Saamwees: The Performance of Difference and Racial Consciousness in South Africa
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Introduction

The apartheid system that dominated South Africa and South-West Africa for much of the 20th century was constituted of legislation, which legalized the difference of people for a distinctly modern, post-World War II setting. One such law was the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953, which codified and centralized centuries of racialized thought by strictly segregating nearly every public location and amenity.¹ If apartheid was about segregation, then petty apartheid, as the Act of 1953 and its addendum in 1960 became known as, was passed with the understanding that it would segregate, but also create the opportunity for shared experiences. Petty apartheid legalized the necessary daily performance of the difference between people, the visibility of discrimination, which aids in the maintenance of racialized ideas. If apartheid means apartness, then petty apartheid is about saamwees or “togetherness.”

This paper sets out to argue that the signs and interactions between white and non-white South Africans that came from this legislation was distinctly performative, the public presentation of difference. Signs and society would expose transgressions allowing for ridicule or derision. The dominant member(s) of the interaction were affirmed of their standing as the superior and the privileged. The subordinate member(s) of the interaction were affirmed of their standing as the lesser and the impoverished. Those witnessing this interaction also felt a similar experience based upon their racial classification. The people involved would experience power-embedded emotions and these emotions would develop memories and remain in the consciousness of the actors of petty apartheid.

In non-white narratives, many whites appear as belligerent aggressors, but in their own narratives, whites appear to be contending with their memories and the guilt of their place in apartheid. Non-white groups struggle with the absurdity of apartheid and race as honorary whites flaunt the supposed racially designated spaces. Due to legislation that forbade the different races from living and cohabiting together, coloureds and their families were sometimes separated and forced to live apart from each other. Amongst the stories from coloureds fraught with confusion and ridicule are sardonic tales of coloureds’ experiences with petty apartheid. Many Indian South Africans recede into their own traditional communities, cultural norms, and familial units. Meanwhile, many

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black Africans endure the brunt of petty apartheid belittling them and forcing some to realize their blackness in a white world. Non-white South Africans and, to an extent, white South Africans were all oppressed and dehumanized by petty apartheid. This dehumanizing apartheid legislation fostered the violence that would permeate and become pervasive in South African society.

**Historiography**

The historiography on a modern South African can be divided into two overarching and distinct sections influenced by the socio-political features of South Africa during the twentieth century. The first exists from 1948 to 1994 during apartheid’s existence and before the process of rebirth began in earnest. The violence and endurance of the apartheid state into the late twentieth century set it apart from other discriminatory states and their legislation.2 Evolving historical frameworks have seen the legislation and implementation of apartheid divided into various forms by scholars of South Africa. Pierre L. van den Berghe, a white Congolese sociologist and anthropologist, divided apartheid legislation into three forms of segregation. These forms were “Micro-Segregation,” the segregation of public facilities and amenities, “Meso-Segregation,” the separation of same race ghettos within mixed race communities and “Macro-Segregation,” the forceful movement and creation of separate homelands or Bantustans.3 I. Th. M. Snellen divides apartheid legislation into two distinct categories: “Grand Apartheid” and “Petty Apartheid.” “Grand Apartheid” is the creation of racialized reserves and the forceful movement of people to those lands. Meanwhile, “Petty Apartheid” is the segregation of everyday places and amenities.4 These two examples represent early attempts to understand the creation and persistence of apartheid.

The historiography of this first period, 1948-1994, features histories on political, social, and economic characteristics of South African life. Articles like “The Politics of Security: South Africa under Verwoerd, 1961-6” by Newell M. Stultz and “Afrikaners, Nationalists, and Apartheid” by Brian M. du Toit are emblematic of the earlier part of this period.5 The sources generally used include

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legislation, judicial rulings, speeches, and formalized anthropological and sociological studies. By the 1970s and 1980s, historians were interested in the story of the everyday South African. This meant the utilization of oral histories and specific interest in the subaltern. However, instead of looking at small instances of day-to-day apartheid existence, the histories of the 1970s and 1980s were written about large social, political, and economic events like the Sharpeville Massacre, the forced removals under the Group Areas Act, the creation of bantustans, and black African political activism with social history methodology and theory.

The impressive, albeit flimsy, control of the apartheid state over the ethnic groups of South Africa could partially explain this. In a state of fear, anticipation, and extreme poverty the concerns of everyday South Africans may not have been in sharing these daily experiences. The moratorium of foreign news services only further dissipated any opportunity for widespread exposure of petty apartheid. Furthermore, petty apartheid paled in visceral power to the riots and protests of the 1980s. Analogously, the United States and, to a lesser extent, other Western countries seemed to have little interest in South Africa. It was not until the 1980s, with South Africa in de facto rebellion, that the experiences of apartheid—specifically the violent maintenance—began to widely permeate Western political and quotidian discourse especially amongst white Western liberals.

Ironically, as South Africa and apartheid became important to the West, petty apartheid continued to live in the shadows.

The second period of South African historiography exists after 1994 during the move towards a multiracial republic and the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The discourse of the TRC set it apart from many African nations. A collection of religious figures, politicians, intellectuals, and legal minds would circumvent the issues that had beset much of postcolonial Africa. This commission outwardly espoused a mantra of truth, confession, and forgiveness for healing summarized in Desmond Tutu’s unifying Rainbow Nation metaphor. By doing this, the Mandela administration, and in some ways


the African National Congress (ANC), could present a ‘new’ South Africa which would, in theory, heal itself of the wounds caused during apartheid. The upheaval of apartheid and its policies created a similar destabilization of South African historiography. South African society’s entire reorientation and restructuring influenced how histories were written. Furthermore, the post-apartheid sentiments influenced the formation of memories and of understandings on the South African past.

The Apartheid Archives Project, a transnational interscholastic project isolates the TRC as an important moment in post-apartheid South Africa. Their mission statement echoes the important themes that have gone unconsidered by past South African historiography. The researchers from various disciplines united to collect the stories of everyday South Africans. The project maintains that the TRC tended to focus on “the more ‘dramatic’ or salient narratives of apartheid atrocities.” This myopic exploration and repentance “foreclosed the possibility of an exploration of the more quotidian but pervasive, and no less significant, manifestations of apartheid abuse.”10 The outward ideology of amnestying the more ‘dramatic’ apartheid atrocities and the creation of a “Rainbow Nation” presented a ‘new’ South Africa that was completely healed and thusly closed for extensive historiographical debates on petty apartheid. However, the divisive lens of the apartheid system will forever color the remembering of memories and formation of the past for Africans.

Memories of Africans who lived through apartheid and into the transitioning and post-apartheid world may attempt to fit past experiences into evolving, acceptable ideas and ideals. Negotiating the Past: The making of memory in South Africa, edited by Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee, collects sixteen essays which address memory formation in South Africa. The first two essays by Njabulo Ndebele and Andre Brink specifically focus on truth, memory, and narrative. Ndebele’s “Memory, Metaphor, and the Triumph of Narrative” postulates that as more narratives are produced, they “may have less and less to do with facts themselves … than with the revelation of meaning through the

Vol. 2, No. 2 (December 1997), 16. The Rainbow Nation is defined as a country that is made up of many different ethnic groups and that such diversity is important and unifying for that country.

imaginative combination of those facts.”¹¹ The tinkering and formation of memories, the process of recreation, exists with a set of meanings or conclusions that become more important than the actual events themselves. This is important to consider when focusing on white South Africans who have had their entire discourses, and therefore their memories, determined obsolete. In addressing this, Ndebele continues by exploring the creation of “the bleeding-heart, English-speaking liberal South African, who has no understanding of why he is hated so much when he sacrificed so much for the oppressed.”¹² In an effort to become a ‘good’ white South African, an amnesia develops about the passivity and complicity of apartheid life for English-speaking whites. The blame, to an extent rightfully so, is shifted to the Afrikaans-speaking whites, while English-speakers fall back on a legacy of liberal strains. However, liberal English-speakers were, or are, amongst these groups who enjoyed privilege and were a part of the apartheid system. The narratives below, many from these English-speakers, appear very aware of this issue. “Memory, metaphor, and the triumph of narrative” concludes by arguing for “the need for the production of ‘truth’, to counter the lies that were associated with and produced by apartheid.”¹³

On the other hand, Andre Brink in “Stories of History: Reimagining the Past in Post-Apartheid Narrative” states that “the individual constitutes and invents her/himself through the constant editing and re-editing of memory.”¹⁴ Memories are like a puzzle with pieces that must fit within a realm of ‘reality’ and ‘fact’ but are not completely tied to these concepts. Moments can be adopted, rearranged, or completely forgotten as one comes to terms with such moments and the structures that existed within the past. Brink grapples with how a “story tacitly narrates an event … it is infused with, and transformed by, the notoriously unreliable complex of private motivations … that constitute the idiosyncratic, individual mind,” continuing “we can never be sure of it or gain access to it, and that the best we can do is to fabricate metaphors.”¹⁵ This is important to consider as the sources below are memories from the different ethnic groups of South Africa as they come to terms with the experiences of petty apartheid.

¹² Ndebele, 26
¹⁵ Brink, 39-42
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Since 2008, the Apartheid Archives Project has been open for public submissions from all South Africans over the age of twenty. These submissions are reviewed by the researchers and then anonymized unless the narrator desires otherwise.\(^{16}\) Many of the groups identified under apartheid legislation submitted narratives including whites, Indians, coloureds, and blacks.\(^{17}\) The narratives come from the two dominant gender groups, male and female. The ages given during the submission of these narratives range from those in their twenties to seventies, including those born before the 1948 election and those born during the transitional period of the 1990s. These narrators live in South Africa, or currently reside in countries often associated with emigration from South Africa: Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

**The Whites**

The white narrators below describe the instances when racist thought became a racist reality as powerful moments in their lives. When interactions occurred, two reactions appear consistent in the narratives. The narrators are usually young children, adolescents, or young adults, who become confused when they acted racist towards non-white South Africans and were then reprimanded by their parents or society. Alternatively, this confusion arises when their parents or society were racist and the narrator spoke out or did not understand this racism.

For example, a woman, currently living in Australia, remembered a moment in her childhood when she criticized the proximity of a black family, “[Her mother’s] response was the first time my assumptions regarding racial division were challenged. She spoke sharply and rebuked me … all children are the same regardless of colour - and that it was my own attitude that was wrong.” This criticism from her mother left her “feeling confused but also shamed. “This was my first experience of shame with respect to racial issues and a seed was planted in my mind that would grow over years.”\(^{18}\) In this narrative, the child felt the need to expose the black family’s disregard for the rules. In doing so, she was

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reminding those involved that the black family was not where they belonged. This maintained the difference between the two families and the visibility of the two families in the public sphere. By saying “all children are the same” and not all people, the mother may have been expressing a distinct perspective that youth and innocence grant children a special privilege. Through this idea, the mother may have believed that black children grew into beings that were lesser or different.

A white male shared a story from when he was seven years old and had been gifted a train set. In a desire to make his train set authentic he asked his mother to write

the words ‘slegs blankes’, ‘slegs nieblankes’, ‘whites only’ and ‘non-whites only’ above my carefully cut ticket kiosks and doorways. My mother flatly refused and burst into tears. Alarmed, I asked my mother why. She replied ‘But it’s [sic] apartheid.’ I then said ‘But what is apartheid?’ She answered ‘Keeping whites separate from everybody else.’ I retorted ‘But that is how it is!’

The power of this narrative is in the naïveté of the child who is simply trying to present his play world with his understanding of reality. The ability of apartheid to permeate the child’s view of the world, as another narrative noted, “shows how effective the system was at reproducing ideas of racial difference.” These children became adherents to the society around them because they understood the world around them to be segregated. However, their parents disagreed with the policies, which invoked a sense of confusion amongst the children.

A woman from the Eastern Cape recalled a childhood experience at a dog club: “I noticed a particular man . . . What I noticed was his complexion and in a loud voice asked my mother whether coloured people were allowed.” The child in this narrative again exposed a member of society to possible ridicule from others. However, failing to note the nuances of whiteness, the child was instead admonished for her mistake. The mother could have been worried about embarrassing the man representing her inability to indoctrinate her child into the racial hierarchy. As the young narrator matured, she realized the “insidiousness

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of racialised ideologies in the minds of young children - the ‘reservation’ of good shoes (and all other good things) for white people, the exclusion of black people . . . and I re-experience the anger.”

Another woman recalled returning from Germiston on train, “it was rush hour. Our compartment was almost empty but there was a multitude of people on the platform . . . we were in a ‘Whites Only’ carriage and nobody got in. It felt very uncomfortable to be sitting in the almost empty compartment.” For some whites, experiences with petty apartheid invoked a “white consciousness.” This whiteness is associated with comfort and ease in her life. In realizing that she has a place reserved for herself solely based on race, she realized that she was complicit in the apartheid system. The ability of apartheid to pacify and foster ignorance in whites made the maintenance of apartheid easier. Another woman, now in her fifties, described how being involved in Youth Club introduced her to “so many people (all of whom were black) [that] live in terrible poverty, and [became] painfully conscious of all the ‘whites-only’ signs- everywhere.” While interacting with blacks, she “became aware of their feelings of pain and anger at being treated as ‘less than human.”

A woman in her twenties from the Gauteng described a family trip with their domestic aid, Doris. The woman remembered her desire to go to the local Milky Lane, a South African desert shop: “we had still not received any service and my dad became almost nervous… a few minutes later, a, who I assume was the manager came up to us and said that he wouldn’t serve us if ‘she’ was with us.” It must be noted that this incident must have occurred sometime after 1985, long after the National Party’s divide over the issue proving that petty apartheid remained an integral part of the South African racist’s world. Because the whites in this narrative refuse to adhere to the policies, they are included in the

presentation of difference and of unacceptable behavior. This is necessary because transgressive whites, whites willing to interact on a similar level with non-whites, severely threatened the hierarchy and the reservation of space for distinct racial groups.

A woman in her forties remembered an experience while her family’s belongings were being collected for a move. The daughter of the family was told to serve drinks; she began collecting the nice silverware until her mother stopped her:

the china and the tray cloth had to be abandoned … in the cupboard below the sink was a set of mugs … Unexpectedly, suddenly, I was flooded with a sense of acute shame. I did not want to set out two glasses (for the white men) and tin mugs for the blacks. I couldn’t face the moment when I would have to set down the tray, on a stone table in the garden - and would see their faces looking at the tray, so clearly mapped out and divided … I felt deeply self-conscious. I was no longer ignorant - I felt implicated.

This memory mirrors the experiences non-whites had with petty apartheid. The mugs were clear examples of not only the difference, but also the lesser quality. Furthermore, the memory highlights the acknowledgement of difference and her involvement. The girl walked out to the truck placing the tray in front of the mixed group of laborers:

I put down the tray. The two white men began to laugh … They did not touch the mugs - ‘kaffer-goed’. I fled. I can still feel the way in which my childhood self burned with shame, humiliation and guilt … no big drama, then. Only an ordinary, invisible moment.

The laughing of the white men comes from a place of comfort and of superiority. However, due to its trivial nature they are able to utilize this to belittle the girl and the non-white laborers. The narrative continues as the woman wrestles with her memories as a child:

Mugs and glasses- a prosaic way to be born into consciousness of whiteness and blackness, and begin to make the connections with other half-mysterious, but thoroughly normalized practices in my world … the rebellion was a compromise, too. How do such tiny, incremental moments and decisions shape what one becomes … Was the apartheid
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born in kitchen cupboards, in safe domestic spaces, in safe white suburbs, as important as the ‘grand Apartheid’ of the history books?25

These children, adolescents, and young adults were raised in a society which saw segregation in the public sphere. The small moments, the moments that could occurred on benches, in shops, and in restaurants developed the pervasiveness of petty apartheid. These divisions caused an emotional response in these white narratives. Their notions of the ‘other’ were challenged by public interactions with non-whites. The narrators experienced confusion which then developed into shame and even guilt towards their actions or their authority figures’ actions. Whether the consistent repentance of these narratives: shame, guilt, confusion, and cultural infamy come from a place of appeasement or a genuine epiphany is unknown. Whites, the majority Afrikaners, must contend with their cultural infamy and their own ideas concerning race. Meanwhile, they must navigate a political system, which no longer explicitly benefits them and are also unable to completely avoid mixed race interactions in the public space.

The Honorary Whites

The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act included a portion where foreign travelers and foreign businessmen were afforded protective privileges.26 These foreign intellectuals, athletes, politicians, and businessmen were designated as ‘Honorary whites’ a racial title created to denote the importance of a specific person while maintaining their inherent racial difference. These non-white groups included Japanese, Chinese, Taiwanese, Samoans, Maoris, and even foreign blacks.27 Though whites understood that though these groups looked different, they were afforded privileges for important, distinct reasons. However, a non-white visitor’s “honorary white” status would end the moment they were seen because South Africans would be unaware of this special designation. Honorary whites were ‘racially visible’ to South Africans.

No narratives from those who had been assigned the ‘honorary white’ status in the Apartheid Archives Project were collected. However, in two instances honorary whites are mentioned in other narratives by narrators of different racial classifications. It would be remiss to not even begin to consider these narratives. However, it must be noted that the limited sources from honorary whites and the perspectives being from other racial groups restricts the findings. Nevertheless, it is important to engage these memories and to support them with other sources. The first narrative was submitted by an Indian woman in her early fifties now living in Australia. An avid reader, the narrator desired access to the ‘whites-only’ section of the library. One day, she saw “a young Chinese girl going into the ‘White’ area.” The narrator continued, “to my child’s mind … the little Chinese girl was definitely NOT WHITE - she had long, straight black hair (as I did), and her skin was not the pink hue that I associated with White people.” The narrator remembers responding negatively to this injustice “shouting and crying ‘She’s not White! How come she can go in there?’” The narrator’s observations represent the nonsensical creation of ‘honorary white’ in a racialized society. If apartheid was to separate people based on their physical appearance, and believed internal difference, then how could South Africa justify the creation of such an arbitrarily created and named racial designation. Furthermore, the narrator’s obsession with physical difference shows the fulfillment of apartheid ideology. She understood and grudgingly accepted her exclusion from the ‘whites-only’ section of the library. However, when someone appearing non-white enjoyed these same amenities, the notions of difference and identity are questioned.

The next narration features a coloured South African who recalled having friends who were honorary whites. Although the mother of the honorary white friends “looked like a regular white stay-at-home mom . . . during the night she worked as a prostitute.” The narrator even remembers that “she on the other hand appeared not to judge us for not being white.” However, the narrator also recalls “her kids who shared striking resemblance to being Japanese were our friends … 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.” For this narrator, the honorary whites did not directly press their superiority over the other non-white South Africans. The honorary whites

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and coloured children were friends, thus denying the separation between their two ‘races’ that was ‘supposed’ to occur. However, honorary whites still enjoyed the privilege of their classification and this created a performed difference between the coloured narrator and their honorary white friend. The difference between the two was subtly enjoyed by the honorary white family.

E.R. Braithwaite, a black South American novelist, visited South Africa in 1973 after a ban on his books was lifted. He applied for and was granted ‘honorary white’ status for his visit of South Africa. After a night with guests, Braithwaite ordered a taxi; the driver, unaware of his status, said “‘this is not for you… this is not for non-whites,’” leaving Braithwaite “angry” and “helpless in an unfamiliar place.”30 Whenever Braithwaite deviated from the planned tours, his ‘honorary white’ status became unknown to white South Africans. Another incident occurred when he visited a “brightly lit and attractive” restaurant. He was “confronted by a waiter,” who told him, “you do not come in.”31 In another example, Braithwaite wanted to see a film. However, the hotel staff explained that “most cinemas are operated for Whites only … [but] as an important visitor to our country you are allowed, shall we say, special status.”32 These moments continued to disturb Braithwaite who wrote about “hating the arrogance which led him to assume that … they could change the color of my skin to suit their whim. No, not change it. Just overlook it.”33 The exploits of Braithwaite described in Honorary Whites presents a glimpse of his uneasy experience. Braithwaite’s visit to South Africa was coordinated to ensure that his encounter with apartheid South Africa was positive. Furthermore, by accepting special foreign guests, South Africa appeared to be embracing a new liberal ideology. However, Braithwaite’s multiple quarrels with apartheid, including petty apartheid, unveiled the real South Africa. Braithwaite may have been granted ‘honorary white’ status, but when experiencing public interactions, Braithwaite was not a special foreign guest. He was simply a black man who needed to adhere to the policies that dictated his status.

The Indians

By 1891, Indian South Africans were assigned passes, and confronted with general discrimination due to their ethnic differences.34 Furthermore,

31 Braithwaite, Honorary White, 87.
32 Ibid., 95.
33 Ibid., 105.
34 Dugard, Human Rights and the South African Legal Order, 72-73.
industrialization of South Africa after World War I led to the creation of a class-based economic community. In 1949, these indignations culminated with the eruption of protests and ethnic conflicts in the city of Durban. Durban, a coastal city, in the Natal province was the location of the ethnic conflict where, “Almost one in every six Indians [were] affected by… riots… bereavement, destitution, [or] loss of home or land.” One narrator describes how her mother had “harrowing and traumatic memories … women from the neighborhood were beaten and raped and men were beaten.” Indian South Africans were subject to removals, continued exclusion from the Free State, and petty apartheid incidences under apartheid. Despite all of this, Indian South Africans were still viewed above other non-white South Africans by the South African government. The memories of the conflict in Durban and this favoritism alienated Indian South Africans from other non-white South Africans. Nevertheless, Indian South Africans were still confronted with the daily performance of racism perpetuated by the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953. It was the privileges that many Indians were given that made them of use to white populations but this also threatened white superiority and economic dominance.

An Indian South African now living in Australia remembered “some Indian families stopping at our house to use the toilets when they were traveling … it was a given that we would be hospitable in this way as they had no access to any facilities en route.” To avoid the possible performance of difference, non-white South Africans adapted their everyday lives. The willingness of families to open their homes to others represents an acknowledgement of their collective subaltern status. Furthermore, this willingness to help represents a community formation of protection based on ethnicity. This knowledge left an impression on the narrator; in her account, petty apartheid is presented in an almost nostalgic tone which emphasizes its disturbing nature.

Part of the purpose of petty apartheid’s pervasiveness was to create a sense of normalcy. Being the lesser was normal. This was reaffirmed by signs,

37 Ibid., 546.
the silent but omnipresent reminders of difference, and by people, the performative and aggressive reminders of difference. Another narrator spoke about a family picnic when they strayed from their party. “I was startled by 2 White men who were fishing; they called me a ‘coolie bitch’ and swore at me for contaminating their fishing spot … I recall my mother rushing to my aid, but apologizing to these racists … I felt hurt and humiliated when my mother explained that I had broken the rules.‘”40 This recollection engages the performative aspect of petty apartheid. In this experience, four people are directly affected. The two white men present their power and superiority over the land and over the person. This coupled with the racial and sexist language which vocalizes the power supported by the signs and separate amenities. The narrator experiences fear and apprehension in this moment, placing her in a position of weakness. The narrator neither has control over the land nor over any person, let alone herself. The arrival of her mother provides protection to the narrator, but her groveling reinforces their own position of weakness, as well as the white men’s position of power. The narrator experiences further degradation during her mother’s explanation of the rules. This acceptance to petty apartheid weakens self-identity, and renders people less than human. The narrator registers this experience with emotions of pain and humiliation, a culmination of the experience of which attacked her humanity.

Another narrator wrote “I found it strange that I was not allowed to use the same facilities as the White and Black people,” even the “picnic spots” were separated. The narrator continues, “Being harassed by Whites was a common experience. They made it clear that we were different from them. This created low self-esteem, low confidence in ourselves.” The narrator remembered another instance of petty apartheid, “I wanted to swim in the public pools … on seeing other Whites that were darker than me swimming, I broke down.”41 For those born during or right before 1948, apartheid facilitated racial separation and hierarchies represented a learning experience. Older South Africans had been raised in the racialized South Africa, and petty apartheid existed to remind and dehumanize under the apartheid regime. For younger South Africans, petty apartheid was a learning experience; it existed to help develop new generations

of non-white South African subordinates. This is illustrated in the confusion noted in the beginning of the narrative. This narrator’s existence as the lesser is learned through the confusion illustrated through the uneven power dynamics. Whites used petty apartheid laws to elevate their existence while simultaneously removing the foundation for the non-white self.

A forty-year-old woman remembered when her access to the ‘Whites-only’ collection of library books was denied and her tantrum towards this injustice. Her mother, embarrassed by her daughter, “threatened to ‘call the Blackjacks to take [her] away.’” The mother’s concern was to avoid the perceived meaning of her daughter’s tantrum, representing an opposition to the petty apartheid system. The daughter’s opposition would have made her mother and her susceptible to a performance of difference by a white South African. This moment proved significant to the narrator, who became haunted by nightmares “inextricably intertwined with related scenes.” She recalls that “in some the Blackjacks were called because I had not been able to suppress the urge to urinate while in a White-owned store. In other dreams they came and took me away because I had somehow gained access to the White section of the library.” Such a small moment experienced because of petty apartheid continued to grow and fester for this narrator. Both members of the interaction could remember the event throughout the day, week, and so on, experiencing similar emotions and confirmation of rejection of self. Remembering petty apartheid events could also develop emotions and opinions of the interaction, for this reason the petty apartheid interaction would perpetuate itself in those who experienced it. Therefore the interaction was accessible to subsequent reinterpretations of both the event and the aftermath. The woman struggled with the experiences of her childhood and realize that “the combined impact of these experiences [the denial of access to the White section of the library and her reoccurring dreams] establish[ed] an early awareness of the injustice inherent in the apartheid system, in that it forced me to realize that social relationships were proscribed on the basis of race.”

Another narrative describes the visit of the narrator’s relative from London. In 1980, the family walked to the beach in Durban where, “we decided

to sit on a nearby bench to absorb the beauty. We didn’t realize that it was a ‘White Only’ bench.” Their transgression was noted by a “young, white, male ... [who] began shouting at us to get off the bench ... my grandfather ... had to apologise for making this ‘mistake.’” The narrator remembered how they “resented this ... this was my first exposure to direct racism. I was embarrassed by it.”\textsuperscript{45} The parent is a protector but also an actor in the daily performance of difference. The weakness rendered upon the parents represents the helplessness and acceptance of apartheid. These narrators view their parent, often, with importance, admiration, love, and respect. Seeing their parents bow to an unjust system provoked a powerful and meaningful emotional response from the child. The narrator experienced being exposed for being different and being made to feel wrong for this. The narrator continues, “it was only after this incident that I realized what apartheid really meant. As a result of this incident, I was cautious not to expose myself to such a situation again.” Petty apartheid, for this narrator, aided in the process of separation. To avoid the negative emotions from the experience, the narrator formed a community that was distinctly Indian. This culminated in the narrator feeling the need to be “more traditional and [I] found my sense of security in traditions and familiarity.”\textsuperscript{46}

A sixty-year-old Indian South African spoke about many instances of petty apartheid, one such occurred when his uncle and aunt visited and the airport was “segregated very clearly for use by whites and blacks. My uncle ... had to use the back of the aeroplane while his wife ... had to use the front of the aeroplane. They were not allowed to sit together.”\textsuperscript{47} They spoke of how, “the Whites in the country [felt] that they were the superior race ... it was blatant in any interaction between the different race groups.” These experiences, “ensured, that all my life I have been reminded that I am a[sic] Indian first ... as with any [community] under threat Indians also found solace internally in the family unit

\textsuperscript{45} Student Narrative SN13, Apartheid Archives Project, University of Witwatersrand, 2009- URL: http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory_enhanced/U/Collections&c=124880/R/AG3275-B-2-1-10, Accessed March 10, 2015.
\textsuperscript{46} Student Narrative SN13, Apartheid Archives Project, University of Witwatersrand, 2009- URL: http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory_enhanced/U/Collections&c=124880/R/AG3275-B-2-1-10, Accessed March 10, 2015.
\textsuperscript{47} Student Narrative SN18, Apartheid Archives Project, University of Witwatersrand, 2009- URL: http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory_enhanced/U/Collections&c=124881/R/AG3275-B-2-11-20, Accessed March 10, 2015.
… this culture strengthened and grew in the extended family unit forced upon the community by the hardships of apartheid.” It was easier for Indians to evolve their community rather than change the system. In the narratives, the consistent response to petty apartheid was a recession to the protection of the community. Especially for Indians, due to their origins in the Natal province, exclusion from the predominately white Free State, and other discriminations, returning to the community represented a safe bastion for living in apartheid South Africa. For the Indian South Africans in the narratives, a revival of Indian identity and family structure provided safety from the insidious petty apartheid.

The Coloureds

Coloureds in South Africa experienced the absurdity of racialization within the South African society. In a society controlled by a political structure which viewed South Africa through the rigid lens of black and white, coloureds were members of the grey in this color spectrum. The unjustifiable racial classification made this painfully clear as families, marriages, and friendships were separated due to minute characteristics of origin, face, or even hair.48 In a narrative titled “Apartheid: The Many Colours of Madness” the narrator remembers, “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.”49 In this narrative, the child’s maternal relationship is understood through racial classifications. Obsession with difference was reaffirmed in apartheid and the connection of privilege to physical features represents its purpose. Apartheid made ‘whiteness,’ however tenuous that identity was, a privilege, a pinnacle aspiration.

This narrator grew up in Woodstock, a mixed-race suburb in Cape Town. Woodstock had become a place of mixed race living for whites, honorary whites, coloureds, and eventually blacks.50 The narrator’s childhood in Woodstock meant “that we lived within walking distance to a school and public swimming pool that were reserved for our white neighbors. The experience of living in Woodstock

emphasized the craziness of being assigned a race.”\textsuperscript{51} Woodstock represented the unrealistic mission of “grand apartheid” in South Africa. However, petty apartheid could be instituted easily, allowing the government to maintain the feelings of lesser in the non-white South African. For in Woodstock, whites and non-whites lived next to each other, but their amenities were still separated, reminding them of their place in the hierarchy of apartheid. In a change of tone, the narrator recalls nostalgically when, “myself and a few fairer skin friends had entered the white public swimming pool … neither of us coloured children could swim, so we’d pay our entrance fee, walk around, proudly defiant,” and other moments when they “would go to the ‘whites only’ beaches … and laugh at the police whom we believed couldn’t tell the difference.”\textsuperscript{52} The sardonic action of these youths responds to the ridiculous, if not absurd, policies of petty apartheid. The opposition to petty apartheid was the struggle for this narrator and his friends to find pride in the self, and to expose the arbitrariness of racial classification. A coloured woman from the Eastern Cape recalled when she wandered from her parents and found herself in a town center. The young girl desired a Popsicle, so she:

asked for it over the counter as[sic] was told in a tone of voice that really frightened me, ‘Jy kan hier koop nie’. I was directed to a window that opened on the pavement. The same stern faced person then sold the sucker to me through the window while I was standing on the pavement. The sucker suddenly did not taste as nice as it normally did. I was frightened and puzzled and could not understand what just happened.\textsuperscript{53}

Again, the experience between a non-white child and a white adult presents a learning experience. Instead of making an exception or overlooking the rule, the white South African in this narrative needed to teach the little girl, as well as perform, the difference for himself, the other patrons, and for society. The


\textsuperscript{52} Narrative N42, Apartheid Archives Project, University of Witwatersrand, 2009- URL: http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory_enhanced/U/Collections&c=124877/R/AG3275-B-1-1-41-50, Accessed March 10, 2015.

\textsuperscript{53} Narrative N16, Apartheid Archives Project, University of Witwatersrand, 2009- URL: http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory_enhanced/U/Collections&c=124874/R/AG3275-B-1-1-11-20, Accessed March 10, 2015. In many narratives submitted by non-white South Africans, Afrikaans takes a domineering, oppressive, and aggressive nature. Afrikaans is intertwined with the violence, absurdity, and oppression of apartheid.
narrator continued that she attempted to avoid these situations but “it is not always possible … I was subsequently refused service at a drive-in restaurant and made to wait … at the Bellville station. And it hurt as much as the initial experience [the ice sucker purchase]. For some reason these experiences stand out more than all the many other.” The consistent denial of simple, daily actions represented the ability of apartheid to not only control non-white existence but also the ethnic consciousness and hierarchies that dominated South African life.

In another instance, a coloured family was on a road trip with a white family, when they stopped at Wimpy, a fast food restaurant, to order some food. While there, the narrator remembered how, “the manager approached my father and requested that we leave as the restaurant did not serve non-whites.” The narrator believed his father was “probably embarrassed, humiliated and publicly shamed about his powerlessness … and proceeded to ‘cause a public scene.’” The narrator remembered feeling “confusion at what was happening, why we had been asked to leave, and the anxiety of thinking about where we would eat, as well as that my father was likely to be hurt in this conflictual[sic] situation.” The helplessness continued when, “we waved them [the other family] goodbye to find accommodation in a little hotel for non-whites on the outskirts of Beaufort West called the Beaufort Hotel.” Before crossing the border to Rhodesia, the family had to go through the non-white line for customs. The narrator surmised “my anxiety revolved around basic everyday matters - where we to eat, to sleep, and how were we to relate to white authority.” The narrator however feared Rhodesia, a sort of “ironic fear of leaving the ‘safety’ of South Africa … where blacks were implicitly identified as the primary antagonists. This kind of contradiction and tension also in part reflected … the construction of ‘coloured in-betweenity’[sic].”

A coloured academic, now living in the United States, remembered an experience with his father. As a child, the narrator wanted to play on a nearby playground set but was unable to:

NOT because he forbade me, but because something bigger than him forbade me - in fact, for bade[sic] him … A big man, a rugby legend, a

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man with broad shoulders who struck fear in his opponents … this man stood saddened and helpless under a small black sign with white letters, ‘Slegs Blankes’. Small white letters in menacing relief against a black blackboard: ‘Whites only.’

The parent’s aura of existence is diminished, dwarfed by petty apartheid. These small moments of difference left an indelible mark on this narrator, and his perspective on his father. The power of apartheid was the ability of small white letters, white minority rule, to exist over the larger black blackboard, the non-white population. Petty apartheid challenged this man’s ethnic and masculine identity. A man described as strong, powerful and commanding was controlled by a sign and the difference that that sign reminded him of.

A narrative from a coloured academic from the Eastern Cape reminisced about his holiday in the late 1980s. The narrator and his sisters headed to the Durban beachfront until policemen were deployed: “as they drew nearer my sisters made out the hand written words on the policemen’s hats: “Whites only beach!” Soon people were scattering in all directions running away from the police.

The narrator and his sisters watched as white South Africans reclaimed their beach and how “they went home feeling hot, burned, and bruised … empty … seething in anger… small and insignificant.”

A thirty-year-old male now living in Australia provided another perspective on saamwees. In a memory he places in the 1970s, the narrator found himself “walking in the main shopping area … I lost sight of my mother and looked out ahead. Then, suddenly, I had to move sideways to get out of the way of another pedestrian.” The young coloured boy had brushed up against a white man who “stared accusingly and bellowed: ‘Kyk waar jy stap jou donder … Wie dink jy is jy?’” The narrator recalls feeling intimidated and powerless in a small instance with big repercussions. The narrative continues, “for me it is a memory. And it is symbolic of white race privilege and power in Apartheid South Africa. In some ways we were sheltered from this in our segregated suburbs.” However:


once you were out of that space, and moved into contexts where you mixed across race lines, whiteness dictated the terms of interaction. As for everybody in the country, ‘race’ shaped my everyday lived experiences … the accumulation of these kinds of experiences, these memories, forged in me a sense of totalising, everyday, and aggressive nature of Apartheid racism.\textsuperscript{59}

This narrator captures the difference in the symbolism of grand apartheid and petty apartheid. Grand apartheid, while devastating in numerous ways, was an entirely different experience than petty apartheid. Within ethnic communities, a certain level of safety was felt and community-building occurred. When non-whites left these areas, the space they occupied was no longer theirs. Coloured South Africans understood their place in a society divided into black and white. As the narrators noted above, some coloured South Africans could use their light complexions to enjoy being classified as white. Other coloured South Africans were chained, by the apartheid system, to their mixed origins. They could not escape the possible “black blood” that existed within them. The non-white South African could possibly experience the performance of difference at nearly any moment in the public sphere. The fear of being exposed by white authority figures for their mixed heritage represents the perceived superiority of whiteness and the inferiority of blackness. During an interaction, a coloured South African may be reminded of their links to blackness, and their subordinate status. Petty apartheid reminded the coloured that they were different, outcasts, and lesser.

**The Natives**

Unlike the coloureds who may or may not have tried to pass for whites, the blacks in South Africa were the most different and the easiest to form as an enemy to the white experience. This is reinforced by the demographics of South Africa that noted the sheer size of the black population in comparison with the white population. In 1979, a black female, now in her thirties, from the Natal province remembered spending time with relatives at a local pool, “an ‘even better’ 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 … I notice[d] that I was the only dark-skinned person in that pool.” The young girl noticing her ‘mistake’ exited the pool to ask her cousins if she was committing any wrongdoing. The cousins waved off her concerns and she went back to the pool when “a

\textsuperscript{59} Narrative N5, Apartheid Archives Project, University of Witwatersrand, 2009- URL: http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory_enhanced/U/Collections&c=124873/R/AG3275-B-1-1-10, Accessed March 10, 2015.
‘policeman’ standing at the edge of the pool … [called] for me to get out. He had a brown uniform and what I remember as a sjambok … he said I should get out of the water because this pool wasn’t for blacks.” The narrator was directed towards the exit and waited outside for her brother and cousins to join her. Another narrator remembered the arduous journey to his high school, situated some “300 km away”. The narrator took a taxi to the train station in “a waiting room for non-whites without windows, let alone air conditioning facilities,” for an eight hour train ride “in the exclusively non-white third class coach … not being able to fully sleep,” waited another six hours for the bus which “had no seats in it as it was only meant to transport goods, not humans.” The narrator also remembered the shops where “whites had access … through the front doors … while we as Black people communicated with the shopkeepers through a small window at the back of the shop … one could not even see what choices were available through the back windows because of the tight mosquito fence.”

Another important aspect of petty apartheid was not only the performance of separation and difference but the diverging quality of the amenities.

This was expressed by a woman from the Soweto who remembered her family trip beginning disastrously, “we got to our hotel … and they told my mum that we [were] not allowed into the hotel because we [were] black.” The family experienced further tribulations as their access to the beach was denied leaving the narrator to retort, “they not only robbed me of my self-pride as a child but they wanted us to be ashamed of who we are, and they did not realize that they were destroying innocent souls.” A narrator known only as Nelly wrote of a moment with a snide ticketing booth clerk, the “booking was done in a “Whites Only” section which at the time was very intimidating … the surroundings were always clean and somehow different from the areas usually used by black people which were not properly maintained.” The interaction left the narrator feeling, “a lot of emotions, surprise, fear, embarrassment and confusion. I felt very small and this did not do much for my self-confidence … I had experienced the worst humiliation as a black person.”

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62 Student Narrative SN33, Apartheid Archives Project, University of Witwatersrand, 2009- URL:
Durban. When the narrator jumped into a public swimming pool, “all the white kids went out of the pool.” Bored from a lack of companionship, the narrator left the pool, leading all of the white kids to then return. This bizarre scene led the narrator to “look at [him]self in a different way - in the sense that you are Black and that things like that do happen.”

While shopping in Cape Town, a black female from the Western Cape remembered being asked to use the “toilet/kitchen/storage area” to try on a dress. In the moment upon entering this room and discovering what it was, a “feeling of shame and humiliation” struck her. She “felt, in essence, diminished, treated like a black person … I had seen - no, felt - this sense of humiliation … treated with disrespect, less human.” Mark Mathabane in his autobiographical novel, Kaffir Boy wrote about an instance of petty apartheid. Mathabane wrote about how his consciousness:

was awakened to the pervasiveness of ‘petty apartheid,’ and everywhere I went in the white world, I was met by visible and invisible guards of racial segregation. Overtly, the guards - larger-than-life signs that read, European Only, Non-Europeans Only, Whites Only, Non-Whites Only, Slegs Blanke, Slegs Nie-Blanke - greeted me, and led me as a blind man would be led to the door I should enter through, the elevator I should ride in, the water fountain I should drink from, the park bench I should sit on, the bus I should ride in, the lavatory I should piss in. The invisible guards, however, did not greet me as conspicuously to orient me about my place in life. Instead, remarks such as ‘You’re in the wrong place, Kaffir,’ ‘We don’t serve your colour here, Kaffir,’ ‘Who do you think you are, Kaffir?’ ‘Are you mad, Kaffir?’ … because the guards of segregation were everywhere in the white world, and I saw black people who unwittingly disobeyed them cursed, beaten or thrown in jail. I became increasingly self-conscious with each step I took.


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The black South African experience was different than other non-white South Africans. Black South Africans were the main antagonist to the white South African. Many black South Africans felt connected to the land known as South Africa, tracing their identity to the political structures, language groups, and the land that surrounded them. For black South Africans, the response to petty apartheid was the realization of race and the formation of anti-government movements. Opposition to apartheid was swift and immediate during the 1950s as the reformed A.N.C and the South African Communist Party vehemently opposed apartheid rule. However, through the 1960s, the South African government had made far-reaching subversions into the A.N.C which was “little more than a shadowy presence in South Africa.” This void of political thought was filled by a movement to empower the black as well as to isolate themselves from white liberals, led by Steven Biko. This burgeoning group whose sentiments are echoed in some of the black narratives believed, “the black man [must] come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity.” Petty apartheid made the black South African a lesser being, I argue in a performative and afterwards, in a psychological context. The totality of petty apartheid tormented the black existence.

Conclusion

Chief minister H.W.E Ntsanwisi of the Gazankulu Bantustan, a northeastern Bantustan near the Rhodesian and Mozambican border prepared but did not present an address titled “Petty Apartheid” for the Sociological Symposium at the University of Pretoria on August 18th, 1973. In his address, Ntsanwisi begins, “much has been written and heard about apartheid . . . in which people are grouped for purposes of government and politics into different categories.” However, the presentation continues, “the expression of petty apartheid or petty apartheid cannot be easily defined as it is nothing else but a

manifestation of the whole concept of apartheid.”\textsuperscript{70} At this moment, Ntsanwisi’s argument begins to intersect with the arguments of this paper. Ntsanwisi poignantly argued that petty apartheid reminds the black of his second class place in the social life of South African.” Ntsanwisi continued that this act was “no doubt a source of emotional pride, economic and other practical advantages to the whites.” Before concluding that, “petty apartheid generates hatred, bitterness, spiritual and social tensions which bedevil human relations in South Africa … any man of self-respect feels deeply hurt when he is discriminated against on the grounds of his colour … you build in my soul a sense of resentment and helplessness I cannot forget.”\textsuperscript{71} The experiences described in the narratives present the moment when these ethnic groups realized they were part of a system that was larger than them and more powerful than them. Petty apartheid helped to maintain and teach South Africans of their place in the apartheid society permeating so far into the public life to include picnic spots, beaches, restaurants, and benches, the encompassing dominance overwhelms the non-white South African. The distinct ethnic groups that were created all had their own responses to petty apartheid based upon their own experiences. Indians protected themselves within a tight knit community based upon shared ethnic traits and traditional ideals. Indians were afforded special privileges due to their “superior” status to other non-white groups given to them by whites. Coloureds and honorary whites walked a tight rope of racial in-betweeness, coloureds suffered while honorary whites were able to sometimes avoid the ridicule and derision. Blacks were reminded of their lesser status that awoke their consciousness aiding in the political upheaval. Petty apartheid maintained the racial hierarchy but also created the opportunities for ethnic communities to oppose the oppressive and violent legislation that invaded the public space.

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\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 84-85.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 85-86.
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**Articles:**


