties
White
KZN

Ngiyikhafula – I am a kaffir

The event that I want to write about happened in the early 1980s. I can't remember the exact year, but it was either 1982 or 1983. I had just returned to Durban, to work at the University of Natal, and had bought a new house in a suburb called Moseley Park, about 15 kilometres south-west of the city centre. The southern part of the suburb was experiencing quite a lot residential development, and so there were a few new houses in the area I was living. It needs to be remembered that this was a residential area "officially" designated, by apartheid law, for white people only! To the south of the suburb was a very large residential township for Indian people, and to the south-west of Moseley Park was an old and very established residential township for Africans.

Given the reasonably high levels of unemployment among the Black population during the early 1980s, it was common for Black artisans and tradesmen (yes, they were men) to be walking the streets of "white suburbia" looking for work. This is how I came to meet the Black man – whose name I no longer remember – of this apartheid narrative. In South African racial parlance this man was African, and a Zulu. He was of medium build, as I am, and in his early forties. I was in my early thirties at this time. The man in question was a builder, a bricklayer to be specific, and he approached me one day enquiring whether I had any building work for him to do. Being a new house, without an established garden, I did have some work for him to do. I arranged for him to build a retaining wall at the back of my house, near the kitchen area. As I recall he did a reasonably good job over a period of about a week. I paid him a decent wage for the week's work, and he after he had completed the work, he left in search of more work, and I never saw him again until many months later.

It was early evening, about seven o'clock, and being winter it was completely dark. My partner and I were in the lounge when we heard someone knocking on the back door. This was highly unusual, and if anyone were visiting, or "legitimately" coming to the house, they

would have come to the front door! Hence, I was a little nervous and approached the back door, which was a "stable door" style (split door), calling out: "Who is there?" I received no answer, and rather apprehensively opened the top part of the door. To my surprise there was a black man at the door, who jumped back when I opened the door, and crouching on his haunches with his hands just above his head said: "Yebo baba, yebo baba". Literally translated from the isiZulu, this is, "Yes father, yes father". While "yebo" can mean "yes", it is also an exclamation, like "hey", but meant respectfully. It was after this exclamation, as the man was starting to stand up, that I recognised "my builder man" of a few months previous.

Having been startled, and a little frightened, I, rather angrily, asked him (in isiZulu), what the hell he wanted, why he had come to the back door, and consequently scared the shit out of me?! He replied that the reason he had come to the back door was because, "Ngiyikhafula" (translated, "I am a kaffir"). This made me even angrier, because I would never have called him such a name, nor would I have wanted to think about him in such demeaning and vile terms. I then said to him (again in isiZulu), that I had never treated him in such a way for him to presume that I saw him like this, and that I was angry and disappointed that he found it necessary to belittle himself as a precondition to approaching me. And in my preachy mode I told him never to refer to himself like this again, and certainly not with me.

When I had finished "lecturing" him, he told me that he had got stranded in the area without any money and would have to walk home which would have taken him hours. So he was approaching me for transport money. I gave him some money, we said goodbye, and I never saw him again.

There is a lot in this encounter that avails itself for a socio-political and psycho-social analysis, and I did some of this in the past in one of my lectures. However, it is probably more interesting to account for how this experience affected me. I was not unaware (at the time of this "encounter") of the horrors of apartheid, and the resulting alienation forced upon the black population, but having the political so crudely smeared in my face through this event was especially sad and unsettling for me. I suppose my surprise, or naivete, was hoping that by treating this man, and other black people, with respect and dignity, I, or we,

could somehow overcome some of the hurt and agony of apartheid social relations, at least at the interpersonal level. And so to have the most offensive insult – calling someone a kaffir – thrown in my face, simultaneously, shocked, saddened and shamed me.

And yet in this regrettable encounter there are some redemptive features lurking in the contradictions of our – my and my black builder man's – socially inscribed inequality. While apartheid socialisation "required" that he referred to me deferentially as "father", even though he was about 10 years my senior, I hoped (at time) that the respectful humanity between us was what "allowed" him to approach me for help. Even so, he still couldn't chance how a white man might react to him, and thus he added to his deference by going to the back door, whereupon being challenged by me, he was "prepared" to negate his being even further by telling me that he was, after all (only), a kaffir!

If I was ever unsure of Fanon's argument, as outlined in his seminal book **Black skin, white masks**, concerning the psychopathology of racialised social relations of superiority and inferiority, then this encounter removed all doubt. I suppose it is through the continual acknowledgement of the hurt and suffering that people experienced under apartheid that we can start to hope for what it might mean to live in a non-racial and caring society.

N48

Thirties

When I was less than ten years old, in about 1984, I remember that when I visited my mother at her flat in Durban, every time I picked up the telephone there was a strange clicking sound. When I asked my mother what was wrong with the telephone I was told that the police were tapping it. Around the same time, I noticed that the plastic on the side of the cat litter box was melted. I asked what had happened and was told that they had got cold one night and lit a fire. A few years later, I was told that the box was burnt because they had been burning incriminating documents. I also remember that at the local community centre where we went roller skating on Saturday afternoons the toilet had a sign that said 'Europeans Only'. I remember being confused as to where I should go to the toilet. I remember going to Durban on holiday and always being taken to the so called 'black beach' and noticing that there were no other white people on the beach. It struck me that white people were allowed on 'black' beaches but black people were not allowed on 'white' beaches.

I think the effect on me as an adult has been that I now over-compensate and am incredibly conscious of trying to prove whenever I can that I am not a racist, particularly to black people.

White
Thirties

I was fortunate enough never to be directly discriminated against whilst growing up in South Africa. I was also fortunate enough to have parents who were politically very liberal and so I had a reasonably good understanding of what was happening. As a result I knew that black South Africans were treated differently to white South Africans, I knew it was wrong, and I knew that there were a lot of people, black and white, all over the world who were fighting to change the system. My father had been detained for about a month before I was born and my mother spent a day in jail because she refused to apply for a 'pass' for our domestic worker.

My most memorable relevant encounter was with the headmaster's secretary at my primary school, I was twelve years old and it was 1985. My father was part of a group of academics at the local university that had organised a march to protest against the detention of a number of students. On the day of the march she approached me while I was walking down a corridor on my own and stopped me to say, 'I hope your father gets arrested for what he is doing today.' I remember being initially quite confused as to what exactly she was talking about. I had a vague idea of what was going on that day but no inclination that there was anything wrong with it. I was a little upset but not upset enough to tell my father about what had happened. I certainly avoided her in the future. I remember later that year wearing a yellow ribbon on my school blazer because the wife of one of my father's friends had been detained. I also remember that my parents stayed seated at every school prize giving when 'Die Stem' was played. I remember being embarrassed and wishing that they would stand up. Now I just wish I had stayed seated myself.

When I finally went to university I was envious that my parents had a definite cause to fight for. By 1992 Mandela was being released and apartheid was supposed to be over. Although there were definitely still important issues that had to be addressed, it felt like the battle had been won. It seemed to me that things were a lot more complicated. I was

disappointed when a group of students were arrested and I had not been one of them, I guess my parents' political activity had seemed quite romantic to me. It was around the same time that I heard that the headmaster's secretary from primary school had walked in on her husband in bed with another woman, I thought that she had got what she deserved.

N50

Thirties
White

It has taken me many weeks to actually sit down and write something that approximates the nature of my early experience of apartheid. I believe that many people like me would rather not think about this too carefully never mind write anything down.

Questions have run through my head on what is racism, was I complicit in apartheid, what is my responsibility and whether things are any different now.

I don't have a description of any "earliest significant experience" of racism. In fact, there doesn't seem to me to have been any significant events that I remember from my childhood that I can point to as being a 'racist event'. Apartheid was a system that was so entrenched that it is difficult for me to identify any one element.

I was born in 1973 and grew up in a lower middle class white suburb. At that time my only personal encounters with black people were our maids and gardeners. The fact that my parents had a full time maid when they weren't particularly well off themselves is telling in any event. But the point is that I cannot recall questioning this as a child and I don't believe that I characterised this suburban world as racist (or even had knowledge of this word). Certainly, neither my parents nor their black employees gave me any idea that this is what it was. But here, I only try to describe my experiences as a young child of a divided society and attempt to understand how this may have come to influence my views now.

Looking back and trying to reconcile an old outdated order with what I know today, it is difficult to untangle and label "racism". I was taught as a child to always be polite to the domestic workers and can certainly remember being fond of all the women who worked in our house. Our only language in common was Afrikaans and being from an English family there was therefore already some difficulty communicating. Somehow I always ended up speaking slow poor Afrikaans (a language I disliked learning) and can't really remember ever

having had what I would now consider to be a proper conversation. (Or trying to learn Sotho or teach English.)

This divide or barrier is the troublesome aspect of these memories for me to recall. To know the extent and reason for this divide, how much of it was down to apartheid and how much the employer / employee relationship. (Never mind that the only reason why we had maids and gardeners was because of apartheid.) I didn't know much about the black people that worked in our house. At most, an English first name is what I can recall. I wasn't encouraged to be curious although I was by nature an inquisitive child. There was a set employer / employee (or more vividly and the more commonly used terms master / servant) relationship in place and that was not questioned. A kind of detachment was either what I learnt from my parents or decided for myself was the only viable way of relating and this is what allowed racism to go unquestioned. Don't get too involved. Remain professional. (I don't want to know.)

I think that as a child I would at times want to visit the maid in her room in our garden ("the maid's quarters" is the term I remember being used) but was not allowed by my parents. I think the ostensible reason given was that the maid had to be able to have her own privacy away from us. I think I only saw the inside of this room once or twice. And then it was when the maid was on holiday and not something I remember as being a pleasant experience. The room was small, smelled strangely and was not dirty, but grubby. There was a vast difference between the inside of our house and this room. So, the nearest I came to entering the maid's space was in the evenings when I got a little older and I would take out her supper to her, calling as I neared the door. Again, this would surely have encouraged me to stay detached from a situation that did not make sense but that I wasn't to question.

Living in England, this experience becomes more starkly outlined for me, in place of a blurred detached memory. It is exactly the fact that I grew up having a full time maid that causes most surprise to my British friends. Although there is some understanding that this is what it was like living in South Africa there is still a perplexed disbelief in coming to terms with such an account.

These experiences continue to have an impact on me as I don't think I will ever completely escape or answer the questions I posed at the beginning of my account. And without wanting to sound feeble, there were some positive things that I learnt of black people when I was growing up. My mother always used to talk of "the grace of Africa" and I do recognise and respect this quality and hope that I too embody some of this spirit. But still in this recognition there are barriers, difference and separateness implied.

Travelling back to South Africa to visit my parents they still have a full time domestic worker and gardener. The difference is now that I know much more about these peoples lives and will even have conversations about current South African politics (albeit still in broken Afrikaans). My mother has learnt to speak some Sotho and so have I. Apartheid appears to have been excised. But I still wonder about the nature of this employer / employee relationship. Having left South Africa before I had my own family, I have no idea of how I would deal with this today. Would I employ a domestic worker? How much would I pay above minimum wage? How would my unresolved questions play out if I was in the role of South African madam to maid?

I recently read in Noami Wolf's book Misconceptions (p216)

> *So many women had said, about becoming a mother, 'I never thought I would become one of those women who …' Well, I never thought I would become one of those women who took up a foreordained place in a hierarchy of class and gender. Yet here we were, to my horror and complicity, shaping our new family structure along class and gender lines – daddy at work, mommy and care-giver from two different economic classes sharing the baby work during the day – just as our peers had done.*

And then a little further on, she says

> *When my husband worked late, our care-giver watched the evening news with me, half-hovering, keeping a dignified distance, because even though she was, through*

the nature of her workday, 'like a part of the family' – a term I heard affluent friends using without awareness of how insulting it was to a professional, let alone someone who has a family of her own – she was also, under the everyday warmth of our work together, an employee after all.

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